

## **Exegetical Notes, Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75**

### **“Peter’s Denial”**

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## **Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75**

### **Verse 31-32**

*Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”*

- These words were spoken by Jesus on the Mount of Olives immediately following the Last Supper.
- The quotation is from Zechariah 13:7.
- Jesus predicts that every one of the disciples will desert him that very night.
- He also predicts his resurrection and his meeting with the disciples after he has been raised from the dead.

### **Verse 33**

*Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”*

- Peter believed that regardless of what all the other disciples did, he would never desert Jesus. He believed that he would remain faithful no matter what.

### **Verse 34**

*“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”*

- Jesus tells Peter that, before morning, he will deny Jesus three times.
- The Romans divided the night into three watches. The third watch, the one that ended duty just before dawn, was known as the “cock’s crow” watch. Jesus’ reference may have been to this watch or to the ordinary crowing of a rooster. It does not matter. The meaning is the

same. Before morning comes, Jesus said that Peter would deny him three times.

- The number of denials, three, may be significant as three is a number which symbolized completeness. Peter's three denials may be an indication that his denial of Jesus was complete. It is certainly to be compared to Judas' single act of betrayal.

### **Verse 35**

***But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.***

- The phrase, "even IF I have to die with you," implies that even though they heard Jesus' prediction of his own death, they still do not fully accept that this will happen.
- This inability to accept Jesus' words is also demonstrated in Peter's continued assertion that, in his case, it will not be as Jesus has predicted. He still insists that, no matter what, he will not deny/disown Jesus.
- All of the other disciples, except Judas who according to John's Gospel had already left the group, decided that Peter's bold statement required a like confession from them. They all claim that they will remain loyal to Jesus no matter what, despite what Jesus had just said.

### **Verse 69-70**

***Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.***

- Several hours later that very night, after Jesus had been arrested and taken to the Palace of the High Priest, Peter, who was watching the events unfold from the courtyard of the Palace, was confronted by a servant girl who said she knew him as one who had been with Jesus.
- Recognizing the danger of being identified as one of Jesus' followers, Peter quickly denied that he was a follower of Jesus.

### **Verse 71-72**

***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." He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"***

- Notice that Peter moved from the courtyard, where he was at the center of things, to the gateway, where he would be at the edge of the crowd.
- There, a second girl points him out as one who was with Jesus. The word used here for girl is a diminutive as in verse 69. It means a little girl. Given the place of females in the culture, these girls are people of very little importance.
- Notice that in the first instance, the girl spoke only to Peter. However, in this second incident, the girl addresses the crowd. So even though Peter has tried to relocate in order to be less obvious, his position is becoming more vulnerable.
- Notice that Peter's first denial is a simple statement that he does not know Jesus. However, in this second case he swears, uses an oath, to establish that he does not know Jesus. His denial is more intense!

#### **Verse 73-74a**

*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." Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!"*

- After a short time had passed, others in the crowd accused Peter of knowing Jesus because he had a Galilean accent.
- This time the persons who accused him were not little girls so the stakes were higher and more threatening.
- Peter's denial was even more intense than before. He used many curses and utterly denied that he knew Jesus.

#### **Verse 74b-75**

*Immediately a rooster crowed. 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.*

- Jesus' prediction was fulfilled just as he said. Peter denied knowing him three times before morning.
- Peter's reaction was utter sorrow. He wept bitterly over what he had done.

(In John 20, the story is told of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples as they were fishing. In that story Jesus had a very private moment with Peter during which, Jesus three times asked Peter if he loved

him. Just as with his denial, each time Peter answered Jesus' question, his response became more intense. At the end of this encounter Jesus commissioned Peter to go and feed his sheep. Bible scholars see in this three question encounter between Jesus and Peter a response to Peter's three denials of Jesus. Peter demonstrates his remorse over denying Jesus by three times declaring his love for Jesus. The denial prepares the way for Peter's confession, and the truth of the confession is found in his willingness to serve Jesus in the way Jesus chooses. Eventually, Peter was executed because of his desire to follow Christ. His denial became a stepping-stone to loyalty and great service.)

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Peter's Denial*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)