

A Man Like Me 5-21-06

Matthew 26:69-75 (NIV)

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. ⁷¹ Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" ⁷³ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." ⁷⁴ Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Someone contemplating the frequent failings of Jewish people in the Old Testament once wrote this little ditty, "Tis odd of God, To choose the Jew. He chose, Which shows, God knew, His Jew." God, who sees the past and the future in the present, picked a people that would perfectly illustrate the need for a Redeemer. (1 Corinthians 10:11) It can be a very frustrating experience to read of the failings of the Children of Israel in the wilderness, or the failings of the kings of Israel. Just when hopes rise and there is a moment of obedience, along comes a string of tragic failures and the consequences. Why did God pick people that would be so consistently unteachable? (Isaiah 65:12) When it comes to spiritual maturity, is there any other kind? (1 Peter 1:24) If it were Wayside Chapel in the Wilderness, would it have been any different? We would like to think so, but when we examine our own wilderness wanderings, we have to conclude it would have been very similar.

Jesus chose Peter for a reason. You have to love him. He is the energetic guy that is always out front in everything. He is a born leader. He always has an opinion. He is always ready with an answer. He is inspired at times, and sometimes dead wrong. He tried to convince Jesus that He should not go to the cross. (Matthew 16:22) He wanted to build little shelters for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. (Luke 9:33)

Preachers often make fun of Peter, but none of us ever walked on water. (Matthew 14:28-29) I have heard it said that he only took his foot out of his mouth to stick the other one in. However, in every list of the disciples, Peter is first and Judas is last. We have some awe inspiring moments, like when after the miraculous catch, he asked Jesus to go away because Peter knew himself to be a sinful man (Luke 5:8), or when he declared that Jesus was the Messiah (Mark 8:29), or his sermon in Acts 2 when 3000 are saved (Acts 2:41). He was the first to have the revelation that God meant for the message to go to the Gentiles and convinced the church of it (Acts 11:17-18).

Impetuous and bold, he is the one who asked Jesus the most questions and who volunteered the most answers. Peter was a learner, because he was in the middle of every situation. He was not willing to sit back and watch the action; he had to be in it.

Commented [notes1]: 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. 1 Corinthians 10:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 12 I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me." Isaiah 65:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 1 Peter 1:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Matthew 16:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) Luke 9:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. Matthew 14:28-29 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Luke 5:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Mark 8:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. Acts 2:41 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" 18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." Acts 11:17-18 (NIV)

Only a few hours earlier, Jesus had warned Peter that Satan desired to sift him like wheat. (Luke 22:31) They went to the Garden of Gethsemane for the night. Peter slept while his Master prayed. I do not doubt that some of those prayers were for Peter. The armed mob appeared, led by Judas. Peter, faithful to his misguided promise, swung his sword. It may have hit dead center on the servant of the high priest's helmet and slid down the side, severing his ear and landing on the shoulder armor.

Commented [notes11]: 31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. Luke 22:31 (NIV)

Instead of a commendation for being the only one willing to defend Jesus, he was rebuked. (John 18:11) Don't you wonder if that was a confusing moment for Peter? He was fearless enough to do what no one else would, facing insurmountable odds. He thought the battle was with the mob, and he was ready to take them all on. He had guts. He had faith. Nevertheless, He did not understand what was happening. Jesus' healing of the wounded servant's ear must have been a blow to Peter's self-confidence. (Luke 22:51)

Commented [notes12]: 11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" John 18:11 (NIV)

Confused and disheartened, he watched as they bound Jesus and led Him away. He and John followed the glow of the torches ahead of them through the dead of night to Caiaphas' home. They knew what went on there. John had friends in the inner workings of the Jewish legal system. (John 18:15-16) They knew a night trial meant sinister intentions were orchestrating something quite serious. They knew of the interrogation chamber under the home and the holding pit for those who were deemed dangerous to the Sanhedrin.

Commented [notes13]: 51 But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. Luke 22:51 (NIV)

John convinced the servant girl at the gate to let Peter in with him. We do not know where John went, perhaps right into the interrogation area. Peter sat about 40 feet away in the courtyard. I have been in Israel in springtime. The nights are crisp, enough for a jacket. Peter went to warm himself by the fire. Temple guards sat around him. It was precarious place to be. I imagine his heart was pounding in his chest. He was in fear of being recognized and dragged into that interrogation chamber, chained up and questioned like others he had heard of.

