



THEN GO took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. 57 And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. 58 And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. 59 And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. 60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. 61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:54-62)

The rural folk of southern Alabama (where I live presently) would describe the Apostle Peter as a "Good ole Boy!" It would be one of the highest terms of praise that could be given by them; and, surely, Peter lived up to that high praise. He was a brawny fellow who stood strongly on principle, and loved to fish. Those three things describe perfectly a Good Ole Boy! Peter's hands were rough and calloused from drawing in nets and handling the ship's rudder. He was a proud fellow, too, as all good ole boys are. Peter was a courageous man, and his courage was reinforced by his love and admiration of Jesus as his Lord. There was little doubt in Peter's mind that, when the chips were down, he would stand tall and die if necessary for Christ.

Because of his livelihood of living by the sea, Peter was a typically practical man. He saw all things in sharp contrasts of black and white. "Best not to go fishing when the clouds of the morning were red and threatening. Morning was never a good time since the fish would detect the fisherman's net. All things to Peter were either up or down; yes, or no; friend or foe!" Peter also placed a high premium on the characteristic that best describes a true and strong man – LOYALTY. Being strong and robust, Peter never doubted his own loyalty to his friends and, especially, to His Lord Jesus Christ! He

would stand and fight to the death any who attempted to harm his Master – or so Peter believed.

There was One found in Peter's company these past three years who knew Peter far better than Peter knew Peter – his Friend, Teacher, Master, and Lord. The very night of His betrayal, Jesus tenderly informed His disciples of those events that were about to transpire. *"31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. 32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. 33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. 34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples."* (Matt 26:31-35)

Peter had a higher estimate of himself, just as we all do, than was merited. But Jesus foresees all things, and He looks into the deep, hidden chambers of a man's heart reads there his weaknesses that go unnoticed by the man himself. Jesus says that not only Peter, but all, will be fearful and unnerved by the events of the night. He tells the disciples this just before retiring to the Garden of Prayer at Gethsemane. It is true that all were 'offended' by their personal association with Jesus that night, but the one who most boldly proclaimed his loyalty is the only one of the twelve who actually denied Jesus publicly – not only once, but three times ere the rooster crowed. But they all fled away at the arrest of Jesus in the Garden! Beware of false pride, friends. God knows the hearts of each of us. He loves us and makes allowances for our weaknesses. Please note the tender invitation of Jesus to those whom He knows will desert Him this night: *"But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee."* Jesus is telling these men of weakened courage: *"Though you will deny me by your actions tonight, nevertheless, I shall meet you by the refreshing waters of Galilee after My resurrection."* (paraphrase)

It would seem that Peter, being a practical fellow, would have known better than to press his loyalty to Christ after being told by Christ that he would deny Him thrice before the cock crew. But Peter's pride was greater, even, than his sense of logic and practicality. Many wars have been fought as a result of such weakness of man. I will not embarrass the reader by asking if he has not made the same blunder – more than once! Not only Peter, but all of the disciples affirmed that they would never deny Christ and would die with Him. None remained with Christ at His hour of crisis – they ALL fled!

I like Peter very much. He is the kind of fellow I would trust at my back in combat; but Peter was not consistent in his courage. He may have demonstrated much courage in walking on the stormy sea – would you have done? The seas were unstable; the gale winds were blasting at the sails; the turbid waters were dark and foreboding – yet Peter garnered the courage to get out of the ark of safety and venture to walk upon those waters at the invitation of his Lord. He was quite successful until he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the teeming waters of the sea. Courage comes from God, and Peter lost courage when his focus was taken off the One who bade him walk upon the sea. There are many courageous martyrs who are dying today because they refuse to take their eyes off Jesus by denying Him when threatened by merciless pagans.

Peter was truly a man of courage if there ever was one. But he could not keep prayerful watch with the Lord for only three hours on the night of His betrayal. He, James and John were weary of their travels and fell asleep – despite the news Jesus had given them regarding His soon Passion. Now the time is at hand, and Jesus finds them sleeping still: *"45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and*

take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.” (Matt 26:45-46)

Do we often sleep when we should be watching and praying. Momentous events are happening in the world as I write this devotion – men, women and children are literally dying for Christ. Young Christian girls are being sold into sexual slavery while we fiddle our time away with mundane concerns. Each of us, too, is responsible for what our own governments does, or does not do, to alleviate the dire circumstances of those Christians on the sands and dunes of the Levant. We are the Caesars of our own land because it is we who elect either moral, or immoral, leadership. We are little men and women much like Peter.

You will note that Peter, while in the company of Jesus, still had great courage on that same night of his denial of Christ: *4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? 5 They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. 6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. 7 Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. 8 Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: 9 That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. 10 Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus. 11 Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? (John 18:4-11)* There were, in the Garden at Gethsemane, a host of soldiers; yet, Peter drew a sword and was prepared to do battle, cutting off the ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant. It was Jesus who had counseled the disciples to sell their shirts and buy a sword just before this time; however, the sword was intended for their personal protection and not His. God does approve of self-defense.

As Jesus was led away, all of the disciples abandoned Him. They fled to the shadows and shrubs of the Garden. *“50 And they all forsook him, and fled.” (Mark 14:49-50)* *“And Peter followed afar off.” (Luke 22:54)*

Do we not lack courage when we follow Jesus from afar off? We need to walk WITH Him – not follow at a distance. The distance between Jesus and Peter lent to Peter’s failure of courage. He had the courage to draw a sword against a host while WITH Jesus, but when separated, his courage failed – instead of a “Good Ole Boy,” Peter became a ‘fraidy cat’ - all southern-born will know what a fraidy cat is! We are much more likely to strongly and bravely testify of the truth of Christ if we watch and pray with Him than if we sleep and follow from afar off.

Peter will deeply regret this night, and his soul will be torn for the next three days and nights because of his denial. Let us examine the very moment of Peter’s third denial, but this time from the Gospel of Saint Luke: *“60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. 61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:60-62)* Jesus had already foretold Peter’s denial which Peter vehemently denied. Now Jesus looks Peter in the eyes on that third denial when the rooster crowed. Imagine, if you can, Peter’s great anguish of soul in looking Jesus in the eye at the very moment of his prophesied third denial! He went out and wept bitterly – for three days. But in a surprising manner, Jesus comforts Peter after that denial. You will have to read Saturday’s devotion to find out in what way.