
Looking into the Face Of Jesus

*“But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, ‘Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly”
(Luke 22:60–62; see Matthew 26:69–75; Mark 14:54, 66–72; John 18:15–18, 25–27).*

Sometime early Friday morning on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, Peter broke his boastful promise never to fall away (Matthew 26:33–35) and denied Jesus repeatedly and vehemently. Following his final denial, he not only had to listen to the rooster crowing, but he also had to look into the face of Jesus. When he looked up and his eyes met with the searching eyes of Jesus, it was too much for Peter. His big heart broke into a dozen pieces. He hurried away from the scene of the trials and out into the cold darkness, where he wept before God over his miserable failure.

Before spending an agonizing night in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had told His apostles that they would forsake Him and flee (Matthew 26:31; see John 16:32). At the arrest of Jesus, they had done so. Mark wrote that “they all left Him and fled” (Mark 14:50). After Jesus had told Peter to put away his sword (Matthew 26:52; John 18:11) and the arresting officers were ready to take Him away, His disciples seized the opportunity to escape. They scattered in every direction under the cover of the darkness of the night. Peter and John watched Jesus and the crowd, with their flickering lights, cross the Kidron Brook and move toward the house of Annas for Jesus’ first trial. Then, regaining their composure, they pushed their immediate fears aside and followed the procession from a safe distance (John 18:15; see Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54).

When they reached the court that fronted the house where Jesus had been taken, they must have stood in the midst of others, wondering

what would happen next. John approached the young woman who was keeping the door and asked for permission to enter into the courtyard. John was known to the high priest and was recognized by the young woman handling the door (John 18:17). Without hesitation, she admitted him into the wide-open area in front of the house. A little later, John likely remembered that Peter was outside the door in a daze, unsure of where he should be and what he should be doing. It was at this point that “the other disciple [that is, John], who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in” (John 18:16). As they passed through the door, the slave-girl who was keeping it said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” (John 18:17a). Peter, perhaps in an impulse of fear, said, “I am not” (John 18:17b).

The night was cold, and those in the courtyard could do nothing but wait. A small, flameless fire had been made out of charcoal to warm those who were sitting or standing in the courtyard, awaiting the outcome of the proceedings taking place in the house of Annas. Peter moved near the fire (John 18:25). Perhaps at times he squatted beside it and sometimes he stood. As he warmed himself, the fire seemed to cast a spotlight on him.

One of the servant-girls of the high priest said to him, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean” (Matthew 26:69). Before everyone who was within hearing distance, Peter blurted out, “I do not know what you are talking about” (Matthew 26:70). Perhaps others around

the fire chimed in, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" (John 18:25a), and Peter declared, "I am not" (John 18:25b). Distressed and embarrassed by the questions, the attention, and especially by his answers to the questions, Peter slowly backed away from the fire and slipped out to the porch, hoping that he could ease away into anonymity. A little time passed, and then another barrage of questions came. A man approached him and said, "You are one of them too!" Peter snapped, "Man, I am not!" (Luke 22:58). Another servant-girl who was nearby spoke up to those around her, saying, "This is one of them!" (Mark 14:69). Peter denied it (Mark 14:70a) and accented his response with an oath (Matthew 26:72; KJV). He may have said something like this: "Before God I tell you, 'I do not know the man'" or "God is my witness; I am telling you the truth—I do not know Him" (see Matthew 26:70, 71).

Our Lord, in His prediction that Peter would deny Him three times, must have grouped these four responses into one denial—the second denial. Peter answered four similar charges from four different voices. Three seem to have been from individuals, two servant-girls and one man; the fourth was from the group of people gathered around the fire.

About an hour later (Luke 22:59), one of the bystanders "confidently affirmed," or adamantly insisted, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too" (Luke 22:59). Someone further said, "For even the way you talk gives you away" (Matthew 26:73). "But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about'" (Luke 22:60a). Matthew wrote, "Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!'" (Matthew 26:74a; see Mark 14:71). "Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed" (Luke 22:60b). The sentinel of the dawn, the cock, could be heard in the distance, making Peter's final denial history and declaring the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy complete. The fisherman who had claimed that nothing would take him away from Jesus had failed privately and publicly by denying Jesus with an oath and curses.

