

When the Rooster Crows

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Date: 14 June 2020

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[0 : 00] But this morning, let's turn to Matthew 26, verses 69 through 75, as we think through Peter's three denials.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me. Well, so the saying goes anyway. Of course, we all know it's not really true. It's one of those fictions we tell our children when they come home from school complaining that someone's called them a name and hurt their feelings.

It doesn't make it any more true, the fact we've told them. Emotional abuse is at least as, if not more damaging than physical abuse. It certainly is more long-lasting.

Physical bruises heal relatively quickly, but emotional bruises can last a lifetime. Broken bones may heal within a couple of months, but a broken heart sometimes never heals at all.

Just try telling Jesus, as from a distance he hears Peter's three denials, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me.

[1 : 15] Just try telling Jesus that. He's being punched and he's being spat on. He's being slapped. But what hurt him more than anything else were the denials of his close friend, Peter.

That same friend who had been the first to say, I believe you are the Christ, is now the first to say, I don't know the man.

Of all the things Jesus suffered, you know, this is the one thing that horrifies me most. Because perhaps like you, I've been where Peter is in Matthew 26, verses 69 through 75.

Perhaps I've not used the words he has, but I've thought it. This is the one suffering of our Lord to which I personally can relate, and I'm sure you can as well.

For it's the one thing that we are most liable to do, to deny that we know Jesus. I don't find it comfortable to sit with Peter this morning because he's altogether too much like me.

[2 : 24] But I want to invite us all this morning to stand beside the rooster, the cock, as he crows. Roosters crow when the sun comes up, but this rooster was altogether different because he was crowing when the Son of God was going down.

This morning, I want us to stand beside that rooster and listen to it crowing as we enter into the emotional vortex of Peter's three denials.

If there is an underlying theme to this study today, it's this. The gospel reaches out to us in our weakness and promises forgiveness to the repentant.

We're all capable of the same denials as Peter, and yet we are promised forgiveness and restoration through the same Jesus we have denied.

But though we have disowned him, he will never disown us. So this morning, I want us to see two things. Contradicting and crying. Contradicting and crying.

[3 : 39] There may be some among us here this morning who in their minds and in their hearts and their thoughts, perhaps even by a hidden lifestyle, are denying Jesus.

Hear the good news of the gospel. There was a way back for Peter through the grace of Christ's forgiveness. There's a way back for you also.

Your backsliding is not ultimate. Christ's loving commitment to you is ultimate. First of all, then, we have contradicting.

Contradicting. There's something, shall we say, rather tragic about Peter. He's a man of many words. Many of these words are good words. But like the rest of us, he's a mixture of the best and the worst of the human race.

He's capable of stupendous confessions of faith. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. But he's also capable of the most horrendous contradictions of faith.

[4 : 49] I don't know the man. He's a complicated mix of a fellow. Just like us. But a mix the gospel transforms.

Even after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter still made mistakes. But then, he's a man full of contradictions. If he's a saint, then we're all saints.

So imagine the scene. It's dark. So in the courtyard of the high priest, there are many fires. Not far away, the rooster is getting ready to crow.

But if that rooster had a brain which could understand human speech, it would have heard the most amazing thing. The mighty apostle Peter.

First among equals. Disowning Jesus. Contradicting in practice everything he was in principle. And what fixes us to the spot is our own inner awareness that, you know, we could be standing in Peter's sandals and do exactly the same thing he did.

[6 : 04] We can't scold Peter. Lest we scold ourselves. Because to deny Jesus is something we can and do. There are a number of things I want us to focus on in Peter's denial.

These denials were public. They were repeated. They were growing. They were pathetic. And they were pointless. It's perhaps no bad thing for us to be able to fit into Peter's sandals this morning.

Because if these things are true for you, then this is also true. The gospel is for you. Forgiveness is for you. Grace is for you. First of all, Peter's denial, denials, Peter's contradictions, were public.

They were public. It seems almost beyond belief that Peter could act like the coward he did.

Because he did not merely whisper his denials. He made them public.

In verse 69 through 70, we read of his first denial. A servant girl came to him and he said, and said to him, you were with Jesus of Galilee. Now, we don't know the tone in her voice when she said it.

[7 : 21] Was it accusatory? Was she caught up in the history of the crowds condemning Jesus? Or was she, in fact, sympathetic to Jesus and his cause? Well, whatever it was, it prompted Peter to deny Jesus.

