

“Peter on Trial”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 2/02/2020
Text: Mark 14:66-72 at FBC of Newport, NH

//66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

“You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said.

68 But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway.

69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” 70 Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”

71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.”

72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept. //

—Mark 14:66-72 (NIV)

The Jewish Sanhedrin had gathered at the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest, and there Jesus was put on trial. (According to John 18, Jesus was also taken to the former high priest Annas) Such a house has spacious courtyards and in the cool of the night Peter was there by a fire keeping warm. Soon, though, he found himself confronted by one of the high priest’s servant girls. She started in on him by simply accusing Peter of being with “that Nazarene” who’s on trial there in the house. Peter denies the accusation and retreats to the entryway. Later the girl sees him and brings the matter up a second time, only now she’s more public about it. Peter continues to deny her charge against him, which, of course, is true.

Finally, the matter is brought up a third time, not simply by the girl but by the people standing around, one of whom was related to the man whose ear Peter had cut off (John 18:26). They heard Peter speak and could tell he was from Galilee, just like Jesus. So they all confronted him, “Surely you are one of them!” they said. This third time Peter is emphatic in his denial of being associated with Jesus. He replies with the equivalent of, “May lightning strike me dead... I swear I don’t know this man you’re talking about.”

At that very point, the rooster crows, reminding Peter of Jesus' words predicting just what had happened. The Gospel of Luke adds that this is also the point at which Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter (Luke 22:61). The courtyards and rooms did not always have solid walls between them, making such a line of sight possible. And one can just imagine the impact all this had on Peter.

Peter was on trial. His intention had been to shadow Jesus after his arrest and he followed him right into the house of the powerful opposition, Caiaphas, the high priest. For what purpose exactly we don't know. He couldn't *do* anything about what was going on. But he wasn't going to let go of Jesus and scatter like the rest of the disciples, or so he thought. Peter loved Jesus. And this was his way of clinging to him—desperately.

John, too, may have been following with Peter, though he's not actually named here. The person with Peter is simply identified as "another disciple." "Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus." John 18:15. There is speculation that it could have been Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea. Whoever it was, he would have to be a believer with enough history in Jerusalem to be known to the high priest and not known, yet, as a threat associated with Jesus. This could well mean the other disciple didn't have a Galilean accent. The thing to note, though, is that this person wasn't confronted as Peter was.

It works out quite well in my Rock Johnson story to not have the other disciple be John. Instead, I have him be Nicodemus. I had started out having it be John, but Nicodemus helps explain how Peter was helped into the courtyard, but later got confronted. If it was John you have to wonder why John wasn't with Peter to continue to help out and why John's accent wasn't noticed. But if it was Nicodemus, well, he was on the Sanhedrin and he would have been busy after getting Peter inside. He might also not be too eager to be with Peter the whole time. Whoever that other disciple was, though, is not crucial. The focus here is on Peter.

As Jesus was standing before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, Peter found himself standing before a servant girl and her friends. He too was on trial. Yet the comparison would both start and end there.

- Jesus said nothing to defend himself.
- Peter lied to defend himself.
- Jesus, when pressed, identified himself for who he truly was.
- Peter, when pressed, identified himself falsely by denying any knowledge of who Jesus truly was, or association with him.

- Jesus allowed himself to be condemned in a court of law for his public stance regarding who he is and what he was about.
- Peter avoided condemnation in a courtyard for his stance regarding who he is in relation to Jesus.
- Jesus was executed.
- Peter ran away and escaped.
- Jesus was glorified.
- Peter was horrified.

So, what are we to make of this second trial, that of Peter and its great contrast to the trial of Jesus?

One thing we can make of it is the same as what Peter made of it. **This trial broke Peter's heart.** Not in a noble way either. Peter was forced to see a disappointment in himself, a side of himself, which he was unaware of and unprepared for.

In a way, it is as though he ate a part of that fruit in the Garden of Eden and had his eyes opened to what he had just done—which was evil and horribly embarrassing. Surely it made him want to die. Surely he felt like he had died inside. The man he thought he was, and the friend he thought he'd been to Jesus, was false—and a terrible sight to behold.

Have you ever had to see yourself in such a state? It doesn't happen equally to all people. Even among the other disciples there were differences of degree and aspects of this "fruit of sin." Judas killed himself. John and some of the women followed Jesus right up to the cross. Most just scattered like sheep.

Still, there is an equality of sorts at work here. Sin is sin. It's a disease of the soul. We all have it. And even though we may suffer differently, we will all die of it as it runs its natural course. Our souls would then stand before God... yet, none of us would be able to stand for long in the light of who he is and the contrast with who we are. The closer we might try to stand to him the more pain we'd find, as our self image, or our love, or our self righteousness would be made vulnerable, exposed, and whatever is less than fire proof in God's presence would be burned.

But there is one more thing we can make of Peter's trial. Something Peter could not see until later. **This house of trials is more about the righteous-ness of Christ than it is about the sins of Peter.** The arrest and trial and the cross are necessary for God's dealing with the sins of the world.

In truth the cross was the worst demonstration of sin the world has ever seen: worse than the prehistoric Flood; worse than Sodom & Gomorrah of the time of Abraham; worse than the Holocaust of our day. For there is no greater sin than the killing of God, the torture and killing of God's Son on a cross.

But God did not send his Son into our sinful world in order to highlight our sin. He came to cover it over. And this he did with his love and his forgiveness. "Love covers over a multitude of sin" because Jesus came to the cross to work his miracle of the Atonement. God not only has covered over our sin, he has actually justified the sinner who would identify not with his sin, but with the Son of God and his perfect, spotless righteousness.

This doesn't mean he's whitewashing our sin, or pretending it isn't there. Just the opposite. It means God is confronting it head on so he can completely cover it, conquer it and replace it with his own righteousness forever.

Peter failed his trial and was let go. Jesus stood faithful at his trial and was condemned. But Jesus went through his trial for Peter. So Peter would have another choice after this failure. So we could all answer this question: **Which is more important to us, our sin or the Savior?** For that's what it boils down to. Which one are we going to believe? Which one will we follow?

If it's sin, then we'll have to suffer the shame of every trial we fail. And there'll be no appeal. If it's sin, then we'll have to believe Jesus himself failed his trial, as a liar, that he deserved the death he got.

But if Jesus is our Savior, then every trial we fail will have another trial going on right beside it. And that trial will be our *real* trial, the one we should see as far more important than the one we've suffered through. Because that's our Savior's trial! And *he* has proven faithful. *He* has overcome the verdict of the world. He has *not* deserved his suffering and shame. And he has found his appeal in God's court. He has risen! And he is our Savior, who comes back to us, not as a judge, but as the Savior and even as friend—loving us, forgiving us, restoring us to where we were when we left him in the lurch.

Don't let sin have the last word by believing your trial with it was greater than that of Jesus'. Don't let the failure of your own trial break your heart more than the injustice at the trial of your best friend and Savior. Believe in the Atoning work of Jesus' trial—the trial of the innocent, beloved Son of God for your sin to be covered by his grace and love.