

And the Rooster Crowed . . .

John 18:15-27

Introduction

It is Monday morning – a co-worker stops by your desk and says, “You go to church, don’t you? Well, you won’t believe what I saw on television last night! I was surfing the channels and came across a preacher. He was talking about the end of the world – the earth being burned up with fire and millions of people being cast into hell. I mean, can you imagine somebody actually believing that stuff?”

You stutter, “Well, uh, uh . . . lots of people are talking about the end of the world these days.”

Friday afternoon at the office, a new co-worker is introduced to you. In the course of your small talk, he asks, “Say, what do you like to do on Sunday? Personally, that’s my favorite day to golf. How ‘bout you? What do you like to do?”

“Oh, I usually just sit a lot and relax.”

You are in the university classroom – a freshman philosophy class. The agnostic professor already has dozens of notches in his belt representing the Christian kids he has been able to derail into confusion and doubt. He is in the process of eloquently debunking Christianity as a pile of superstitious rubble, and then asks, “Does anybody in here really believe the Bible from cover to cover?”

He remains unchallenged.

You are at the grocery store, standing in the checkout line, when, what do you know, one of your neighbors, from up the street, is in line in front of you. She is reading the latest story in a tabloid about an angel sighting. Angels are popular now. There are TV shows about them, books, sightings, and some angels have even allowed interviews. Angels are in!

She says to you, “Wow, this is really amazing! What do you think about angels?”

You say, “Well, I believe I married one.”

Good answer!

I was at the gas station, late the other night, filling up. A car pulled up on the other side of the pump. It was a shiny European model with a name that rhymes with “cheese”. A man got out and started pumping gas, while his wife and daughter remained in the car.

Alright, how many of you are running car names through your mind trying to find one that rhymes with “cheese”? Stop it and pay attention! Where was I?!

We struck up a conversation related to the fact that his little girl wanted something from inside the store. He laughed about how he tries to get out of the car quick enough so that his daughter does not have a chance to ask for anything. I said, “Yea, my kids love to come to this gas station. They always want gum, candy, small toys, drinks, lollipops or little packaged doughnuts.”

He asked, “How many kids do you have?”

I answered, “Four. Would you like one?”

Not really!

Then, he replied, “Wow, four! What do you do for a living?”

I hesitated for just a second, not because I was embarrassed, but, somehow, I knew that “preacher” would not be the answer he was expecting. Maybe I could say, “I’m an inter-personnel relations executive.”

It is true, right?!

I could say, “I’m a food distributor. I feed the hungry.”

Besides, what if I tell him I am a pastor and he has a problem that needs on-the-spot counseling? It is late and cold, and I am not in the mood to counsel. But, for me to say anything other than “I’m the pastor of a local church,” would be a kind of denial. It would be much like the university student or the businessman or woman.

By the way, when I told him I was the pastor of a church in Cary, he asked, “Which one?”

I told him the name of our church, and he said, “I can’t believe it! We’ve heard a lot about that church. We’ve been talking about visiting. Come and meet my wife and daughter.”

I thought, “Now Lord, that was kind of tricky.”

How would you like to have the entire world read about your failure to consistently own up to the fact that you are Christ’s disciple?! How would you like your hesitation, confusion, or maybe, outright cowardice, put into black and white for it to be picked apart by millions of people?!

That is exactly what you have with Peter and his denial of ever knowing Jesus Christ.

Before we begin the study, however, do not forget that it was Peter who was willing to walk on water; it was Peter who took on six hundred soldiers with one sword; it was Peter who, with only one other disciple, dared to follow Jesus into the very courtyard of Christ’s enemies.

I will also remind you, as we begin this study, that we are looking into the mirror of the Word – and the apostle Peter is stamped on all of our foreheads. This was written for our profit, so that we might learn and change and grow.

Now I want to take an aerial view of this tragic night, by first reading John’s account of Peter’s denials. It is recorded in just seven brief verses. Turn to John, chapter 18, verse 15.

And Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest,

By the way, this other disciple was John, I believe. In fact, several times in this gospel, John refers to himself in this manner. Continue to verses 16 through 18.

but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought in Peter. The slave-girl therefore who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

Skip to verses 25 through 27.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said therefore to him, “You are not also one of His disciples are you?” He denied it, and said, “I am not.” One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” Peter therefore denied it again; and immediately a cock crowed.