Commented [notes14]: 15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, 16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in. John 18:15-16 (NIV)

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. The thing he feared most happened. What would this bold and powerful man do? He had already been told to put his sword away. That was not an option. Was he just supposed to tell the truth in faith that God would take care of him? Just surrender? That is not in his nature...at least not yet.

Heart pounding in his chest, he looked at the soldiers and then *he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.* The words were out. What else was he supposed to do? It was fight, deny..., or surrender. In addition, what thoughts played on his heart and mind once the words were out? What justifications did his mind come up with?

John tells us that it was at this point that Jesus was brought in bound after Annas' interrogation. Now it is Caiaphas' chance to try to break Jesus. Jesus may have been chained in that interrogation room, arms stretched up forming a V. Peter must have tried to listen to the soldiers, feigning disinterest in what was going on during the interrogation, but his real focus was on Jesus, his friend and master for the past

three years. What was going to happen? Was Jesus going to call the 12 legions of angels now? (Matthew 26:53) Would He reveal His glory as He did on the mountain? (Matthew 17:2)

Commented [notes15]: 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?
Matthew 26:53 (NIV)

Nervous about the presence of the soldiers and the accusation, he got up and went to the gate. Maybe the servant girl would not see him there. It was darker over there away from the fire. ⁷¹ *Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth."* What is going on? Wherever he turns, someone is pointing him out to others. He had already chosen his course of action. Denial seemed like the best option. After all, it was so that he could stay near Jesus. Wasn't it?

Commented [notes16]: 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.
Matthew 17:2 (NIV)

He took a more serious step. ⁷² *He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"* This time he made a vow before God that he did not know who Jesus was. A lie never stands alone. It needs bigger and bigger ones to prop the first one up. Once we choose that path, it only gets increasingly worse.

What is happening? Why doesn't God help Peter out, make him invisible or unrecognizable or something? Instead it seems like God has a spotlight on him. Sovereign God is challenging Peter to commit his life to Jesus and place his faith in God. He is giving Peter a glimpse of reality. "You think you love Him? You think you will stand when all others flee?" And do you think when the gun is pointed at your head you will declare that He alone is God? What did Peter truly believe deep within his heart? Do we really believe?

I am not so sure Peter realized how much he needed a Savior. I wonder if sometimes we are not so sure that we need a Savior. We think we have our convictions straight and our will is set in stone. We think that we can do it even if we have to do it all alone. Then God allows a situation that reveals to us where we really are. We begin to justify and explain ourselves. The faithfulness of God will not leave us in our delusions. He will use our own words to reveal to us that we are not nearly as strong as we once thought. With that revelation comes a taste of humility and a great recognition of our need for a Savior.

Thinking that he is likely to look less incriminating, Peter moved back to the fire near the guards. Everyone was standing around the fire. They could hear the proceedings were winding down. The victim was being struck and mocked. ⁷³ *After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away."* Luke tells us it was an hour later. It is now around 3 A.M. Romans call this hour *gallicantu*, or cockcrow. Peter had tried to carry on a conversation to try to disguise his mounting fears, but his accent gave him away. What was this? It is as if God is trying to expose him. They just will not give it up.

⁷⁴ *Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.* Peter swore to God under threat of God's curse that he did not know Jesus, and the rooster crowed. Trying desperately to follow Jesus when all others fled, trying to be the one who would not fail Him, he came to this point of invoking the wrath of God upon himself. And the rooster

crowed. The rooster crowed, "Now do you believe me?" The rooster crowed, "Do you still trust in your own strength?" The rooster crowed, "You failed!"

