

The Trial Of Jesus Part 2

“This Fellow Also Was With Jesus Of Nazareth.”

Text: Mat 26:71

Suggested Hymns:

516, 132, 296, 318, 173

1) The historical setting

2) Temptation come when least expected

3) Repentance

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 26:69-75, 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. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We have all learnt the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer as in *Luther’s Small Catechism*.

Let us refresh our memories, **And lead us not into temptation.** *What does this mean?* God tempts no one to sin, but we ask in this prayer that God would watch over us and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful self may not deceive us and draw us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins. And we pray that even though we are so tempted we may still win the final victory.

To the trial of Jesus by the church council there was an interesting side-issue, which we are going to consider today. It was Peter being present in the courtyard of the high priest.

The pertinent words for today are the words spoken by the girl who said, *“This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Historical Setting

After the first panic of Christ’s capture in the Garden of Gethsemane and the flight of the disciples, two of them, Peter and John, had now recovered and they followed¹ after the moving mass.

It was only when the crowd was nearing its destination, the palace of the high priest, that they pushed forward, John entering with Jesus into the courtyard, while Peter remained behind until such time as admission for him could be procured.

Let us picture to ourselves the construction of such a house as the high priest’s palace. Whereas our houses look out into the street, an Oriental house looks upon an open and enclosed inner court, which is reached through an arched passage, which is usually guarded and watched.

When the arresting party arrived with their Prisoner, the gate was opened and the whole party admitted, including John, who was acquainted with Annas, the high priest. But Peter was shut out. As the event shows, it would have been better if his exclusion had been final.

It seems that John occupied a higher social level than the rest of the Twelve Disciples. Since the Gospel of St. John is rich with details of the Judean ministry of Jesus, it has been thought with a good degree of likely-hood that he had spent quite a bit of his life in Jerusalem, before he became a disciple of Jesus.

He may have even been the representative of his father Zebedee’s prosperous fish business in the capital city. At any rate, he was known to the high priest, and also to the servants at the gate, because shortly after he went out to the maid who kept the door and he brought Peter in.²

It was a friendly act. But still it was an ill turn. Neither of the two disciples had any business to be there. John did not enter as the disciple of Jesus, but as the friend of the high priest.

And as to Peter, it was his purpose *“to see the end,”*³ and he was led into temptation. Likewise many Christians are not always quite honest in their confession with respect to their Saviour nor entirely trustworthy with respect to the best interests of their friends.

After Peter had been admitted, John, it seems, hurried across the hall where Jesus was to witness the proceedings.

Not so Peter. He did not feel at home in that strange, big house. He felt more at ease among the servants, but even there he was out of place.

It was long past midnight by this time, and the spring air was cold and chilly. In the center of the court the servants had built a fire to warm themselves and were now standing with others around the coals of fire. It was this miscellaneous group that Peter resolved to join.

But Peter did not belong there. He was in danger, but in another sense than he may have supposed. It was not bodily peril. That would have been an eventuality which his fiery nature would have been equal to. But he did not anticipate dangers to his soul.

Yet that was the very danger lurking in the shadows at the fire. No doubt the fireside was ringing with jests about the Prisoner who had been captured. Peter was silent. He did not interrupt the vulgar jesters. He simulated disinterest and indifference.

2. Temptation Comes When Least Expected.

It is when least expected that temptation like a wild animal sneaks up and strikes a sudden blow. Already in the darkened archway Peter's pretended indifference and betraying restlessness had attracted the attention of the girl by whom he had been admitted. As a hypocrite he was a failure. When the gatekeeper was relieved by another maid, she stepped closer to the fire to verify her suspicious intuition concerning Peter. She fixed upon him an earnest gaze. No, she was not mistaken. With a flash of recognition she exclaimed, *“You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.”*⁴

What an honour! To what greater praise could mortal man ever aspire? What better inscription could be engraved on the tombstone of a Christian's grave than the words, "*He was also with Jesus of Nazareth?*" At another time Peter himself would have desired none better. But here he was taken off his guard. A mask had been suddenly torn from his face.

But instead of taking himself in hand, since the mask did not fit him anyhow, and confessing before all, he denied, lamely saying, in Mark 14:68, "***I neither know nor understand what you are saying.***" ***And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed.***

How easily, how quickly, Peter glided and fell! For a while Peter was at rest. Nobody pursued him and no one bothered him. But he felt uneasy and warm. There was a fire burning within him. Quietly he slunk away from the glowing brazier to the arch-covered entrance of the open court. He suddenly felt himself in need of refreshing air.

