

The Valley of Humiliation

"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."¹

"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."²

How many times have we heard those words? Words of Jesus and Paul. Words of warning. Words that can penetrate our very soul, like a cold winter breeze.

If we listen.

But, like that breeze, we try to insulate ourselves from it. Holding off its piercing effect. Reminding ourselves of all the things we've done right; how devoted we are; how few sins exist in our life; how much we've done for Jesus.

We do this at our peril.

For in our assurance of our faithfulness we are following in the footsteps of Peter. Footsteps that came to rest at a fire outside a trial. Where he would deny His Lord.

"Even if all fall away, I will not,"³ Peter had said.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today -- yes, tonight -- before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."⁴

A few hours later, Peter would cry out, "I don't know this man you're talking about."⁵

How many times have we disowned Jesus? Through our talk. As we fall into sins of the flesh. As we find ourselves consumed by anger, hatred, or lust.

As we walk towards the fire of our humiliation.

True examination seldom takes place before the communion table. If it did communion would be the scene of more tears than funerals.

¹ 1 Cor. 11:24.

² 1 Cor. 11:28.

³ Mark 14:29

⁴ Mark 14:30.

⁵ Mark 14:7.

No, true examination takes place as we hear the cry of the rooster and stare into the face of Jesus. After our sin. After our humiliation. After we have done what we said we would never do.

And, like Peter, we turn and weep. Over our sin. Over our failure. Over our humiliation.

Maybe you've been there. Crying into your pillow, "flooding your bed with tears."⁶

I have.

But to all of us who have walked in the Valley of Humiliation, Peter's story resonates with hope.

First, there is the hope of warning. Peter was warned by Christ. Perhaps, today, Jesus is trying to warn you of a sin that will lead to your downfall.

Perhaps He sent someone to give you His counsel this past week.

Listen to that still, small voice.

"Pray that you fall not into temptation."⁷ Heed the warnings that He has placed in your path. Pray earnestly that you not fall into temptation. Let this be a time for true examination. And repentance.

Second, there is the hope of reconciliation. Peter was received back by Jesus.⁸ Because of Jesus' love. And, because of Peter's repentance. For Peter's tears led to healing.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."⁹

That's why there is a cross. That's why there is this time of communion. And I will go to that cross and lay my sins underneath its branches. Below His bleeding arms. That I may be "justified freely by his grace . . . through faith in his blood."¹⁰

Sometimes God has to operate on our heart. He would prefer to use a gentle word, as He tried to do in warning Peter. As He did with the women caught in adultery and the woman at the

⁶ Ps. 6:6.

⁷ Luke 22:40.

⁸ John 21.

⁹ Rom. 3:23.

¹⁰ Rom. 3:23-25 (*in part*).

well.

But sometimes -- if we won't listen -- He must use the fire of testing and a lonely, painful, walk down the Valley of Humiliation.

It is a road well traveled. By Peter. By David. By Moses and Paul. Jacob and Abraham.

Perhaps you've traveled its byways.

But rest assured, although the road may lead down through a Valley, it leads up to the Celestial City. And those who have traveled along its way appreciate all the more the wonder of Grace. "The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly," said Paul, "Along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."¹¹

Peter never doubted again. Under the power of Spirit, he would proclaim, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins."¹²

He was not preaching from a sermon outline. He was preaching from his life. For he had experienced repentance. He had been forced to look into the face of His Savior. Once as he faced his sin. And again as Jesus asked him to rededicate himself to sharing the gospel.

Fellow travelers of the Valley of Humiliation. Look into the Savior's face. Remember. Examine. Repent.

And then partake of the grace that is offered to you.

(Suggested song: "Beneath the Cross of Jesus.")

¹¹ 1 Tim. 1:14.

¹² Acts 2:38.