**PRAY**

We looked last week at how Jesus prepared His disciples for His death on the cross and how that would transform them into the apostles that we see after the gospels – people who were prepared to continue God’s work on earth, without apparent concern that in time, with the exception of John, they would all die for their faith in Jesus.

Yet, the passage we have before us is way off that point – we are looking at Peter’s denials of Jesus, but with the exception again of John, all the other disciples are nowhere to be seen.

The real message from this passage is that sin, if dealt with in the right way, by turning to Jesus in repentance and for forgiveness, can be dealt with in a Godly way.

We all fail and all sin, but we have a Saviour, who never failed and Jesus can save us.

As we shall see today, Jesus and Peter are under trial at the same time, but in contrast to Peter, Jesus never fails.

**SLIDE** **John 18:15-16**

**And Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door and brought Peter in.**

Peter (Simon) is called ‘rock’ by Jesus – he is called by Jesus to be a follower and in his human confidence, Peter claims that he will follow Jesus all the way to death.

Jesus tells Peter that instead, he will deny him when the pressure comes on.

Peter is perhaps brave, foolhardy, or even trying to show loyalty to Jesus, as he and another disciple follows the arrest party from the Garden of Gethsemane to the High Priest’s residence – remember that he has just cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant.

It is this other disciple that gets the two into the courtyard. Majority opinion is that the other disciple was John, the author of the gospel, who was known to high priest.

We can only guess as to the relationship – suggestions included it was by a business relationship (supply of fish?) or marital ties.

Whatever the explanation, John’s connection to the high priest and his servants gained entry to the courtyard for himself and Peter.

But Peter is the focus here, not John.

**SLIDE** **John 18:17-18**

**Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.**

It took a simple servant girl to start Peter’s night of grief and deceit, with a simple question of, ‘**are you not also one of this Man’s disciples?’**.

This first test of Peter’s loyalty seemed easy; he could have answered nothing, mumbled something, or said, ‘I know Him.’

Maybe Peter thought that a denial was the way to get in to the courtyard, rather than to start a conversation with a servant girl, especially as the recorded words she used for ‘this man’, imply a level of contempt in the Greek original.

The girl had said, ‘**you are not also one of this Man’s disciples’.** The words can be interpreted several ways, but possibly she already knew John was a disciple of Jesus – in seeing Peter with John, she may have merely been expressing, ‘oh no, not another!’

What seems to have been a quick exchange of negative words at the door was actually a clear denial of association with Jesus.

That short exchange should be a warning to each one of us. A brief conversation which can be easily dismissed as small talk, could lay the foundations of larger conversations – where our initial comments will either enable, or prevent us, having a full conversation about Jesus to an unbeliever.

Peter’s initial actions in denying Jesus, would make things harder later.

But Peter was in – where he wanted to be - and as a bonus, fire had been lit to enable everyone to warm themselves.

Probably hanging back would have made him more noticeable (it was cold) and surely Peter wants to blend in at this time, so he stands amongst the group around the fire to warm himself.

He tries to blend in – albeit he had followed Jesus, it was still dangerous to be noticed, because he was a disciple of the man who had been arrested, who Himself was in serious trouble.

**SLIDE** **John 18:19-21**

**The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus answered him, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.”**

Inside the building, Jesus is questioned in a way that would have sat well in interrogation cells of authoritarian states.

Despite Jewish law requiring the accuser to have arrested the guilty party, then providing the basis for charge, Jesus is effectively asked, ‘tell us all what You are guilty of and everyone who is with You.’

Jesus is under pressure, yet He speak only about His teaching. He protects His disciples at this dangerous time.

Jesus continues to protect His disciples. John 17 tells us that we have Jesus and God as protectors – the same is included in **Psalm 61**, **91** and **121**.

Jesus replies that there is nothing to find out – there is no secret doctrine that is being taught, His teaching was done in the open – Jesus has nothing but the truth to share and for that there is no reason to teach behind closed doors.

Clearly, some of Jesus teaching was done in private, but that was done to give the disciples a more detailed knowledge and explanation of God’s work. What was taught in these sessions was not a different message to that taught in the synagogues.

Jesus also says, ‘**why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them**’

He is not being obstructive here – Jesus is merely stating His legal rights. In Jewish law, a formal charge could not be brought against the accused until witnesses had been heard and been found to be truthful.

The amount of illegality in this trial is worthy of separate study, but it is not for now, except to make one further point:

* The Talmud (the main text of Rabbinic Judaism and primary source of Jewish religious law) states, ‘Criminal processes can neither commence nor terminate, but during the course of the day. If the person be acquitted, the sentence may be pronounced during that day; but, if he be condemned, the sentence cannot be pronounced till the next day. No kind of judgment is to be executed, either on the eve of the Sabbath, or the eve of any festival.’

According to that statement, as these events take place on the eve of a festival, the trial is illegally started and continued.

Yet, for the Jewish rulers, these were desperate times as it had been said that the ‘whole world was going after Jesus. Their un-Godly and sin-filled authority was being threatened.

**SLIDE** **John 18:22-24**

**And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.**

As a response to Jesus’ reply, He is hit by an unnamed official – this is but the first level of physical abuse that Jesus would take in the next few hours, leading to His death on the cross.

These may be event that took place nearly 2,000 years ago, but every single piece of abuse that Jesus took that day was ultimately not for His benefit – but yours and mine.

