

## “denied...”

*John 18:12-27*

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**John 18:12** *Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. 13 And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. 14 Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews*

*that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. 15 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. 16 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. 17 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." 18 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. 19 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. 20 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. 21 "Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said." 22 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?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" 24 Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. 25 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!" 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 immediately a rooster crowed.*



Throughout the gospel accounts of the Life and Times of Jesus, there have been many attempts that were made by the enemies of our Lord to lay hands upon Him to do Him harm, but because “*His hour was not yet come,*” He always eluded those who aimed to take Him early. Then, just before this text in John, we have an account of Jesus...with just His words, causing this band of soldiers to literally be blown back on to the ground. Their response? Tie Him up this time. Can you imagine such a scene? Trying to stop the power of God with some ropes! Jesus was ready now. He allowed Himself to be taken by sinful hands.

Jesus would begin His journey to the cross by appearing before this man Annas, who wasn’t even the official high priest at that time, but who certainly welded the power behind the scenes. History on the secular realm has much to say about this Annas, who was apparently one of the most brilliant, clever, and satanic of all the high priests. Apparently this Annas had officially surrendered the position of high priest to his son-in-law Caiaphas, but even having done so, Caiaphas was essentially a mere puppet ruler, *as proven in this case with Jesus*. It is believed that Annas surrendered the position at least partially because he wanted more time to devote himself to the ‘business’ of religion within the temple. It would seem that he was inadvertently the recipient of Jesus previously overturning the tables of the money changers and those who were wrongly capitalizing upon the marketing of religion.

Many commentators believe that it was Annas who was actually behind the whole play for Jesus, the arrest and the death sentence, as he was most definitely politically connected, and certainly had a lot to lose because of Christ and the spread of Christianity. Jesus would firstly be tried in a *religious* trial, falsely painting Him as guilty of blasphemy. Then they would take Him to be tried in a mock *civil* trial, in attempt to find Him guilty of insurrection and crimes against the state.

While folks have for generations read this account before us in incredulous if not self-righteous judgement, the truth is we shouldn't be surprised. Things hadn't been going too well for Peter for a while now. Peter was enthusiastic, strong-willed, impulsive, and, at times, brash. But for all his strengths, Peter had several failings in his life. Still, the Lord who chose him continued to mold him into exactly who He intended Peter to be. One thing God always seems to give us, is time to regain our balance and correct our life trajectory when we find ourselves in a spiritual spin. It's called grace. Despite his past stumbles, the heart of Peter's downfall seemed to be his excessively large ego. Many such stories begin there, *even with us*.

Hindsight is 20/20 they say. No doubt Peter was thinking that about the time the last verse of this passage was lived out. But again, the events that transpired that night were "long in coming." Firstly, it began even as far back as Matthew 16:22 where Peter contradicted Jesus' words and argued Jesus' plan. Peter that day went so far as to take Jesus aside and actually rebuke Him! Jesus had been telling His apostles of His coming arrest, and Peter was quick to reject that plan saying, "*Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!*" And in order to give Peter no later excuse, Jesus was quick to seriously come back at him for his actions that day. But whatever Peter felt about such correction, it did not ultimately deter him from barreling on ahead. That event then was just the beginning of Peter's undoing.

Secondly, It seemed that on more than one occasion Peter would rely on his own strength instead of upon Christ. Peter thought he *would* never, that he *could* never deny his Lord, and he was quick to verbally claim as much. He believed in his OWN strength and stamina. This heart and action would be Peter's second fatal error.

Third, when things proved to be "out of his control," as in this scene of the garden arrest, Peter turned to carnal weapons. He forgot that ultimately our battle is not with flesh and blood, and he took on fleshly weapons to fight a spiritual war. Yet such weapons do not work in the realm of the Spirit! Jesus rebuked Peter "on the spot" and even went so far as to clean up Peter's mess by healing the ear of Malchus. Despite such an incredible "save" on the part of Jesus, Peter still did not "pull up."

Then fourth, when things were in "full swing" and game was on, the scriptures record...*once again, for all of history to read*, that Peter "**followed afar off.**" According to the other gospel accounts, we know that he did not run away, but he also did not join Christ in the midst of the fray either. He *followed*, but just like so many of us do, he followed "way back." Many of us think we too can be ok with Jesus, just as long as we keep Him in sight. Even if He is *way* up ahead of us...

Then his fifth mistake, well along in this spiritual "slide," Peter made the mistake of accepting a place in the company of Christ's enemies. Peter "saddled up to the foes of Christ and His followers." He "*warmed himself beside the fires of the enemy.*" He sought comfort while Jesus suffered! He attempted to "blend" with the world to stay of the chaos. Peter, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. While we are not completely sure of his motives, (*for he himself was probably unsure of his motives!*), Peter was certainly not there to evangelize! He was not the "salt and light" that we are called to be in the world.

Peter was “warming himself around the fires of the enemy.” I wonder how many of us are doing the same today? Maybe like Peter you think playing both sides will protect you. Your self-preservation tendencies are in control. Peter too was there because he ironically thought it was safe. But it would ultimately prove to be anything but “safe...” We can easily error in this way. Hanging out a little with those who seek to undermine your church, or even the kingdom of God. Maybe it’s just through email or on Facebook. But in the end it doesn’t make any difference. In your pride you think you will pull it off. I am sure Peter thought that too. Maybe you too are spiritually cold and tired. Maybe confused, lonely, or hurting? Where do *you* go when you feel that way and want to “get warm?”