And notice he did not just deny Jesus to the servant girl. Look at the text carefully. The text tells us he denied it before them all. Now, we talk in our tradition of making a public profession of faith, that we have become Christians of going public, as it were, about our faith.

But Peter's first public profession wasn't faith in Christ. It was the denial of Christ. In the ears of all you could hear, he said, I don't know what you're talking about.

So let me ask you this morning, what is your public profession? What does the wider world hear from your mouth? What are you known for?

Owning Jesus or disowning Jesus? There were words and actions in public and private say the same thing.

[8 : 33] Peter's devotion to Jesus was private. Peter's denial of Jesus is now public. The second thing about Peter's denials were that they were repeated.

Repeated. We all know the story here of Peter's denials. I'm sure we could all write our own book on the subject. Having denied Jesus once, he now denies him twice and then three times.

Sometimes he says, I don't know, and he says it three times. Perhaps the denials become easier the more he denies. Or perhaps he's becoming used to denying Jesus.

But for whatever reason, denying Jesus once does not bring Peter to his senses, not twice, and only three times with the crowing of the rooster does Peter realize what he's done.

I guess it goes without saying that our denials of Jesus are repeated events. That it's a chronic problem we all face.

[9 : 36] Well, perhaps our denials are not quite as public as Peter's. Or perhaps they are. Maybe they are more internal. And they're more focused down onto our own doubts and our own fears and our own weaknesses.

Every time we go looking for answers to our doubts and fears and weaknesses from anyone else other than Jesus and his grace offered to us in the gospel, you know, it's as if we are shutting the door on his face and saying, I don't know the man.

A man may profess to be a Christian, but be a practical atheist at the same time. A man may be a Christian, but a Peter at the same time.

But there's another aspect of this repetition that I want us to think about for a moment. Later on, we're going to discover that Jesus wholeheartedly forgave Peter, restored Peter, and commissioned Peter for his service.

There may be some of us here this morning who have come to realize how repeatedly we have sinned against Christ and how repeatedly we have failed to respond to his call to return to him. [10:45] Yes, and there may be far more than three repetitions, hundreds perhaps of that denial. But you know there is forgiveness for you from Jesus for the asking.

You may say, but I've rejected Jesus so many times, Colin. He'll never have me back now. But Jesus says to you right now, even now come again to me, and I will wash your heart whiter than the snow.

Third, Peter's denials, contradictions were growing. They were growing. Not only are they repeated, but you can see from the passage that they're growing in intensity. The first denial consists in Peter saying, I don't know what you're talking about.

The second consists in Peter denying Jesus with an oath. I don't know the man. The third consists in Peter calling down curses on himself and swearing an oath to them all. I don't know the man.

Like this great hellish crescendo, Peter's denials are becoming more and more violent, more and more insistent, and finally, presumably swearing, Peter curses and says, I don't know that man.

[12:02] Man, I've seen it with my own eyes. Some years ago, I was at a conference where a certain high profile preacher was speaking. And his words were so inspiring.

He wasn't Scottish, by the way, just in case you're wondering who it was. His words were so inspiring as he encouraged us all to pursue faithfulness to Jesus. Sometime later, not years, but months, perhaps even weeks, I heard that this preacher had left his wife and family and was now living with another woman.

When senior church leaders from his denomination approached him to counsel him to repent and return to his wife, he said to them, I no longer believe a word of what I once preached as truth.

I no longer believe a word of what I once preached as truth. And don't think for a second that this man's apostasy was a one-off event. It was a process of growing denial.

Dissatisfied with his marriage and his ministry, he met another woman to whom he felt attracted, but he knew that he couldn't be with her as long as he kept to his Christian faith. And so rather than denying her, he denied Jesus.

[13:23] And that growing process of denial finally led to him saying to those grieving church leaders, I no longer believe a word of what I once preached as truth.

If at all, you should see that process beginning in your heart. Cut it off right now before it grows more serious.

Repent of it. Who knows where it might lead? The fifth characteristic of Peter's denials is that they were pathetic. They really were very pathetic indeed.

The transformation between Peter on the Mount of Olives and in the courtyard of the high priest is dramatic, to say the least. Just a couple of hours previously, he'd been the one to draw his sword. He had been prepared to fight this huge mob which had come to arrest Jesus by himself. But now, just a couple of hours later, it's not a huge mob who were calling upon him to deny Jesus.

[14:29] It's not a powerful warrior intimidating him with strength. It's a servant girl. By trade, Peter was a fisherman.

