

Night of the Rooster ***Mark 14:54,66-72***

***When nights are cold, there's always room
Around the fire if we assume
That no one needs to know we've vowed
To love our Lord and that we're proud***

***To be identified and known
As servants who are not our own.
Ah, but the price our Savior paid
Demands we stand when we're afraid.***

***It's better far to shiver in the cold,
Without a friend we've never told
That Christ's our Captain and our King.
A servant who is following***

***Alone is warmed with Fire within.
It's more than a mistake; it's sin
By secret silence to disown
The loving Lord we once enthroned.***

A full moon silvered Jerusalem. Seder suppers were finished. And one by one the orange glow of lamplit windows blinked off.

But in an upscale neighborhood, light still gleamed from windows in the spacious villa where Annas and Caiaphas lived.

And in the open air courtyard, a fire crackled, sending showers of sparks up into the darkness. Peter had seen and forgotten many such moonlit nights. But try as he might, he would never forget this one. And neither would anyone else.

In years to come, the lame and the leprous, the diseased and the demonized would crowd the cobblestones just to sit in the fisherman's shadow. Paralytics would leap, and the dead would live. But Peter isn't remembered as a healer.

Peter would preach powerful sermons, too. And thousands would kneel on cobblestone street corners to commit their lives to Christ. He would also write powerful epistles that Christians would cherish for thousands of years.

But Peter is remembered as neither a preacher nor a teacher. It is unfair and all out of balance. But the Master's most powerful and impetuous disciple is remembered most of all for this one night.

It began in the upper room. After the Passover lamb had been eaten and the communion wine was gone, the Savior sighed and shook His head. He had ominous news for Peter.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again,

strengthen your brothers.” But he said to Him, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” Luke 22:31-33

The Savior said Satan would soon attack the fisherman. That assault began in the garden. The temptation there was sleep. Three times Jesus found the fisherman sleeping and rebuked him.

Then Judas came with his poisonous kiss. And before the soldiers could lead the Lord away, Peter failed again.

Drawing a sword, he tried to cleave the skull of a man named Malchus, the High Priest’s sneering servant. But in the end, all Peter got was one ear and a stinging rebuke from the Redeemer.

Moments later, Peter fled deep into the shadows of the old olive trees. And there in the darkness, he made his first mistake. He assumed his trial had come and gone.

But his failure wasn’t finished. It had barely begun.

Sin and Submission

For centuries, believers have examined the big fisherman’s long night of failure as if he were an anomaly or an aberration. But Peter was neither unusual nor out of the ordinary.

He knew Christ as a close friend and had deep, personal faith in Him. Yet he failed, terribly and tragically, publicly and pitifully.

And that stands as a warning for Christians of every age. If a man who walked with our Lord three years, heard Jesus teach, and watched Him perform powerful miracles could fail, so can we.

From the shadows of Gethsemane, Peter watched the torches and lamps the soldiers held wink in the darkness. And as he watched, something the Savior said in the upper room rang in his ears. Jesus said He would soon go away. That both surprised and stunned Peter.

Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered, “Where I go, you cannot follow Me but you will follow later.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.” John 13:36-37

Now the Master’s ominous prediction was coming true. He was going away just as He said He would. And in that dark garden, Christ’s command that Peter couldn’t follow Him echoed in the disciple’s ears.

But Peter’s heart was wild with wonder and frantic with fear. He simply had to find out what would happen to the Lord he loved.

That brought the big fisherman to the brink of a decision. He could swallow his fears, resist his feelings and simply obey Christ’s command. Or he could do what his heart craved and follow.

Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. Verse 54

That was first in a row of dominoes. It was the foundational error that made all the others merely a matter of time. Peter disobeyed Christ’s clear and unmistakable command.

Maybe that is why the Peter followed at a distance. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to be close to his Lord. Quite the contrary, there was nothing he wanted more. Neither was it fear that made the big fisherman slink from shadow to shadow.

Peter made the same mistake many of us do. We try to walk the razor edge of both obeying our Lord and doing what we really want to do. But that isn’t possible.

It is never possible to obey God’s Word halfway. Our submission to the Savior must be complete. And our obedience to His commandments must be absolute.

Peter didn’t realize it, but there was an important reason why Jesus said he wasn’t to follow

Him. By creeping into Caiaphas' courtyard, Peter was entering an arena where temptation was far greater than he could withstand.

God's Word is filled with stern commands that must be obeyed if we are to avoid duplicating Peter's failure. For instance, Paul told Timothy to flee from both youthful lusts and every desire for riches.

When we fail to obey such commands, we do what Peter did. We force ourselves through the hedge of God's protection into our adversary's overwhelming temptation.

We walk into the very line fire. And when we do that, failure is merely a matter of time.

Sin and Separation

Corinth was sin city, notorious for hedonism and homosexuality, for paganism and prostitution. So saints in that city couldn't avoid coming into contact with people who were wholly given over to sin. Yet they were still commanded to separate themselves from sinners.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?...come out from their midst and be separate.” says the Lord. 2 Corinthians 6:14, 17

That was the second mistake Peter made. He not only crept into Caiaphas' courtyard. He also He also sat with the servants and soldiers who had just captured Christ.

The mountain air was cold that night. And the crackling fire was warm. So Peter slipped up and sat in the firelight to warm himself among men who were entrenched enemies of the Master.

But Peter's error wasn't merely that he sat with unbelievers. It isn't possible to avoid all contact with people who have no faith in our Lord. Peter's problem was that he tried to be with them and pretend he was one of them. That is a fatal mistake for any believer.