Before we dive in and pick the story apart and put it back together, since most of us are familiar with this scene, I want to take time to list some things that made this scene the tragic reality it was.

We will look in detail at what Peter did, but first, let us ask and answer the question, “How in the world did someone like Peter end up doing that?”

Preparation For Spiritual Failure

I have entitled this part of our discussion, “Preparation for Spiritual Failure,” because that was exactly what was happening. You need to understand that Peter, as well as you and I, will never sin suddenly; we will never fall in a moment – our moment of sin has been in the making for some time!

Do you want to prepare for spiritual failure? Then stir into your life a few of the following ingredients and you will have, in the making, any number of things that will, ultimately, deny Christ and destroy your joy.

Ingredient #1 – Self confidence

1. Ingredient number one is self confidence.

At their last supper together, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 26, Jesus predicts that they will all abandon Him. Peter’s response is in verses 33 through 35a.

But Peter answered and said to Him, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.” Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times.” Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.” . . .

This is the talk of a hero – a man who is not taking heed while he stands, lest he fall.

Ingredient #2 – Defiance

2. Ingredient number two is defiance.

When Matthew recorded Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial, he used a strong word. Jesus literally said, “Peter, you will deny Me completely!”

Peter, however, could never imagine himself guilty of that particular sin! Mark, chapter 14, verse 31, tells us,

But Peter kept saying insistently, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”

“Lord,” Peter insisted, argued, repeated, “You’re wrong . . . You don’t know what You’re talking about!”

Ladies and gentlemen, do you want to fail miserably? Do you want to guarantee rebellion against the will of God? Then start having conversations with God in which you hear yourself saying, “Lord, I hear what You’re saying through Your Word, but You’re wrong . . . I’m right!”

These may be conversations such as, “Lord, I know You’ve demanded integrity in the marketplace, but You don’t know the pressure I’m facing at work . . .” or “Lord, I know You might have said that physical relations outside of marriage is a sin, but You don’t know how my situation works . . .”

Imagine – Peter arguing with the living, breathing, incarnate God! It does not matter if it is Peter arguing before the Living Word, or us arguing with the written Word, a lack of submission and a defiance to the Word is preparation for spiritual failure!

Ingredient #3 – Prayerlessness

3. Ingredient number three is prayerlessness.

This is just another form of self-confidence. Jesus exhorted Peter, along with John and James, to pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, but they all slept! He would wake them two times and say, “Men,

your flesh is weak; pray *that you may not enter into temptation.*”

This literally means, “that you may not enter into temptation unprepared”. It is interesting – Jesus is saying that there is a direct relationship between praying and purity; between praying and prospering spiritually. He is also implying that there is a direct cause and effect between prayerlessness and spiritual collapse.

So, while Peter should have been praying, about to enter the darkest hour of temptation in his entire life, he slept.

But wait, I have to admit – prayer is a discipline; it is hard work; it is not a sport, or we would all spend our Sunday afternoons practicing it – it is spiritual work. Paul wrote to Timothy, in I Timothy, chapter 4, verse 7b,

. . . discipline yourselves for the purpose of godliness

In this verse, Paul used the Greek word “gumnazo” for “discipline”. We get our word “gymnasium” from that. As Kent Hughes wrote, Paul was exhorting Timothy to exercise, work out, train himself to become godly. He was calling for some spiritual sweat! He was asking Timothy to exercise in the gymnasium of spiritual disciplines – to work at godliness.

Just as you work at your marriage to make it a good one; just as you work at communicating to your children to become a good parent; just as you work hard at your tasks to be a contributor to your company, so work at your relationship with God.

The fact that you may be an effective executive and a lousy spouse is determined by your investment of time and energy. You may be an older Christian, yet still a weak and ineffective Christian, because God never makes it into your schedule – except for Sunday morning and maybe, if you are a fanatic, Sunday evening!

So, out of one hundred sixty eight hours a week, you give one hour to God – and then, you wonder why you are not becoming more like Him. You never make it to the spiritual gymnasium – you do not know what it means to sweat!

My friend, godliness is not a coincidence, it is a disciplined choice that we make many times, every day!

Our church wants to help you to enroll in the gymnasium. Ladies and gentlemen, the primary reason, twelve months from now, some of you will look back on this year as just another year in which you did not lead anyone to faith in Christ (which is your spiritual mission), you did not memorize one verse of scripture (your spiritual protection), you did not read your Bible (spiritual nutrition), you did not get involved in exercising your spiritual gifts (spiritual contribution), etc. is because you thought of the church as a place to visit rather than as a spiritual gymnasium. I want you to know our purpose for existence is to win the lost to Christ and then to train them; disciple them.