Now, most fishermen I know have big hands roughened by working with nets. For Peter to be afraid of what this little servant girl could do to him is like an elephant being afraid of an ant.

It makes Peter's denials all the more pathetic. That though there is no direct danger to Peter, it is not the force of arms which draws his denials, but the questions servant girls ask of him.

This is Satan's sifting of Peter and here the tempter has found a weak point in his armor. Be sure that's Satan's tactic, by the way. He will always find a weak point in your armor and he'll press home the advantage.

A great Christian preacher stands in front of a crowd of thousands proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and yet alone before a computer screen late at night when all the family's gone to bed.

[15:42] He has another life, a seedy, disgusting life, but his Christian profession is well out of sight. What a crowd of thousands was unable to do to him, a pretty girl on the internet does.

It's really pathetic when you think about it and yet it's a pathetic to which many of us can relate. We could stand firm for Christ before armies, but we will wilt before weakness.

Satan knows the weak point in your armor, my Christian friend. He will exploit it mercilessly. Do you know where the weak points in your armor are?

Servant girls who, though they have no physical force to draw you, can draw your denials. And then lastly, Peter's denials were pointless.

They were pointless. What makes his denials almost laughable is what those questioning him say to him in verse 73. Surely you are one of them because your accent gives you away.

[16:57] Your accent gives you away. Now Peter was from Galilee, far to the north of Jerusalem. His accent gave him away. There was no mistaking where he was from. It was as distinctive to our ears as Aberdonian Doric.

You can tell an Aberdonian a mile away. Everyone knew that the disciples of Jesus were mainly Galileans. Peter spoke with a Galilee accent.

You know what they say if it walks like a duck, if it looks like a duck, and if it quacks like a duck, then in all probability it is a duck. Virtually everything about the Hollywood blockbuster Braveheart is a fiction.

One of the most obvious bits of fiction is near the end of the film. William Wallace is being executed in a huge square in London, and the English crowds are baying for his blood, cheating when he is hung and drawn.

But in the crowd are two of Wallace's generals. They're not cheating, they're weeping, they're wearing kilts, and they're talking with Scottish accents to each other.

[18:04] And you wonder if the crowd are saying to themselves, gee, I wonder if these two red-headed guys speaking like Scots are true cockneys. You see, Peter's denials of Jesus were pointless because his accent gave him away.

I know this is the pointlessness of denying Jesus. something about you will always give your Christian profession away. It won't be your accent. Accents mean nothing.

It may be your hesitancy about entering into sin. It may be that look of guilt on your face. But something about you will give your Christian faith away, that you're running away from who you really are.

You know, there's nothing quite as pointless as a Christian denying Jesus because you are one. And try as hard as you might, it can't be hidden. Did I say, poor Peter, we don't despise him and his weakness and sin.

Perhaps we pity him. Furthermore, we learn from him because we cannot and we dare not deny Jesus like he did. if Peter could speak into our hearts today and if he could stand before us all, I'm pretty certain he'd say something like this.

[19:30] Those three denials were the worst thing I ever did. Don't follow in my footsteps. Jesus deserves way better from you.

Way better from you. contradiction. And then secondly, more briefly, crying. Crying.

Herein lies the greatest difference between the Judases of this world who betrayed Jesus and the Peters of this world who deny Jesus. One repents, the other does not.

One returns to the Jesus he has denied for forgiveness and restoration, crying not so much because he has let himself down and he himself has lost so much, but because of the cost of his sin to Jesus, because of how serious his sin is against Jesus.

Judas Iscariot was filled with remorse, but not for how much his sin of betrayal had cost Jesus, but because things hadn't worked out the way he had hoped they would.

[20:48] Peter was filled with repentance because he knew what he had done to Jesus. Judas refused to return to Jesus for forgiveness, but proceeded to hang himself.

Peter longed to return to Jesus for forgiveness and proceeded to return to the company of the other disciples. And so we read in verse 75 of Peter, he went out and wept bitterly.

He went out and wept bitterly. These are bitter tears of repentance. He has denied his Lord. He's disowned his closest friend. Only recently he had seen his Lord transformed into glory in the Mount of Transfiguration.

but now he sees a man beaten and scarred, spat upon and cut by his accusers. That face which Peter had so often seen turned upwards into heaven in prayer and then turned outwards to needy people in love is now beginning to darken with bruising.

Peter sees what's happening and he can't believe that he's been complicit in all this but he has. That's godly repentance for you.

