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As we have moved through Mark's gospel we have been spending some time in the company of Simon Peter. We have moved from seeing how on their first meeting, when Christ's eyes met Peter's there was total knowledge on Christ's part of Peter. We spent some time looking at how Christ tested Peter's faith, and how when Peter took his eyes of Christ he began to sink and his faith weakened. Christ's eyes, his gaze, his look play such an important part in the life of this Galilean fisherman. He is a man who wants to do what Christ would have him do and yet so often his human nature takes over and he replaces his faith in Christ for a human excuse, a human prop - just as we I'm sure may well have done. I am sure I have said this before but in Peter I can see so much of myself and here in tonight's text it is never truer. For tonight we will be looking at the account from the perspective of all the gospel writers.

Prior to our text we can read of the high emotions in the Garden of Gethsemane when Judas betrays his Lord with a kiss. A sad moment indeed for Jesus but also for Judas and the other disciples. It appeared to be the end. Peter was not prepared to stand by and see all that he believed in, taken away and crucified, he had to do something. Luke, for his own reason, keeps the name of the disciple who cut off the servant of the high priests ear, an anonymous name, yet John's account clearly states:

"Then Simon Peter who had a sword, drew it and struck the high Priest's servant, cutting off his right ear".

He wanted to do something, for this was his Lord they had come to take away. The passion this man had, was still as strong and fiery as it had been as a fisherman on the sea of Galilee. However, John's next line is, Jesus commanded Peter:

"Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Try if you can to place yourself in Peter's shoes. Think of how you must have felt as you wanted to lash out to protect your Lord, and then consider Peter's feelings as Christ commands - not asks or tells - but actually commands him to put his sword away ... Peter must have felt confused and bewildered initially but I'm convinced that this feeling was rapidly over taken by a feeling of shame that Christ had to rebuke him in such a way. He really wanted to help, he only wanted to at least put up some form of resistance to this threat. When all the others had fled for fear of their own life, Peter held fast and in one last ditch effort he struck out - only to be rebuked by Christ. At that moment in time, a darkness must have fallen over Peter's heart squeezing every ounce of joy from his breast as he realised that he was no longer in control of the situation, he was left standing in a dark and lonesome garden as torch lights led his saviour of towards certain death. What should he do now, run off to find the other disciples, sit down for a while and brood over how the good times with Christ had been good - while they lasted? Perhaps he should go and see if he could find his long abandoned nets and get them ready for a nights fishing - after all that's all he was really good at.

But then Peter surprises us, for we read in verse 54:

"Peter followed him at a distance."

Jesus, we can discover endured six different trials before he was actually condemned to be crucified. Three before the Jews and we thought about one of those this morning, and then three before the Roman authorities. First, he was taken to Annas, the former high priest, who we are led to believe was an influential man in the nation and retained his former title. He in turn sent Jesus to Caiaphas his son-in-law who Matthew tells us was the official high priest. Finally at daybreak, he was tried before the Sanhedrin and found guilty. The Jews, as we know, did not have the right of capital punishment so they had to take him to the Roman authorities to have him crucified. This was quite a long process too. They first of all brought him to Pilate who tried to avoid a decision by sending him to Herod, who in turn sent him back to Pilate. When Pilate realised that there was no way for him to avoid making a decision he gave the Sanhedrin what they asked for and condemned Jesus to die on a Roman cross.

It was during the second Jewish trial, the one before Caiaphas that our friend Peter in the Courtyard, denied his Lord three times ... But how did it happen? To begin with Peter did not take the Lord's warnings seriously, verse 30 of this same chapter Christ tells Peter that he would deny him 3 times before the cock crowed twice that day:

³⁰"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

Peter must have felt that this was simply a figure of speech and perhaps ignored the warning. So often it's the same in our own lives. We read the Bible and note its warnings about this life and the life to come and yet how seriously do we take these warnings? As we shall see in a few moments, the realisation of what Christ had actually said came home to him with force, so much so that it reduced him to tears, like no man, I am convinced, has ever wept. My friends, what Christ says is true, what the Bible teaches is fact. Pay attention to the warnings in case you too like Peter realise all too late how true these warnings really are. Yes, Peter didn't take the Lords warnings as seriously as he might have done and secondly he did not "watch and pray" as Jesus had instructed him to do so, while in the garden. For all his courage and zeal, the Apostle Peter was totally unprepared for Satan's clever attacks. As we have mentioned, Jesus was led out from the garden and Peter followed at a distance. This in many ways was the next step in his defeat. In spite of all the sermons that had been delivered on this text, criticising him for walking at a distance, in fact Peter was not meant to follow at all. The sheep were supposed to scatter and meet Jesus later in Galilee as we can read in Matthew 26 V 31:

"Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will fall away on account of me for it is written," and then Christ quoted from Zechariah, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

In fact when he was arrested, Jesus said to the guards in John's gospel:

"Let these disciples go their way."

A clear signal that they were not to follow him. Peter and John both followed the mob and gained entrance into the courtyard of Caiaphas house.

It was a cold night even though we can read of Christ sweating while praying in the garden – I was cold enough to gather around a fire. Peter first stood by the fire and then we can read of him sitting down with the servants and officers. As Peter sat in enemy territory, he set himself up to be an easy target. Let's just take a brief look at the three occasions when Peter denied his Lord. First it was one of the high Priests servant girls who challenged Peter.

