

Before the Cock Crows

Opening

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch ('ē- ,pāk) of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity (in·cre·du·li·ty), it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only." Did Peter, the disciple of Jesus, inspire these famous words of Charles Dickens from the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*? In this opening, Dickens refers to this time as the *age (epoch) of disbelief (incredulity), it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness*" this is a direct reference to God as the source of Light and Satan the source of Darkness. Dickens is saying there is a clear contrast between Light and Darkness, and good and evil. These lead to heaven or hell. It is the heart of men that makes the difference and often the heart of men moves back and forth in this constant struggle with sin. It seems this is exactly where we find Peter.

Read along with me from John chapter 18 beginning in verse 15, "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, **16** but

Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. **17** The servant girl at the door said to Peter, 'You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' **18** Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself." As we read of Peter's first denial of Jesus it is hard for me not to think of Dickens' famous novel that has sold more copies than any other novel in history. It describes the turmoil that takes place in people's hearts as they struggle in this life with sin and this is the turmoil we find in Peter's heart. Peter also reminds me of the Book of Psalms that is filled with songs and prayers offered to God. The Psalms is like the beginning of Dickens' book and Peter here in the courtyard; the Psalms are filled with praise and dismay, faith and the lack of faith, joy and sorrow, peace and frustration. The first book of the Psalms is titled "The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked." Reading from Psalm 1, verse 1 "Blessed is the man who walks **not** in the counsel of the wicked, **nor** stands in the way of sinners, **nor** sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." Peter chose to not meditate on the truth and teaching of Christ, but instead placed himself in bad company as he sat in the courtyard of the high priest warming his hands by the fire. He had allowed the stress of the situation to stop his mediation on the law of God. Verse 4 of Psalms 1 continues, "The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away." At this moment and time Peter was like chaff and he was blown away by the temptation to deny Jesus for his own safety. Peter had placed himself in bad company and Peter paid the price. The Apostle Paul knew well the effect of being

in the wrong or bad company; it took direct intervention from Jesus on the road to Damascus for Paul to be forcefully removed from his bad company. Paul wrote to the Corinthians this short, but direct advice, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’ ” (1 Corinthians 15:33) Do you think you are impervious to the effects of placing yourself in bad company? Look around you and identify those who are “bad company” in your life and separate yourself from them as Jesus separated Paul. Did your dad and mom ever say to you they thought a friend of yours was bad company? Most likely you did not, at least for a while, listen to your parents, just as Peter did not listen closely enough to what he had been taught by Jesus. If we look at people all through history and even just through our own life experience and what we observe as the normal course; we see that the bad company brings down those who are not bad. Without Christ the good do not elevate the bad. Peter finds himself in bad company and concerned with self-preservation. Peter is impulsive and at times is easily incited into brash action. On the other hand what had Peter been like when he listened to and was with Jesus?

With Christ

Jesus had given Simon the name Peter or Cephas meaning “rock.” When Peter keep his focus on Christ he was able to walk on water, but as soon as he lost his focus he began to sink. The wonderful thing is Jesus reached out to save him.

I see similarities between Peter and King David. They both made many mistakes, but they also had a heart for God. God sent Samuel to find a new king because Saul had turned his heart from God. Samuel knew David was God’s chosen.

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him (David) in the midst of his

brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.” (1 Samuel 16:13) David is given the gift of the Holy Spirit and when he gave himself to the Spirit he served God well.

Remember when Jesus and his disciples reached Caesarea Philippi Jesus ask them, **13** ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ **14** And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ **15** He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ **16** Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. **17** And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ ” (Matthew 16:13-19) This is the Peter when he is in the presence of Jesus, this is he when he kept his focus on Jesus and this is the Peter after Jesus’ resurrection – most of the time. Peter was a new creation in Christ and of God and when he gave himself to the triune God he was strengthened and walked in holiness.