We who have chosen to live for Jesus Christ cannot avoid contact with unbelievers. But we must never attempt to conceal our faith and allow sinners to think we are no different than they are.

At the fire, a servant girl kept staring at Peter. In the firelight, she seemed to recognize him as one of the men who followed Jesus.

As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.” But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.” And he went out onto the porch. Verses 66-68

Peter swallowed hard and mumbled an answer. He didn't know what the girl was talking about, he said, or even why she asked.

It was an oblique, backdoor attempt to avoid answering her uncomfortable question. Nevertheless, it was still a definite denial of his commitment to Christ.

Looking around at the other faces around the fire, Peter suddenly realized his foolish error. He had placed himself in the company of those who were bitterly opposed to Jesus.

So the fisherman waited until all the others were busy talking. Then he silently slipped away from the fire and retreated to passageway near the outer gate.

It was wise of Peter to do that. But if we have lived among non-Christians, hiding our faith by letting them think we are no different than they are, we must go beyond merely withdrawing. Peter left, but he never told the others around the fire why. He never admitted he had made a personal commitment to trust in Jesus Christ.

And that is what we must do. We must not only avoid close relationships with unbelievers, we must also tell them about our faith in the Lord who loves us.

If we don't, we have already denied Jesus.

Sin and Sensitivity

Something ominous happened inside Peter's heart when he muttered that first denial of his Lord. Once the fisherman's heart was hard as flint. However, years of learning at Jesus' feet and obeying Christ had made Peter's spirit soft and sensitive.

But sin always numbs spiritual sensitivity. It hardens the most sensitive saint as surely as a branding iron numbs nerve endings. An hour dragged by. Then the servant girl recognized Peter in the shadows near the gate. And once again she confronted him.

The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" But again he denied it. Verses 69-70

And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." Matthew 26:72

This time, Peter's denial was much more definite. He even added an oath to his assertion that he didn't know Jesus. And that, the Master once said, is evil in itself. But that isn't all.

Peter also referred to Jesus as *the man*, contemptuously calling Him *that fellow* or *that guy*. His first sin beside the fire hardened Peter's heart. And this lie, hardened him even more.

And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too." But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" Verses 70-71

The Aramaic spoken in Galilee had a Syrian slant to it. And those standing nearby couldn't help but notice Peter's accent. He had to be one of the Carpenter's followers. He was obviously a Galilean.

Hardened by repeatedly lying about his love and commitment to Christ, Peter angrily denied he knew Jesus. And this time, he called down curses upon himself and swore he was telling the truth.

The pitiful pattern of Peter's willingness to commit greater and greater sin stands as a stark warning to every believer. There is a price for choosing to sin. It so hardens our heart that we find ourselves sinking deeper and deeper into darkness.

But that isn't the only way sins hardens our heart. It also numbs us to the call and conviction of God's Holy Spirit.

Luke tells us that something else happened immediately after Peter's second denial.

Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. Luke 22:60

Hours earlier, Jesus told Peter a rooster's crow was the sign the big fisherman had denied he knew the Master.

Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times. Mark 14:30

That first rooster's crow was a signal from God. It was a clarion call, telling Peter he had denied the Lord he loved.

But the fisherman didn't recognize it. Sin had so hardened his heart that he was numb to God's convicting call.

As surely as sin hardened Peter's heart, it will also harden ours. We too will find ourselves deeper and deeper in sin.

At the same time, we will grow more and more numb to God's call to repent and return to righteousness and faith.

Sin and Sorrow

Satan won his battle with Peter in the shadows of Caiaphas' courtyard. And the tempter's desire then has not changed today.

With words or actions, he would have us deny our personal relationship with Christ. And that is just what we do when we sin.

However, the devil didn't win the war. God hadn't given up on the Peter. He wasn't about to allow his disciple to get lost in sin.

Like the Good Shepherd He is, our Lord will always find and fetch back those who wander away. And so it was with Peter.

Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep. Verse 72

When the rooster crowed a second time, the big fisherman felt like he had been stabbed with an icicle. In one terrible moment, he realized how far he had fallen from his faith in Jesus. He saw all his lies and ugly oaths for what they were and was overcome by sorrow. And the more he thought about it, the more he wept and grieved.

There is both a warning and a ray of hope in Peter's sorrow. It reminds us that if we have genuinely and sincerely trusted in Jesus, He will surely bring conviction to our hearts when we have chosen lusts or lies, pride or pleasure.

When He does, our sorrow will be every bit as profound as Peter's was. And the fleeting pleasure of sin won't make up for the grinding grief in our heart.

But sorrow is not repentance. Judas felt great remorse when he realized how horribly he had sinned by betraying Jesus. But his sorrow didn't produce a change of heart, only suicidal guilt.

Peter did return to faith and become a great man of God. But the process of repentance and renewal was neither quick nor easy. Even after Jesus returned from the grave, Peter was still despondent.

Believing he had forfeited his right to serve the Savior, he tried to return to the life he lived before Christ called him. Then, there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus came to get Peter. And beside a morning fire, our Lord restored Peter to full faith.

When we have sinned, that is the sweetest promise of all. Our Lord loves us so much, He will never allow us to drown in despair.

No matter how long we have sinned or how deep we have descended into darkness, there is hope. We can always confess our sin and return to our relationship with Jesus Christ.

He is the God loves us too much to let us go.