⁶⁶While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. ⁶⁸But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway. ⁶⁹When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." ⁷⁰Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." ⁷¹He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." ⁷²Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times."

Luke tells us that at that moment Jesus, being led away to the next trial, turned and looked at Peter; ... his look broke the heart of this rough tough fisherman ...

I know I have read this before but Peter Marshall in his book, "The first Easter," describes it in this powerful way: 'Like a wave there swept over him the realisation of what he had done. All of a sudden he remembered what Jesus had said and with tears streaming down his face, he turned away from the fire, through a mist of tears he saw ahead of him the stairway that led to Pilates palace ... And by a terrible providence, it was just at that moment that Christ was being led up the stairs to appear before Pilate. The Lord had heard! The Lord had heard every hot searing word ... the Lord had heard the blistering denial ... the foul, fisherman's oaths ... He - he had heard it all. Christ paused on the stair, and looked down over the rail - looked right into the very soul of Peter. The eyes of the two met ... at that awful moment. Through his tears, all else was a blur to Peter. But that one face shone through the tears ... that lovely face ... that terrible face ... those eyes - sad, reproachful, tender ... as if they understood and forgave. Ah how well he knew him, and how much he loved him We will never know what passed between them'

Peter slipped out and wept bitterly. It was surely to Peter's credit that all the Lord had to do was to look at him to bring him to the place of repentance. For one cock to crow at the right time, while the other birds in the area remained silent was indeed a miracle. But the crowing of the cock was much more than a miracle that fulfilled our Lord's words; it was also a special message to Peter, a message which I believe eventually helped to restore him to fellowship again. That being the case, I just want to spend a few moments before we close, examining together, believe it or not the encouragement's that the crowing of the cock gave to Peter.

Firstly, God's Sovereign power to Control

It gave him the assurance of the fact that Christ was still in control. We thought about this earlier this morning how Jesus before the Sanhedrin seemed almost like a broken man with no control and no power and yet nothing was further from the truth. Even though he was a Roman prisoner, bound and seemingly helpless before his captors. Peter could recall witnessing his Lord's authority over the fish, the winds, and the waves, even or

disease and death. No matter how dark the hour was for Peter, Jesus was still in control! What about you? Do you still believe that God is in Control? Nowadays it is somewhat easier to believe since we are living in a time of relative peace but during the troubles, with people dying on our streets and roads week in, week out, at the hand of terrorists, back then did you still believe God is in control? Perhaps your world is falling apart at this moment in time and you are questioning God's loving control over your life ... It's hard, isn't it?

I'll never forget the Poppy day massacre in Enniskillen as long as I live, for one reason alone and that is that it drove me to tears for our country, real tears, perhaps something like those of Peter's. Yet in my tears a powerful realisation came to me that through the carnage and destruction, through the hopelessness and despair ... God was still in control, not necessarily in the way I wanted to see Him in control, but still in control and my tears turned to tears of submission, tears of surrender and there and then I realised that we have a God who has not forgotten us, a God who promised that he would never leave us nor forsake us. I am quite convinced that as Peter's remorse led him to weep, from this he was to be shown that what Christ had predicted had come true and therefore even though all was lost in human terms - Christ's control was as strong as ever.

Secondly, the crowing of the cock assured Peter not just of Christ's control but also God's Sovereign Power to forgive.

Peter as we have stated already, had not been paying close attention to the word of God. He had argued with it, disobeyed it, and even run ahead of it, but now as we read in Mark 14:72 - he remembered the word of the Lord and this brought him hope. Why? Because with the word of warning there was also a word of restoration. Peter would become a strong man free from the grip of sin and a strength to his brothers and sisters in Christ – a strength even to us tonight! Can we see ourselves in Peter?

Can we see the times when God's word has spoken clearly to us and called us to do something for him? Perhaps we have heard his word calling us to a new life in Christ, a life from sin set free, a life in which we have the assurance of sins forgiven, yet we have not paid attention to it. God's word to us is not like an article in a newspaper or magazine which we notice and say – I will maybe get around to reading that later. None of us like to be put on hold when on the phone - how do you think God feels if we constantly keep putting him off, saying "later Lord, there are things I want to do before listening to you." In the same way as Christ forewarned Peter of his denials so, today he warns us to get our houses in order, to get our lives in order, for the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

So what can we do about it? Well as we have seen, with the cock's crow there came evidence of God's Sovereign power to Control and to forgive but also there came evidence of God's Sovereign power to give us an eternal future. The miracle of the cock told Peter that a new day was dawning, for after all, that is what a rooster's call means each day. It was not to be a new day for Judas, or for the enemies of the Lord, but it was to be a new day for Peter as he wept bitterly and repented. In Psalm 51:17:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

On resurrection morning, the angel sent a special message to encourage Peter, and the Lord himself appeared to Peter that day and restored him to fellowship. Each one of us will at one time or another, fail the Lord and then hear, (In one way or another) "the

crowing of the cock". Satan will try to tell us that we are finished, that our future has been destroyed, but my friends this evening, that is not God's message to us. It was certainly not the end for Peter! His restoration was so complete.

Peter did not have 1 John 1:9 to read; but he did experience it in his heart.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Let us pray!