He knew the name of the person that struck Him, in the same way that He knows each and every one of your life’s actions. Yet, Jesus is prepared to forgive that man, as well as you and I.

As Luke recorded Jesus saying on the cross **Luke 23:34 - ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**

God is prepared to forgive those things that are done in ignorance, but we must come before Him to repent of those things.

It has been said that because the official did not fully understand who he hit, his name was graciously not recorded.

We don’t know if that man ever came to faith, but possibly the events of the next few hours and days persuaded him that the man before him was God’s Messiah – in the same way those events have persuaded millions of people ever since

**SLIDE** **John 18:25-27**

**Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, “You are not also one of His disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not!” 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?” Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.**

John’s narrative returns to Peter as he continues to warm himself.

Luke’s account of the same event **Luke 22:61** indicates that Peter could see Jesus, albeit at a distance and once again, Peter is asked the same question as before.

Another unnamed person around the fire asks Peter, ‘**you are not also one of His disciples, are you**’.

It is asked in the same negative way as previously and for a second time, Peter said **I am not** and denied any association with Jesus.

Straight away, Peter is asked a third time – this time by **one of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off**.

This is the kind of thing that John would know, having connection with the high priest and his household – it is also the sort of questioning that is beginning to get pointed and personal, given this is a relative of the injured man.

**Did I not see you in the garden with Him**. Even in just firelight, Peter finds that he has been recognised.

The question is emphatic in the original Greek – we would say, ‘I saw you with my own eyes’.

Peter has been asked three times and for a third time, he now denies knowing Jesus.

John gives no more detail, but **Matthew 26:74** states Peter denied this third time with curses and swearing. It doesn’t say if these are against him or his accusers, but it is done with the hope that such behaviour would make the lies believable.

It has been said of Peter that at that moment it was not his faith that failed, but his courage.

Nothing has changed in Peter’s heart to alter the fact that Jesus is the person that he declared early in Jesus’ ministry to be his Messiah.

Rather it was the courage to own up to that claim and face the inevitable criticism and consequences of that belief which has deserted Peter.

Rather than criticise Peter, we should want to stand alongside him at this moment of his life.

He stands for each one of us where we have either drawn back from opportunities to talk about our faith in Jesus, or maybe taken an easier route in terms of our human behaviour – in not standing up for those who are being persecuted for Jesus sake.

Whilst having that conversation, or prayerfully making a stand for others may not seem to make any difference and may even bring ourselves into the line to be bullied or argued against, we are doing those things for God’s Kingdom – for Jesus’ sake.

Then **immediately a rooster crowed**. This fulfilled what Jesus said in **John 13:38**.

The fact was not missed by Peter. **Matthew 26:75** states, **…Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: ‘Before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.’**

Luke 22:61 makes it even worse for Peter as Luke records that Jesus looked round and saw Peter at that moment. We are told that **went outside and wept bitterly.**

**CONCLUSION**

If that had been the end of the story, it would have been a tragedy, but Peter’s tears are full of remorse and Jesus’ ministry is full of forgiveness.

As we come to communion, we are reminded that Jesus’ ministry was to sinners, to those who acknowledged they had fallen below God’s standards, yet they remain people who want to repent and want a restored relationship.

All followers of Jesus fail in some way at some time – no one is perfect. We all fail – we are sinners by nature. It is our attitude of loving ourselves more than Jesus. For Peter he was more concerned about himself than Jesus in those moment.

Peter’s failure here is merely a picture of every believer’s failure.

This had the potential to define the rest of Peter’s life – his great failure – and in a way it did define his life. Peter needed to be brought to the point where he realised Jesus was more important than he was.

Maybe he needed to get to a point where there was nothing left of himself and from now on he needed to be totally reliant on God for his strength.

For Peter, being the rock really started after Jesus’ resurrection, but his rebuilt life glorified God – let us also submit to God to allow His Name to be glorified through each one of us as well.

Let God’s grace work in you today and forever – let your dependence be totally on Jesus – the only sinless one, the only one never to compromise.

**OFFER / PRAY**

**READINGS**

**John 13:36-38, 18:15-37**

**36Simon Peter asked him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus replied, ‘Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.’ 37Peter asked, ‘Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’ 38Then Jesus answered, ‘Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times!**

**John 18:15-27**

**And Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door and brought Peter in.**

**Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.**

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**And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.**

**Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, “You are not also one of His disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not!” 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?” Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.**

### **Psalm 91**

**1Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
    will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
2I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress,
    my God, in whom I trust.’**

**3Surely he will save you
    from the fowler’s snare
    and from the deadly pestilence.
4He will cover you with his feathers,
    and under his wings you will find refuge;
    his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
5You will not fear the terror of night,
    nor the arrow that flies by day,
6nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
    nor the plague that destroys at midday.
7A thousand may fall at your side,
    ten thousand at your right hand,
    but it will not come near you.
8You will only observe with your eyes
    and see the punishment of the wicked.**

**9If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’
    and you make the Most High your dwelling,
10no harm will overtake you,
    no disaster will come near your tent.
11For he will command his angels concerning you
    to guard you in all your ways;
12they will lift you up in their hands,
    so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
13You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
    you will trample the great lion and the serpent.**

**14‘Because heloves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him;
    I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
15He will call on me, and I will answer him;
    I will be with him in trouble,
    I will deliver him and honour him.
16With long life I will satisfy him
    and show him my salvation.’**