Luke 22:61a *The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. If the rooster crow did not say it loud enough, Jesus' sad eyes certainly conveyed the whole story. In those eyes we can read, "Now do you understand why I must go to the cross?" Every time I think I am becoming mature in Christ and setting myself apart for Him alone, the Lord brings circumstances together to surround and trap me. I see who I really am, and He looks me in the eyes. I hear Jesus say the same thing to me, "Now do you understand why I had to go to the cross?" I weep with Peter. God brings us into deep waters, not to drown us but to cleanse us. He cleanses us from trust in our own strength and from confidence in the flesh. He cleanses us from pride in who we are and what we think we have accomplished. "Thank you Lord for your mercy and grace."*

⁷⁵ *Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.* If you have never been there brother or sister, you do not yet know who you are and have not yet had the revelation of who He is.

"I am weak but Thou art strong,
Jesus keep me from all wrong,
I'll be satisfied as long,
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee."

Why did Jesus choose Peter? Because he is so exemplifies human behavior. His ups and downs, his victories and defeats so mirror our own. In this sad story of Peter's failure, we see ourselves, but we also see the tenacity of God. God loves us too much to leave us where we are. He will corner us with circumstances until our weakness comes to the surface. He will let some kind of rooster crow to wake us up to where we are. Then He will look us straight in the eyes, and we will begin to understand.

Peter later called it being refined by fire. Listen to his words written decades after this painful event. ⁶ *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.* ⁷ *These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* 1Peter 1:6-7 (NIV)

Why did he begin that passage, *"In this you greatly rejoice..."*? Isn't he weeping in our text? We rejoice because of what those tears produce, a faith that is genuine. It results in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Isn't that what you are really after? It is what God is after. And thank Him that He will not rest until we are conformed to His likeness. (Romans 8:29) What patience! What love!

For each of these three denials, Jesus will give Peter a chance to declare his love for Him. (John 21:15-17) And He will do the same for you. When Jesus warned Peter about the sifting of Satan, do you remember the promise? Jesus told Peter that He

Commented [notes17]: 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."
16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."
17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. John 21:15-17 (NIV)

would pray for him. (Luke 22:32a) He also implied a time of restoration and ministry. "And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:32b (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 32a But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. Luke 22:32a (NIV)

Can you see the incredible goodness of God? Jesus was telling Peter that he would deny Him, but not to worry because, "I will pray for you." While Jesus was silent during the trial, I think He was praying for Peter. It is an incredible thought. While Peter was being faithless to Jesus, Jesus was being faithful to him. (2 Timothy 2:13) When you are in that trial that God has graciously allowed in your life, know that Jesus is praying for you. When you are denying Him, He is praying for you. He lives to intercede for us. (Hebrews 7:25) Then wonder of wonders, He takes failures like you and me and invites us to represent Him. Peter was to go from failure to leader, betrayer to trusted shepherd of the apostles. Grace upon grace upon grace! Is there one of us here this morning that deserves to represent such a gracious, loving, and holy God? But He blesses us with opportunities to represent Him. That is amazing grace!

Commented [notes20]: 13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. 2 Timothy 2:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Hebrews 7:25 (NIV)

I have been thinking about that Passover song, *Dayanu!* It would have been enough. If He just gave us the Word, it would have been enough. If He just gave us the example of His life, it would have been enough. He could have stopped with that and we would have had more than we could ever deserve. But He does not stop there. If He just died for us, it would have been enough. Don't you think so? If He just interceded for us, it would have been enough. If He just gave us the Holy Spirit, it would have been enough. If He just worked in our life each day to purify us, it would have been enough. He just never seems to stop pouring out His grace. He lets us minister His love to others, He lives in us, and He is preparing a place for us. Holy, holy, holy! I am overwhelmed with the love of God day after day after day, and I have not seen but a glimpse. (1 Kings 10:7)

Commented [notes22]: 7 But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. 1 Kings 10:7 (NIV)

God's gracious choice of Peter teaches us all that we are not hopeless. It teaches us that no matter how far we have fallen, His grace is enough. He still desires to bless us with a relationship with Himself. To whom much is forgiven, the same loves much. He allows us to sink so low so that we can understand how great His grace and mercy is.

When the revelation of His love becomes clear, no one needs to tell you how you should respond. You know! You cannot help but worship. You just long to surrender every corner of your heart. You just want to be in His presence and love Him even more. Amen? That is the invitation. He is speaking to your heart this morning and you know how you should respond.