Now...primed and ready...the “*seeds sown and the investments made,*” Peter would make the biggest mistake of his life. One that would echo down through the ages, so very public and so very shaming. Recording it all for history would apparently be John, Peter’s unwitting biographer, who was trailing along beside him. Someone is *always* watching...

What makes all of this even worse is that Peter was truly without excuse. Even without a *fleshly* excuse! For he did not cower before an armed soldier, but a simple young girl who kept the door! This was not primarily his *skin* he was worried about, but his *life* as a whole. The life he had known up until that moment was all slipping away around him and he couldn’t stop it.

Ultimately he wasn’t just being asked if he *knew* Jesus, he was essentially being asked how much he loved Him and loved his calling. It was a test each of us will one day have to take. It is that crossroads where we are “all in” or it is time to run. So many will turn back when we too have to “drink of His blood and eat of His flesh.” John 6:53 & 66 says “*Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.’ ... From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*”

Annas now begins an information search here. This would be the beginning of 24 hours of endless questions that nobody really wants to hear the answers to, this high priest begins to quiz Jesus on His beliefs and His followers. We must note that the Sanhedrin had not been assembled at that point, so this was not in any way a real or legal trial. Merely asking Jesus the questions he did was illegal, as they too had a provision in their law which allowed a person not to incriminate oneself. But the high priest really wasn’t concerned about what was right or legal or he wouldn’t have even been there in the middle of the night!

Jesus tells the high priest that what he did, he did openly and publically. He was not organizing a secret army to somehow gain earthly power. Unlike clandestine Peter, who was outside at that moment telling lies, Jesus was still out in the open telling the truth as He always had. That’s the thing about warming oneself around the fires of the enemy: *it’s all done in the dark and in secret.* Such is the proof that it’s wrong, and further that the guilty party knows it. Such acts of treason are done in whispers and in shadows, with secret emails and passing notes under the table. Those who are party to such will not come out in the open, into the light and speak their words. ***But Jesus did.***

He encouraged the high priest to go and ask all those who had heard Him speak and minister over the previous three years. Jesus is our model in this matter and is why we as a church always deal with conflict in the open, in the light of day. The “fruit” of His ministry is His defense, as it is ours. A lot of folks don’t like the light and will quickly scurry away at the suggestion of a public discussion.

When these folks didn't like the answer Jesus gave, *their* answer in response was violence. Such is the classic response to truth by those who do not want the truth: *they lash out in attack mode*. Jesus, however, just stands by the truth. If He had been lying, then bring it on. But notice, no one is much interested in that. They wanted rather to **silence** the truth, not debate it! They attempted to use force, violence, lies, and religious pressure to do so.

So it all plays out just as Jesus had warned Peter that it would. But Peter either hadn't believed it, or again, *out of his pride*, he ignored its reality. Can you imagine that moment? That moment when the rooster crowed and he realized what he had done? Some of you know, for some of you have been to that place. The anguish of that moment must have been so overwhelming! Suddenly Peter must have realized that *he had become a Judas!* He was "that guy" that they all had talked about... "that guy" that Jesus had always warned about. The one who took the road "most traveled" ...a position that so many have filled over the ages.

There had been two "capital crimes" of sin that night. One was betrayal, and the other was denial. One in Judas, the other in Peter. One would prove he ultimately was *not* a child of God, the other would prove that despite his failure, **he was**. One would die in eternal humiliation, the other would weep in repentance.

It seemed that just beyond these eternal issues playing out *inside* before the high priest, was another scene...a smaller stage, and a far more personal event that was going on just outside for two men, Judas and Peter. Two men who stood at the crossroads of their eternal lives. Both would now manifest their true spiritual standing. It takes a while, but we all get to that moment. It's dramatic, it's incredibly pressured, and the outcome changes everything forever.

For Peter, the rooster crowed to signal his guilt. But what Peter *didn't* know at that moment was the rooster also crowed to express the fact that Peter's night had come to an end, and it was a new day. Following His resurrection, Jesus would seek out Peter individually and specifically to express his love and care for him. Then He would deal with Peter on that lake shore in chapter 21 and would commission him back into ministry. And finally...on the Day of Pentecost, it would be Peter who would stand up and preach the Word, and three thousand were saved. It would be Peter who Acts 4:5-22 who would stand before the very men who had condemned and crucified Jesus and would *lean in* unflinchingly and without fear boldly declare to them the gospel! What happened in those days in between? How did he make it out?

Jesus would ask Peter that day at that lake shore picnic if he "loved Him." There was no scolding, or promises of "never doing such a thing again." It all came down to that one single question and its truthful subsequent answer: "*Peter, do you love me?*" The answer to that was the fork in the road. It was the question of his life. The answer would decide...even with all the shortcomings and slip-ups, whether he would be Judas or whether he would be Peter.

We too are being asked...maybe at just such a point of personal failure and crisis, "*do you love me?*" Do you? For this is the end of it all for all of us. Do we truly love Him? More than anything and anyone? Then "Peter"...*feed my sheep*. Let's go do it. Get up Peter...*let's go change the world...*