At that moment Jesus was brought out from Caiaphas' interrogation, His second trial. He was being taken to the place where the official trial of the Sanhedrin would occur. In that brief,

passing moment, as Jesus was hurried from one trial to another, He turned and looked Peter's way. Peter looked up, and their eyes met. Luke captured the moment in a few words: "The Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61a). This touching image is frozen in time by Luke's narrative. The world cannot begin to imagine the full range of teaching, emotion, and significance that passed from Jesus' eyes to Peter's heart in that second or two when their eyes met. No wonder the text says that Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).

What did Peter see when he looked into the eyes of Jesus?

As he looked into that divine face, he saw his immediate past flashing before him. Back at the Passover supper, He had said, in effect, "Lord, I do not know about these other men, but I know what I will do. I will go with You to prison and even to death. One thing You can count on is this: I will not deny You" (see Matthew 26:33). He had meant what he was saying and even demonstrated his bold assertions during Jesus' arrest. Jerking out his sword and swinging it in the face of Malchus, he had cut off the servant's ear. He surely risked his life and the lives of the others by that one swift swing of his sword. Jesus' command to put the sword away must have done something to Peter's heart, reducing it from an aggressive, determined heart to an unsure, confused one. Peter had not fully understood Jesus' teaching concerning all that was about to take place. Later, in the door of the courtyard and by the fire, he had completely melted before the onslaught of questions demanding the truth concerning his relationship with Jesus. He had failed as never before. It is likely that tormenting questions tore through his mind: "How could I have said, 'I do not know the man'? How could I have said it so clearly, so quickly, and so convincingly?"

In addition, when Peter looked into the face of Jesus, he saw His mercy. To his amazement, Jesus' facial features were not preaching, "Peter, I told you what you would do! Yes, I told you so! I knew you would do it!" In his three years with Jesus, Peter had never seen Jesus embittered against anyone. He had never observed a vengeful or retaliatory spirit in Him. On the contrary, he had heard Him tell how often one

should forgive a brother: "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). He could remember Jesus teaching, "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:15). He may have listened to Him telling a woman caught in adultery, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Now, more than any other time in His walk with Jesus, he must have seen etched on the face of Jesus the great compassion of His heart for those who have fallen headlong into sin. Jesus' eyes and expression were saying, "Peter, you have made a mistake, but there is a road to forgiveness. Take it, and walk in it. Remember, I still love you and will never quit loving you."

As Peter's eyes met with the eyes of Jesus, he saw his sin in all of its darkness and in all of its tragedy. Who can imagine the contrast that Peter saw as he looked into Jesus' eyes! Peter, the sinner, was looking into the face of Jesus, the sinless One! Peter, the guilty man, covered with the fresh stench of denial, was looking into the face of Jesus, the Son of God, who was on His way to bear the guilt of every man!

Peter had seen something of this contrast before. In Luke 5, after the miracle of the big catch of fish, the truth of Jesus' deity had overwhelmed him. After swimming ashore, he

had cried, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). When sin is juxtaposed with the holy character of Jesus, it is seen to be undeniably detestable in its ugliness, corrupt in its purposes, and damning in its consequences.

No person whose heart has any sensitivity can look into the face of Jesus and remain the same. Jesus' pure, compassionate, all-knowing eyes search us, convict us, break us, and draw us to the love of God!

Eddie Cloer



James M. Stalker wrote, "I have sometimes thought what an honor it would have been to Christianity, what a golden leaf in the history of human nature, had one or two of them—say, [Peter or] the brothers James and John—been strong enough to go with Him to prison and to death. . . . [W]hat a revelation that would have been, what a gospel, what a living epistle!

"It was not, however, to be. Jesus had to go unaccompanied. . . ."¹

¹James M. Stalker, *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ* (Glasgow: N.p., 1894; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 15.