“Disciple” and “discipline” come from the same Greek root – so when you came to faith in Christ, you became a “gymnast”. Ask yourself, “What is the tone of my spiritual muscle?!”

The reason Peter failed God in public was because he ignored God in private – he did not need to pray.

Ingredient #4 – Independence

4. Ingredient number four is independence.

We have previously studied, in John, chapter 18, the account of Peter standing up for the Lord in the garden and cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant. The trouble was, Jesus made it very clear that sword fighting was not in His plan, and He harshly rebuked Peter.

Peter’s motto in life could have been, “I’ll do it my way.”

- Jesus said, “Pray.” – Peter slept.
- Jesus said, “I’ll wash your feet.” – Peter said, “Not on Your life.”
- Jesus said, “It’s time for My arrest and death.” – Peter swung a sword and chopped off an ear.
- Jesus said, “You’ll deny Me three times.” – Peter said, “I’ll die with You, not deny You!”

If there ever was a disciple who could make it on his own, this self-made man could. The only time Peter came in second was when he lost the footrace with John to the empty tomb. Peter had willpower and courage; he was aggressive, strong, and committed. He was a natural born leader, as well. He would have

been a terrific advertisement for a conference on self-esteem. Why? Because he esteemed himself!

He was the first century counterpart to the twentieth century G. Gordon Liddy. This brilliant, prosperous, self-assured man was swept into the Watergate catastrophe of former United States President Richard Nixon. I think it is interesting that Chuck Colson and G. Gordon Liddy were both sentenced to time in prison for Watergate crimes. Colson became a Christian while serving time. G. Gordon Liddy was interviewed, after being released from prison, and these were his words,

I have found within myself all I need and all I ever shall need. I am a man of great faith, but my faith is in George Gordon Liddy . . . and I have never failed me!

Do you know what a gracious God is in the process of doing? He is fashioning Peter into a small vessel – one into which He can pour His great strength, great power, and gracious Spirit. Until now, Peter is filled with himself – and frankly, he is in the way.

Paul wrote, in II Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 7, . . . *we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves*

Three Scenes of Spiritual Collapse

Well, that is a long introduction. Now let us slip into that chilly courtyard and move over to that charcoal fire and watch, as Peter learns some unforgettable lessons. Turn to the expanded account of Peter’s trial, found in Matthew’s gospel, chapter 26.

Scene #1 – A servant girl stronger than soldiers!

1. Scene number one is of a servant girl who is stronger than soldiers!

Look at Matthew, chapter 26, verse 69.

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a certain servant-girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.”

Stop at this for a moment. This servant girl was on duty at the door of the courtyard and may very well have known that John was a follower of Jesus. She probably suspected, since John had helped Peter gain

access into the courtyard, that Peter was also a disciple of Christ.

She tips her cynical hand as well, in what she says. You need to understand that, by this time, Jesus was the subject of everyone's conversation. Everyone had already cast their vote about Jesus – and even the servants had concluded that Jesus was an unimportant fraud; a momentary blip on the universal screen. So, she refers to Jesus as “the Galilean”.

In the vernacular of this day, to refer to someone as a “Galilean” was a slur, a cut. It was equivalent to suggesting that the person was backward and even ignorant. The citizens of Jerusalem, during this time, frequently used the Galileans as the butt of their jokes. The northern Galileans were considered less sophisticated than the southern Israelites – so the southerners ridiculed the backwardness of the northerners.

It is funny that in America, it is reversed. The northerners look down on the southerners as being less sophisticated – as sort of “backwoods,” southern hicks. If you are a “Yankee,” do not pretend to be innocent – you know it is true.

So with a cynical, cutting edge to her voice, she suggests, “You're a follower of that ignorant, backwoods, unimportant Jesus, aren't you?”

Continue to verse 70.

But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.”

Imagine – hours before, he had taken on six hundred soldiers, single-handedly with a small sword! Now, he is a cringing coward before a servant girl.

Peter was prepared to take on six hundred soldiers – he had promised Jesus that he would die with Him. I think that if Jesus had called Peter inside and said, “Testify on My behalf,” he probably would have done it. But, a little servant girl made him lie before he hardly had time to think.