Just then the crowing of a rooster smote unheeded on his guilty ear. It did not occur to him that Christ had said, "***Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.***" ³¹ ***But [Peter] spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.***⁵

And not only that. If he had only heeded the warning! But he did not. That is the way of sin. You feel you know what you ought to do. But you don't do it. Such is our miserable human nature. You may talk all you want to about human nature, but you will have to admit that it is corrupted, polluted, and miserable.

A second maid replaced Peter's first accuser. At that moment she was standing with two or three men. She ***said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth."*** ⁷² ***But again [Peter] denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"***

Poor sinful, fallen Peter! Again he is felled to the ground by the gentle touch of a woman's hand. And how often a woman's jeering laugh and saucy tongue have made a man feel ashamed of his highest and holiest possessions!

This time it took more than a mere denial to set Peter straight. He flung an angry oath at her. He denied with an oath and said, *I do not know the Man!* This was the second denial.

By this time an hour had passed. Turning on his heels, Peter returned to the fire. He was now completely wild. He was boiling with conflicting emotions, and his mouth was out of control. Before he was silent, but now he would talk. Assuming an air of defiance, he threw himself into the conversation, outdoing the rest in coarse and noisy talk. He would show them that he was not with Jesus of Nazareth. But before he knew it, he was fatally betrayed by his rough Galilean accent.

“Surely you also are one of them,” the scoffing firesiders insisted, *for your speech betrays you.”* But Peter would show them! *“When you are with the Romans, you must do as the Romans do,”* is an old proverb. But the more Peter tried, the less he succeeded. Now that he tried to make good, he drew attention to himself.

In spite of his oaths and denials Peter was utterly despised. The devil hates man, and he hates him all the more for being a Christian. And then he hates him for having been a Christian. There was no hope for Peter to liberate himself.

A relative of the wounded Malchus whose ear Peter had slashed off in the Garden confidently accused him with having been there with Jesus. In the face of such evidence, how could Peter deny it? We read in John 18:26, ²⁶ *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?”* ²⁷ *Peter then denied again.* And still he makes one more effort. ⁷⁴ *Then [Peter] began to curse and swear, saying, “I do not know the Man!” Immediately a rooster crowed.*

This was the third denial. How quickly and how deeply had Peter fallen! And immediately the rooster crowed. The word of Jesus had been fulfilled, *before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.*

But repentance for Peter? Not yet. To his denials he added profanity and poured out curses and oaths. As far as he was concerned, Peter, that great disciple, had done his part, tried his best, to fill the whole courtyard with foul and infernal fumes. He was thoroughly lost.

Let us note that there are certain sins that only Christians can commit, like denying Christ. Unbelievers cannot deny Him. When they say, “*I don’t know the man!*” they are merely telling the truth. But when a Christian denies his Lord, he is endangering his own faith and salvation.

3. Repentance

But it is a good thing that the story does not end here. There is a sequel. And thanks be to the merciful God that there is forgiveness for sin! It was the Lord Himself who brought about Peter’s return, as written in Luke 22:32, ³² “***But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.***”

Not even the second crowing of the rooster, which ought to have shot into his conscience like a charge of dynamite, brought Peter to his senses.

It was merely a look which the Lord used. We read in Luke 22:61, ⁶¹ “***And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”***”

What a look! It was as if an arrow had pierced fallen Peter’s inmost soul. Then he remembered, but not before. There was pain in that look, disappointment and reproach, but also understanding, kindness, grace, forgiveness, and unspeakable love. The unspeakable love of Jesus is described in John 13:1, ¹ “***Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.***”

With his heart filled with unbearable pain, Peter cast down his tear-stained eyes and rushed out into the night. Gone, forgotten, was his foolhardiness, his enemies, his fears, denials, curses, perjuries, and oaths. Something else had filled his heart. He rushed out into the night, but not into the unsunned darkness of miserable remorse, the midnight of hopeless despair, but by the grace of God into the sorrow of repentance. ⁶² “***So Peter went out and wept bitterly.***”

God be thanked for the tears of Peter! They were better than his foul profanities and salvation-selling oaths. What a picture! And in the image of

Peter every penitent sinner sees himself. For does not a sinner's salvation pass through the stage of sin, sorrow, contrition, and faith?

And what a sermon in that look of Christ! And with that same look the Saviour views us: pain, reproach, disappointment, but also kindness, mercy, rescue, and undying love.

We read in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 ¹⁰ *For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.* ¹¹ *For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

The Passion story does not need any oh's! and ah's! to stir the depths of the human heart. When hearing the story, examine yourself. What a powerful incentive to searching self-examination and unmerciful self-condemnation!

But also what an invitation to accept the fruit of that self-sacrificing Saviour love, and to have it reflect in your lives!

Let us conclude with these words of Scripture. 2 Corinthians 5:15, *He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 26:58

² John 18:16

³ Matthew 26:58

⁴ Mark 14:67

⁵ Mark 14:30-31