

PETER'S DENIAL

APRIL 6th | *READ JOHN 13:37-39, 18:15-18;25-27*

It is widely accepted among people of all cultures that a traitor is to be abhorred. In American history there have been a number of traitors but none so infamous as Benedict Arnold. Arnold began his military career with the Continental Army and soon distinguished himself with the capture of Fort Ticonderoga. Arnold was awarded command of the fort at West Point, NY, now the home of the U.S. Military Academy. But by this time Arnold had become disillusioned and disappointed that he had been passed over for advancement by his superiors. Through secret negotiations he had agreed to give the fort over to the British as well as reveal troop positions of the Continental Army. He defected to the British before his plans were discovered. While with the British, he captured Richmond, Virginia and pillaged the surrounding area. When Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Arnold fled to England to escape prosecution. So dastardly were his deeds that Benjamin Franklin compared him to none other than Judas Iscariot.

When I read of Peter's denial of Jesus, I have a visceral response. It makes me sick to my stomach. I'm simultaneously disappointed in Peter, grieved for Jesus, and fearful of my own response had I been in Peter's place. Peter had been with Jesus, done the miraculous with Jesus, been loved and taught by Jesus, yet in the moment of testing had failed. When the two of them made eye contact (Luke 22:61), I feel the hurt both of them must have experienced. But where I linger most in this story is my own response. I want to believe I would have done better. I want to believe that in that moment my faith and courage would have been strong, and I would have followed Jesus all the way through. Yet deep down, in a place I don't want to go, I know I could have, probably would have, done the same. How could I? Jesus has loved me when I was his enemy. He loved me when I failed again and again as his disciple. He remained faithful when I was faithless. How then could I deny him? Indeed, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

After his betrayal of Jesus, Peter wept bitterly. It crushed his heart to know what he had done to his Lord and Savior. Have you come to grips with your own potential or actual betrayal of Jesus? Have you not spoken up when you should have for fear of being ridiculed? Have you ever acted in an un-Christ-like manner? Has there ever been a time when you have denied Christ in word or deed? Have you grieved over your actions? I'm not sure how Peter would have fared as an apostle had not Christ come to him and forgiven him and restored him. But we do know Jesus did just that! (John 21:15-17) He will do the same for you. Simply come confessing and repenting. You will find the grace of our Lord is indeed deeper and wider than you could have imagined.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your tenderness in the midst of our betrayal. Thank you for forgiving us. Thank you for restoring us. Thank you for equipping us to be your witnesses. Encourage our hearts, steel our will, fit us for heaven, O Lord. Amen

In Christ,

John