

⁶⁹ Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, “You also were with Jesus of Galilee.” ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you are saying.” ⁷¹ And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, “This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁷² But again he denied with an oath, “I do not know the Man!” ⁷³ And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, “Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.” ⁷⁴ Then he began to curse and swear, saying, “I do not know the Man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” So he went out and wept bitterly.

Text: Matthew 26:69-75 A 4/3/22 Passion History, part 5 Psalm 130 Responsive Psalm: 51
Hymns: 166, 140 (1, 3, 5-6), 376, 175

BITTER TEARS

Dear fellow believers in Christ, crucified for sinners,

The pressure was on Peter. People were recognizing him as a follower of Jesus. In his account Luke tells us, “*A certain servant girl... looked intently at [Peter] and said, ‘This man was also with Him’*” (Lk. 22:56, my emphasis). John says, “*One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, ‘Did I not see you in the garden with Him?’*” (Jn. 18:26, my emphasis). Jesus was on trial before the Jewish leaders, who were determined to have Him put to death. Peter knew that if people found out that he actually was a follower of Jesus, he could be put to death, too.

Jesus has told us, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it*” (Mt. 16:24-25). We love the forgiveness and comfort and love Jesus gives us. But there’s a cost to being a follower of Jesus. “*If they persecuted Me,*” Jesus tells us, “*they will also persecute you*” (Jn. 15:20). Jesus was persecuted for telling the truth that He is the Son of God and only Savior of the world. When we stand up for the truth about Jesus and for the other truths of His Word, we will sometimes be persecuted for it. Jesus suffered on the cross for us, and He sometimes sends us a “*cross*” of suffering for His sake.

A little before the event of our text Mark tells us, “*Then Jesus said to [the disciples], ‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.’ But he spoke more vehemently, ‘If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And they all said likewise*” (Mk. 14:27-31). Jesus warned the disciples, Peter included, that they would all fall away from Him. Jesus specifically warned Peter that he would deny Him. But Peter didn’t listen. Instead he insisted that if it came to it, he alone would remain faithful to Jesus even if it cost him his life.

So how did Peter do when the actual test came and he was pressured to admit that he was a follower of Jesus? *“But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are saying.’ ... Again he denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the Man!’ ... Then he began to curse and swear, saying, ‘I do not know the Man!’”* Instead of relying on Jesus to strengthen his faith, Peter relied on himself and how strong he thought his faith was. And Peter failed completely, miserably.

The Bible warns us, *“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12). When we’re being tested, if we’re looking at how strongly we can trust in God instead of asking God to strengthen our faith, we’ll fail the test, too.

Paul tells us, *“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might”* (Eph. 6:10). *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philip. 4:13). Don’t trust in how strong your faith is. Trust in Jesus, and how strong He is. When Jesus tests our faith, if we’ll ask Him He’ll give us the strength we need to face the test, and pass it.

Jesus was in the house of the high priest, on trial before the Jewish leaders. Peter just was outside in the courtyard. And while Peter, for the third time, was denying that He even knew who Jesus was, *“Immediately a rooster crowed.”* Just then Jesus was being led out of the high priest’s house. Luke says, *“And the Lord turned and looked at Peter”* (Lk. 22:61), knowing what Peter had done. The rooster crowing and Jesus looking at him reminded Peter of Jesus’ warning, *“Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”* *“So [Peter] went out and wept bitterly.”*

In His Word God tells us what to do and what not to do, what’s right and what’s wrong, what’s good for us and what’s bad for us. We need to pay attention to God’s Word, take it to heart, and do what God says. When, like Peter, we fail to do this, we get ourselves into trouble.

What Peter did in denying Jesus was a very serious sin. Jesus says, *“Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven”* (Mt. 10:32-33). Jesus gave His life for us. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us so that we don’t have to go to hell, but can go to heaven. When facing the cross, Jesus didn’t fail us. When facing our crosses of suffering for Jesus’ sake, He doesn’t want us to fail Him. If we deny Him to avoid persecution and suffering, we take the chance of Jesus denying and rejecting us.

By warning Peter, by the rooster’s crow, and by His look after Peter’s denial, Jesus showed Peter that He loved him. Peter didn’t have to run and hide from Jesus in despair. He could come to Jesus in repentance and be forgiven.

“By the law is the knowledge of sin” – Romans 3:20. It’s because God loves us that, in His Word, He confronts us with our sins. God wants us to see our sins and come to Him in repentance. It’s because God loves us that, in His Word, He assures us that when we repent He forgives us. *“If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* – 1 John 1:9.

Peter “*wept bitterly.*” Peter cried bitter tears, remembering his boast to Jesus that he would remain faithful to Him, no matter what. Peter cried bitter tears because, in spite of Jesus’ warning that he and the other disciples would fall away from Him, and that Peter would deny Him three times, Peter had done just that. Peter cried bitter tears seeing his dear Lord’s bruised and swollen face from the beatings of His captors who were going to put Him to death.

Whether or not we cry over our sins, we can certainly feel bitter regret over them. “I wish I never would have said, never would have done what I did.” “If only I had listened to God’s Word and done what God says.”

Peter failed Jesus. But Jesus didn’t fail Peter. Jesus allowed His enemies to capture Him, falsely accuse Him, beat Him, and put Him to death. And in so doing, He earned forgiveness for Peter.

For every one of our failures to confess Jesus and speak up for His Word, Jesus, our Substitute, faithfully told the truth about Himself and the world’s salvation in Him. We’re saved, not by how faithful we can be to Jesus, but by Jesus’ life of perfect faithfulness in our place.

Peter was sorry for his sin of denying Jesus, and for all of his sins. We’re sorry for all of our sins, too. The Bible says, “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*” – Romans 5:8. Jesus died for sinners. Jesus forgave Peter. Jesus forgives you and me, too.

Martin Luther says, “After man has ... become aware of his sin and is terrified in his heart, he must watch that sin does not remain in his conscience, for this would lead to sheer despair. ... We must pour this sin back on [Christ] and free our conscience of it. ... You cast your sins from yourself and onto Christ when you firmly believe that His wounds and sufferings are your sins, to be borne and paid for by Him, as we read in Isaiah 53:[6] ‘The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,’ as St. Peter says, ‘In His body He has borne our sins on the wood of the cross’ [1 Pet. 2:24]. ... You must stake everything on these and similar verses. The more your conscience torments you, the more tenaciously must you cling to them. ... If we behold [our sin] resting on Christ and [see it] overcome by His resurrection, and then boldly believe this, even it is dead and nullified. Sin cannot remain on Christ, since it is swallowed up by His resurrection.” (“Treasury Of Daily Prayer,” ©2006, CPH, pp. 136-137).

Thank God that Peter wept repentant tears over his sin. Thank God every time we see our sins and repent of them. Thank God that Peter was forgiven, and we are forgiven. Amen.