Peter was tempted; he was blind-sided from a source he had never expected. He had expected soldiers, so he stood before them courageously and loyally, but he did not expect servant girls. Now he whimpers pathetically.

Principle – Being courageous in big battles does not guarantee victory in little ones.

- There is a principle in this, and that is, being courageous in big battles does not guarantee victory in little ones.

Peter was prepared for sword fights and suffering . . . but not for servant girls!

Scene #2 – A lie with sincerity all over it!

2. Scene number two takes place a few hours later and includes a lie with sincerity all over it!

Look at Matthew, chapter 26, verses 71 and 72.

And when he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.”

You could render this, “Peter denied it and said, ‘I swear that I don't know the man.’”

It was not that Peter began to use vulgarity, this was their way of adding reinforcement to the fact that something they were saying was true. You could flesh out the custom by translating it, “On my word of honor, I do not know the man.”

We do it a lot of ways; for example, we place our hand on the Bible and swear to tell, “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

When my kids really get serious, they say, “If I'm telling you a lie, stick a needle in my eye.”

The first graders have this thing called a “pinky swear”. When my first grade daughter is really serious, and says, “Oh Dad, it really was my brother's fault.”

I ask, “Are you sure?”

She says, “Yes, sir, I pinky swear,” and she holds her pinky up.

“Well, sweetheart, it's not nice to swear. You haven't done that in Sunday school have you?”

Here is Peter, in his language, looking just as silly, holding up his little finger, “On my word of honor, I'm not a disciple of that backwoodsman.”

The tragedy is that everyone probably knew he was a disciple! The only thing Peter is doing is digging the hole deeper!

Principle – One lie will usually require another lie.

- This leads us to another principle to be reminded of, and that is, one lie will usually require another lie.

The trouble with telling one lie is that the next lie has to be better than the first. Have you ever been caught in that whirlwind?

A couple of years ago, I decided to give my wife a “surprise” birthday party. Am I naive or what?! First of all, my clever wife is impossible to surprise. The men are nodding their heads – you married one like her – you might as well not take the time to wrap the birthday presents!

Tim Downs talked about our wives, when he referred to them as having antennae that pick up and network signals from around the globe. He went on to say that men are like cordless telephones. So, here I am, a cordless telephone trying to sneak around a communication satellite!

The hardest part about getting everything ready for this party was that I had to remember what I told her last; I had to remember which tale I was spinning. And, it always led to having to spin another, more clever tale.

In order to pull that party off, I’m guessing it took about three thousand lies! I was claiming I John, chapter 1, verse 9 – confessing my sins and being forgiven by our Lord – right and left.

Can you imagine, in reality, living with a series of lies – and they are for keeps?! The wonderful thing about telling the truth is that you never have to remember what you said.

Principle – In the flock, the safest sheep are those who are closest to the Shepherd.

- Before we move to scene three, I want to suggest another principle. In the flock, the safest sheep are those who are closest to the Shepherd.

It is interesting that Peter believed, at that moment, that he would be safest by disassociating himself from Jesus; that if he put a little distance between himself and the Lord, maybe he would get away unscathed. The truth was, the Lord had already predicted that none of His disciples would be harmed along with Him. Peter might have gotten kicked out of the courtyard; he might have experienced some jeering; or maybe a little stone throwing as he ran

away, but dissociation from Christ will never bring safety to any of us.

It will bring spiritual danger – it will prepare the way for spiritual collapse.

Scene #3 - The coward is finally cornered!

3. Scene number three is that the coward is finally cornered!

For this scene, I want to return to John’s account, in chapter 18, verses 26 and 27.

One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” Peter therefore denied it again; and immediately a cock crowed.

Mark’s gospel informs us that the rooster actually crowed on two different occasions. As you study the gospels, you will discover that different gospels adds different details and you get the fullest picture by studying all of the accounts. The rooster will crow once during Peter’s first two denials. This was God’s gracious reminder to Peter – and a reminder that Peter ignored. And now, the second time, the rooster crowed after Peter’s third denial.

Freeze this picture in your mind – all eyes are on Peter and this third, convincing witness has just delivered the best evidence yet. The others had accused Peter on the basis of his accent or their own suspicion. Now, this man was in the garden when Peter swung the sword. He has probably been eyeing Peter for some time, thinking, “I know I’ve seen that man before!!”

Then, it dawns on him. He “puts two and two together,” “Hey, I know you! You’re the one with the sword in the garden. How could I ever forget?”

