

Can Your Faith Stand the Test?

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We can have such good intentions and a powerful verbal commitment to the Lord, but how do we do when these are put to the test? As long as everything goes well and smoothly, we flow in our convictions and commitment, but what if...? What if something unexpected happens that acutely challenges our faith and commitment? Something like the Coronavirus lockdown? Even though some countries are slowly opening up, we have all lived the last few months in a situation beyond our control, which has challenged us in every way imaginable.

How have you been holding up? Is your faith intact? Has it grown stronger?

Peter's Faith Test

Reading through the four gospel accounts from the last hours before Jesus' arrest until the end of each account, what struck me was what is recorded about Peter. He was so full of good intentions, so full of faith. He had such a strong verbal commitment to stand with Jesus: 'Lord, I won't fail you, I will go to jail for you, yes, I will even die for you!' and 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.' What a wonderful example he is to all of us! What an honourable commitment to following his Lord and Saviour.

The Cracks

However, Jesus looked into his heart and saw serious cracks: *'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows two times, Peter, you will have denied even knowing me, three times!'* But Peter declared, *'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'* Jesus, you can count on me! I am that solid rock on which you are going to build your church. But Jesus counters him with: *'Satan wants to sift you like wheat, but I prayed for you that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'* (Luke 22:31,32)

The Pride

How often are we just like Peter? When others ask us about our commitment to Jesus, our faith in Him and in His word, our obedience to His commands and our love for Him and for all that He loves, we are quick to say: 'Others may fail Jesus, but I never will!' Peter had such high expectations of

Jesus and how he himself would benefit from Him, but all of that came to an abrupt halt when Jesus was brutally arrested...

The Test

Just a few hours after Jesus' arrest, Peter is put to the test by a harmless servant girl: *'You were with this man! You are one of his followers!'* and again *'...this fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth!'* and again *'Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away!'* (Matthew 26)

Peter counters each challenge with a strong denial: *'I don't know what you are talking about!'* He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, *'I don't know this man you're talking about.'* (Matthew 26:74)

Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: *'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.'* (Matthew 26:34)

The Revelation

'The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter'. That action is pierced right through Peter's armour of self-preservation. Just hold on to that for a moment and imagine what Peter saw in Jesus' eyes. What did that look communicate to Peter? And how did Peter return that gaze? Jesus wasn't condemning Peter, it wasn't an 'I told you so' look. It wasn't a 'You poor failure, poor excuse of a disciple' kind of a look. It was a look filled with sorrow and pain, filled with an excruciating love and compassion for a sinner so full of self-confidence and false commitment.

Peter was the exact embodiment of why Jesus was going the way of the cross. Peter was no different from those who betrayed Jesus. Those who arrested Him, falsely accused Him, tortured, mocked and nailed Him to a cross. All denied who Jesus was, all knew He was innocent and without sin. But Peter was His closest friend, Peter knew better, Peter knew Jesus! And yet...

How Will We Respond?

How will you respond when you are put to the test? When your faith is questioned or challenged by unforeseen circumstances beyond your control? 'I'll be okay', you may say, perhaps too quickly. But what if you know that your confession may result in your arrest, torture, imprisonment and even death? What if your confession could result in the arrest and murder of your loved ones? What will you answer then? Will you also deny knowing Him?

In Secret

There are forces at work today which have a clear anti-Christ, anti-Christian and anti-church agenda. Though conspiracy theories abound, governments around the world are united to stop Christians from meeting and worshipping together. How have you responded? Have you stopped spending time with Jesus, praying, reading your Bible and worshipping in the privacy of your home? If you have, you may not have openly denied knowing the Lord, like Peter, but in your heart, you surely have.

In Public

During this trying season, how have you and I responded? Our faith and our commitment to the

Lord have been severely put to the test. In our response to the Covid-crisis have you, like Peter, exclaimed: 'I don't know what you are talking about, I don't know the man'?

Jesus said to His followers that if they would deny Him before men, that He would deny them before His Father. This is a stark warning. But thankfully not the end of this story!

Our Redemption

Amid Jesus' suffering, knowing what the people would do to him, Jesus looked at Peter. And right at that moment, when he heard the rooster's call, he remembered and went outside and wept bitterly. He broke down and wept. The gaze of his beloved Lord had pierced him deeply. How could he have failed so miserably, how could he have fallen so low?

The kindness and love of Jesus for his errant disciple and friend had already exclaimed: *'And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'*

Turn Back

Yes, you too may have fallen, your faith may also have faltered during this trying season. You too may in your heart and your actions have denied knowing Jesus... we too are just like Peter! We should not judge him. Instead we must allow the Lord to use this terrible failure in Peter's commitment to his beloved Lord as a tool in the Lord's hand to pierce through our armour of self-preservation. David prayed, *'Lord test me and try me, show me if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting'* (Psalm 139:23-24). That should be our prayer as well.

Jesus did not say to Peter, *'if you turn back'*. No, He stated: *'Peter, when you have repented (turned back), then you will be a true example to your brothers, then you will be able to strengthen them!'* Jesus had not given up on Peter, nor has He given up on you and me!

Stronger Than Ever

What Peter so boldly proclaimed, that he would be willing to go to jail and even die for his Lord, surely became reality. He was indeed arrested several times, imprisoned, sentenced and finally crucified for his uncompromising faith and commitment to Jesus.

It is beautiful to read in John 21 how Jesus reinstated Peter, forgave his sins and restored his relationship with Himself. *"Peter, do you really love me?"* That is what we need to guard above all else: our love for our Lord and Saviour! If we really love Him, we will never deny Him!

The Coronavirus crisis and the subsequent reaction of governments around the world did not take God by surprise. Let's make sure that we continue to love and worship our Lord and love all that He loves. If you have faltered in your faith and commitment to Jesus, perhaps given in to fear, anxiety or complacency and allowed your heart to grow cold, this is when you need to hear the Lord say to you: *"And when you have turned back [repented], strengthen your fellow believers."*