[22:12] He thought he had made so much progress in discipleship but the end of his face comes crashing down around his ears in a few moments of sinful madness. He had always been first to

criticise others for their lack of faith but now he recognises just how little faith he really had.

He was always the first to resolve to follow Jesus but now Peter recognises that his sinfulness has overcome his resolve and so he weeps at what his sin has cost Jesus that the heart of Jesus breaks within him the thought of Peter's denials.

Now listen carefully to this paragraph what I'm going to say next. this is true repentance not so much regret or remorse but the understanding that ultimately we have sinned against Jesus and his love for us.

It's what our sin cost Jesus as Peter did not what our sin has cost us as Judas did which leads to true repentance.

It's not what it's sorry it's what our sin has cost Jesus as Peter did not what our sin has cost us as Judas did which leads to true repentance.

[23 : 42] So for the longest time the rooster all it could hear was the crying of Peter outside the gate as he wept bitterly. Is there a need for true repentance among us this morning?

Perhaps you've stood in Peter's sandals and in your own ways you denied your Lord. You pretended as though you didn't know him whether in public or in private on social media or whatever.

It's not the correct response to such pretense the godly repentance of Peter. this is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ for us all here today especially for those among us who perhaps unknown to anyone else are in process of denying Jesus.

It may be that you're watching things on the internet that you shouldn't be watching. It may be that when you're with a certain group of friends you hide your Christian profession or perhaps simply it's your lack of time management and lack of time spent in God's presence you're where Peter was. Here's the good news that Jesus you are in process of denying went to the cross because though you may deny him he will never ever deny you.

[25 : 08] He will never abandon or forsake you but rather he waits for you to go outside the gate and weep and weep bitter tears of godly repentance.

The blood he shed in that courtyard the bruising he endured it was the beginning of his passion a passion which will end with his cry on the cross it is finished it is finished the work of salvation is complete.

Now all you must do is to place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ to come to him with your sin whether it's the first sin or the millionth sin and say to him I'm sorry for what I've done please change who I am.

The cross of Jesus is good news for the secret internet addict for the secret gambler for the apathetic Christian the cross though Peter found repentance before it and we shall find repentance after it will change our lives forever.

Well as we close this morning I want to do so very briefly by returning to the crowing of that rooster the crowing of that rooster we all know what a rooster sounds like when it's crowing the thing is that by my time calculations this rooster should have not been crowing for another few hours the events of Matthew 26 69 through 75 are taking place very late at night but the dawn when roosters crow is still far away this rooster should have been asleep in other words God made this rooster for one purpose and one purpose only but this rooster should crow up this very moment when really he should be asleep so the rooster crows and Peter hears it remembering the words of Jesus before the cock crows you will deny me three times it's the sound of the rooster which brings

[27 : 17] Peter to his senses so what is this rooster's crow for you could it be that this sermon you're hearing this morning is bringing you to your senses and showing you an area of your life in which you are denying Jesus could it be something that a Christian said to you very innocently perhaps but you hear God speaking to you through it could it be a personal health crisis that you've had which is making you realize that you're not immortal and you need Jesus could it be that you're in process of denying Christ and for all that you say to others it's making you altogether miserable and it's your misery which brings you back to him a very dear friend of mine heard the rooster crow in this way he and his wife had both been brought up in a Christian home but had rebelled against their upbringing they lived in

Aberdeen where he was a traffic policeman on one occasion in the early 1980s the Christian evangelist Louis Palau was in Aberdeen and speaking at Petardy Stadium to a huge crowd my friend and his wife had been invited to attend to manage the traffic at this event the traffic police in

Aberdeen had set up a huge one-way system near Petardy in the streets round about Petardy if you know Aberdeen at all you'll know that Petardy is surrounded by streets my friend and his wife drove to the stadium but were stopped as they went down one of the streets near Petardy by a traffic policeman to tell them they were going the wrong way down a one-way street now remember my friend was a traffic policeman so he knew the traffic policeman who had stopped him and his wife and he knew that this traffic policeman was a Christian well this traffic policeman when he stopped my friend's car he leaned in through the driver's side window and he said to my friend Billy you're going the wrong way you're going the wrong way the rooster was crowing as my friend and his wife realised that they'd been going the wrong way their entire life and that night Billy and his wife gave their lives to Christ at that evangelistic meeting in Petardy Stadium I you're going the wrong way today what wisdom shall crow for you