Should we not learn from King David and Peter’s mistakes? When we keep our focus on Christ and when we give ourselves over to the Spirit we will walk in the way of the Lord. But, as soon as we take our focus off of Christ we will by our fallen nature gravitate to bad company and be pulled down. Last week we talked about the “Armor of God” that readies us to do spiritual battle. One thing that is quickly noticed is that there is no armor on the backside. The armor is all for defense and moving forward is battle. If one retreats they are exposed. When

we place ourselves in bad company they can easily take advantage and find our exposed backside. This is why it is so important to say in the Word and pray. Be prepared for battle moving forward and not exposing us to the wiles of the evil one.

Peter found strength and purpose in Jesus. [“Peter said to him \(Jesus\), ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!’ And all the disciples said the same.”](#)

(Matthew 26:35) The point I want to make is that if Peter could fall, then anyone can fall, from the strongest to the weakest. In truth, it is the strongest, like David and Peter, who are at the greatest risk. They begin to become self-confident and stop relying on Christ for everything every day. As you think through your life I believe you will see that at the times you became over confident is when you had some of your greatest struggles because you had become lazy about your spiritual life.

I do want to defend Peter also. It was Peter who stepped forward to defend Jesus and cut off a man’s ear. It was Peter and the other disciple, as verse 15 tells us they followed Jesus while the other nine fled into the darkness of night. Peter was able to gain entrance into the high priest’s courtyard. These were not actions of a coward. So Peter’s failure here at the fire could only have happened because of his courage to risk following Jesus. Like Peter we need to be courageous for Jesus, but we must also take the time to put on the Armor of God.

Another great thing about Peter is we know he loved Jesus. It was his love for Jesus that spurred him to follow Jesus into the priest’s courtyard. Personal safety would have driven Peter to run into the darkness and head towards Bethany as the others did. Again, Peter failed when [“The servant girl at the door said to](#)

Peter, 'You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, 'I am not.' "

But, Peter could not have failed if he had not loved Jesus so deeply he risked following Him into the lair of evil.

Peter was a man of great faith. Remember when many of the followers of Jesus began to leave. In response Peter said to Jesus, "You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69) Christ had chosen for Peter to be the leader among the disciples and to lead the Jerusalem church. Yet, Peter fell, he fell quickly and with only the slightest provocation. Having denied Jesus once it would become easier to deny Him again. One we fall in sin and do not repent it becomes easier and easier to continue in sin even though we are saved by Christ.

Without Christ

I see similarities between King David and Peter in their failure spiritually. When one does not seek God they become at risk. Remember when David had Bathsheba's husband Uriah killed because of his desire for her? God sent the prophet "Nathan *who* said to David, 'You are the man!' Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. **9** Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight?' (2 Samuel 12:7 & 9) David was not walking closely with God and fell into sin. He did repent and God restored much, but not Bathsheba's child. Peter at times did not walk in the footsteps of Jesus and Jesus told Peter what would be the result. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, **32** but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." *Jesus knew of Peter's*

coming fall, but He also knew of Peter's repentance and his restoration. **33** "Peter said to him (Jesus), 'Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.' **34** Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.' " (Luke 22:31-34)

Why did Peter fall? Peter was a man of strong character and courage. Let's examine some of the reasons, for we can learn from his mistakes.

First, what is apparent here is that if Peter or any of us indulge ourselves in overconfidence – relying upon our talents or hard work we are setting ourselves up for failure. When we immerse ourselves in our culture and society instead remaining holy, set apart for service to God we are setting ourselves up for failure and falling into sin. Jesus taught this clearly. During one of His teaching He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for *apart from me you can do nothing.*" (John 15:5) Jesus is our source, we must abide in Him and without Him we cannot bear fruit, we cannot do anything of lasting value or goodness.

Second, Peter failed in and what I have often failed in, and that is Peter did not pray. Isn't it strange; Peter desperately needed to pray and did not. Jesus, who as God did not need to pray, but He did. Peter sleep in the garden while Jesus prayed. Jesus pour out His very soul to His heaven Father. Jesus warned Peter; he had been told to be watchful and to pray. Unfortunately, the church and many Christians are like Peter they have fallen asleep spiritually and fail to pray. Paul having been recued from bad company by Jesus understood this problem of spiritual insensitivity while living in a corrupt world. Paul instructed, "Rejoice always, *pray without ceasing*, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will

of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19) Like, Peter, we find ourselves in the same circumstance, we do not pray and this opens the door for sin to come charging in.