Peter is cornered now. The case against Peter has built more after each witness.

Let me give you an illustrative story to help you imagine the way the case was built by the witnesses.

A boy “played hooky” from school and went swimming. Later, he is accused before his parents and the school principal.

The first accuser says, “I think you played hooky from school.”

“Not me,” the boy responds, “I never play hooky.”

The second person says, "Sure you did! You played hooky and went swimming. Your clothes are still wet!"

"Oh no I didn't," the boy replies, and adds, "I love school and hate to swim."

Then, the third witness says, "Sure you played hooky and went swimming – I *saw* you swimming in the creek during school hours."

Oh boy! The poor kid might as well "come clean" now!

Well, that is what happened to Peter.

First he was accused of being a disciple.

"No, not me."

Then, the second person said, "Sure you are, you're accent is exactly like His."

"No way."

The third witness said, "Yes you are, I *saw* you in the garden with Him. And furthermore, you chopped off my cousin's ear. I'll never forget you!"

The case is closed, Peter. You have been seen at the scene. You might as well confess!

Peter chose, instead, to deny it again with the strongest denial yet. Matthew's account tells us that this included repeated loud cursing and swearing. This indicates the crowd turns on him and repeatedly accuses him.

The word for "curse" literally means, "to pronounce death upon yourself if you are lying". It is a much stronger word than the oath that Peter had already made. Peter says, in effect, "May God take my life if I am not telling you the truth."

Now, imagine the entire scene. The supreme court of Israel is inside with Jesus. They are spitting on Him, beating Him, and mocking Him. Outside, Peter, his strongest champion, is cursing and swearing that he never knew Him.

Can you see the Lamb of God? He was:

- rejected by the world,
- betrayed by one of His own disciples, and
- denied, again and again, by one of His only friends – a friend who had earlier vowed to remain loyal to the death!

I will never forget reading the story of a young mother who rescued her only daughter from their burning home. She had to fight her way through flames into her young daughter's room. In the

process, her hands were terribly burned and her face badly scarred.

The little girl grew up to be a popular teenager. When her senior class took a boat trip, her mother volunteered to come along and help with meals. That afternoon, the girls were on deck and a few of them had seen this scarred woman. They began to talk about the woman's hands and face. One of the girls asked, "Who is that ugly woman?"

Not knowing her mother was near enough to hear, the daughter said, "I do not know!"

Now turn to Luke, chapter 22, verses 60 through 61a.

But Peter said "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. . . .

Perhaps Jesus looked through a gap in the crowd of the Sanhedrin through an open window or door. He stood, silent while all others mocked Him, with perhaps already, a bloody and bruised face. Jesus turned and looked through that opening at the same time guilty Peter looked toward that meeting room – and Jesus was looking directly at him.

It was not a look of hatred or spite. The Lord's look did not communicate, "Peter, just wait, I'll get you back for this."

I believe it was a look of absolute sorrow and grief. Oh Peter, this God-man was crushed with the sorrow of denial.

As Isaiah, chapter 53, verse 3, says,

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

I cannot imagine that look. Peter's heart must have stopped. He probably caught his breath, as he realized what he had done. He was immediately overwhelmed, and as Luke, chapter 22, verse 62, tells us,

. . . he went out and wept bitterly.

This literally means, he sobbed uncontrollably.

Principle – Great achievements can be followed by great failure, but terrible sin can be followed by wonderful forgiveness.

- This leads us to another principle. Great achievements can be followed by great failure, but terrible sin can be followed by wonderful forgiveness.

I want to conclude by conveying this challenge to every Christian.

- Do you think you are great? Is your world wrapped around yourself?

I pray you will have a courtyard experience where you will see that Peter's failure is your failure.

- Do you think you have sinned too greatly? Have you disappointed your Lord to the point that surely, He must not love you?

May I remind you that the risen Lord sent the angel to greet the women who came to the tomb on

Sunday morning to anoint His body. Mark, chapter 16, records that the angel told the women that Christ had risen and, in verse 7, that they were to,

. . . go, tell His disciples and Peter, "He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He said to you."

In other words, "Gather all the disciples who abandoned Me – and especially tell Peter to meet Me."

Why tell Peter especially? Because he would be the one disciple who would believe that Jesus would never want to see him again.

So, "Make sure you tell Peter."

Oh wonderful, gracious Lamb.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/8/1995 by Stephen Davey.

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