The third mistake Peter and we also make is not staying close to Jesus. Peter followed Jesus from a distance. We know this from Luke’s account, “Then they seized him (Jesus) and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance.” (Luke 22:54) Peter did have the courage to follow while others did not. But following at a distance was for his safety, not wanting to be recognized as a true follower of Jesus as we see in his denial. So many of us today do the same thing; it is true we have given our life’s to Jesus but we want to follow at a distance so we can keep one foot in the world. This was not being true to Christ - for Peter or for us. The question is, “are we fruitful for the kingdom of God?” Peter repented and became bold for Christ, what about you? Jesus taught as recorded in Mark, “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Mark 4:19) How can you hope to have influence with unbelievers when you proclaim the Word of God mingled with the desires of the world? If Peter had followed closely to Jesus his exposure would have been greater, but the danger would have been less. It is Jesus that guarantees victory. So, as Peter found out after the resurrection and we know by the Word of God the safest place to be is in battle next to Christ!

When these things are considered it gives us the ability to understand Peter’s second and third denial. Reading again from John beginning in verse 25, “Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, ‘You also are

not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, 'I am not.' **26** One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' **27** Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed."

We quickly see another problem with Peter. In verse 18 we read, "Peter also was with them." Peter has placed himself among the enemies of Christ and denied knowing Christ. But his denial did not work. For in verse 26 we read, "One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' " At this point was Peter more like the world in which he lived or more like what Jesus had called him to be?" The answer is obvious, but before we jump on the bandwagon and batter Peter we need to ask this same question of us. Do people see you in the garden with Jesus? Do they see your fellowship with Him? Are you with Jesus currently through the study of the Bible? We have Bible Study on Wednesday nights as a church and you are the church. Should you not be there? Are you experiencing Christ in regular prayer? It is prayer that helps change you into what Christ desires and this is a witness to the world. Then if we answer, Yes, I am in fellowship, Bible study and prayer." Do the people around you see this? Are they seeing you with Jesus in the garden, like Peter – asleep or praying? Are you denying or proclaiming Christ?

Closing

If you answer that the world has seen you in the garden praying with Jesus, then are not certain things to be expected of you? The world may expect perfection from Christian and this is impossible. If at some point we think because Christ has

redeemed us we can live without sin, well then, our arrogance will place us in great danger.

Isaiah after he had seen the Lord in His glory and holiness and being impressed with his own sin, he said, **“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”** (Isaiah 6:5) Isaiah recognized that he is utterly lost without the Lord. This is what Peter failed to do and was his mistake. Isaiah recognized he is unclean, so what does God do? God sends **“one of the seraphim flew to me (Isaiah), having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my (Isaiah’s) mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’ ”** (Isaiah 6:6-7) God did this for Isaiah. But Jesus purifies all who God has called. Do we feel God’s hot cleansing coal of His Word touching our lips when we speak?

In our jobs and professions people have the right to expect certain things from us. There are tasks and duties that need to be performed and should be performed well. The same is true with Christians. Christians should profess what Jesus professes. Jesus’ doctrines should be our doctrines. Jesus’ priorities should be our priorities. Jesus’ values should be our values. This means we are not to concede to our culture or society things that go against Jesus doctrines. We are not to try and warm ourselves with the world’s values for this will lead to us denying Jesus if not with our lips as Peter did, then with the living out of our lives.

We should live as Jesus has taught, living with joy, peace, truth and holiness. We should be engaged in the mission He has given to us, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son**

and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20) As we fulfill this mission the world should observe we are doing all that we do with unity with the Scriptures and love for others.

If we call ourselves Christian, followers of Christ, the world has a right to expect and observe that we live as Jesus modeled and taught. I pray this is how you are living and the world sees you. We cannot be in the world and in Christ. “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.” (1 John 2:16) The Lord mission for you and my instruction to you is live this day and everyday for Christ to the fullest – know His joy and peace that comes from staying close to Jesus.