

## THE HOUR OF DENIAL

**Luke 22: 56-62** - *"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. and he denied him saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirming, saying, of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou saith. And immediately, while he yet spoke, the cock crew. 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 three times. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."*

The faces and features of animals are, in general, expressionless. We can, however, interpret certain expressions of animals, such as fear, hatred, love, hunger etc. we all know that, when the fangs of a dog or bared, there is danger for us. The look of an animal can speak to us in a limited way.

But a human being can often say things with certain facial expressions that cannot even be put into words. The face can express surprise, intelligence, joy, sadness, disgust, disdain, reproof, shame, hurt feelings, and many other things. We can speak, as it were, with our face. Looks often speak louder than words.

All of us can interpret the looks of another human being. So could the disciple Peter. In the Palace of Caiaphas two people looked at Peter. Their facial expressions spoke volumes. This will become more clear to us when we learn tonight about;

### *The Hour of Denial*

#### **1. A Look Caused the Denial**

Peter was warming himself by the fire at night in the courtyard of the high priest's palace. A certain maid saw Peter as the fire lit up his face. She had a very sharp eye and a keen memory. She looked earnestly at Peter. Suddenly she recognized him as one of Jesus' disciples, whom she had perhaps seen in Jesus' Company. With recognition came a look. What a look of disdain that maid gave Peter! That look spoke volumes: "so you are connected with the pretender and deceiver of people. You fool, you and your religion. We have the upper hand now; soon your cause will vanish from the earth." That look of contempt from this maiden burned into the heart and soul of Peter and was harder for him to bear than to face an army. With recognition and a haughty look when a pitiless tongue. She simply could not contain herself, nor keep Peter's secret. "This man was also with him," she cried out to all who were nearby. She took great pleasure in being training and exposing Peter before for all her people.

The eighth Commandment is explained by Luther as follows: "We should fear and love of God, that we do not deceitfully betray our neighbor." This commandment of God meant little or nothing to the maid. There was no pity for a poor, forlorn disciple whose cause seemed to be collapsing. She was delighted to add to her look of disdain words of defeating contempt, "this man was also with him." In other words, "Look at this object of dejection and fear, did you ever see anything more contemptible? He followed that pretender and deceiver of the people: he was with him: he is just as much to blame as the rest."

Poor Peter! He was dejected, miserable, alone. He was greatly shocked at the turn of events. He had never expected the Messiah to be arrested, neither could he entertain the thought that Jesus would be put to death on a cross. "All ye shall be offended," Jesus had said. Peter had not believe these words because he had not understood them. Peter still stood as he did in Matthew 16:21 - 23. When Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer and die, Peter rebuked Jesus for saying such things. Peter and the other disciples had expected an earthly kingdom from the Messiah. They had been taught that from childhood. Jesus had repeatedly told the disciples of His sufferings and death, if they never fully realized what He was saying. As Peter sat in front of that fire, the Lord's words must have come back to his confused mind.

Peter had been very earnest when he told Jesus, "if I should die with thee, I will not deny thee." This was a wonderful statement on the part of Peter which reveals his great love for his Master. Every true Christian should be willing and ready to repeat it. Peter's trouble was his self trust. "Pride goeth before a fall." What Peter meant was this: "Yes, Lord, others may be cowards and weaklings; others may deny Thee, but not I. I am different; I have a strong, heroic faith that will not falter. I have absolute confidence in myself."

One must admire the man's courage. In the Garden of Gethsemane, against that whole mob of armed people who came out to capture Jesus, Peter drew out his sword and was willing to pay the supreme price for being a disciple of the Lord. He would have fought for Jesus until he was cut down. Jesus made him put away the sword and thereby saved his life. Peter never knew how close he was to death at that moment.

We now come to a surprising turn of events. Peter was sitting before a fire of coals. A maid was earnestly looking at him, and the light of recognition was shining in her eyes. Instinctively Peter shrank into the shadows, but he was too late; she had recognized him. Ironically enough, Peter was in absolutely no danger at all. Suppose he would have admitted being a disciple, what then? The worst that he could suffer would be the content and ridicule of the people around the fire. Yet Peter withered before the maid. Before he could think, he was saying, "Woman, I know him not." In the hour of denial a look caused it all, a look by a maid! Not a sword pointed at his breast, nor horrible tortures facing him, but just a look of disdain caused Peter to renounce his discipleship. What an unexpected turn of events! Peter was really ashamed of Jesus now. There was Jesus bound, and at the mercy of the rulers. This whole idea of Jesus' kingdom did not seem right to Peter's confused mind. "All ye shall be offended because of me this night," said Jesus. Peter was offended, and fell from faith, because of the humiliation of his Master, and because of a scornful look.

The first denial seems to be a simple statement that he is not a disciple. In the second denial he added an oath to the simple statement to make it more convincing. In the third denial he added to the simple statement a solemn wish to be accursed if you are lying. Again the aim was to convince his hearers. Each time it was easier to repeat the sin and to add more sin to it. So, above the clamor and noise of the people and soldiers and crowing cock, you can hear the oaths and curses of Peter denying his Lord.

We should be warned by Peter's downfall. Dear friends, how often do we not hear members of churches say, "I will never give up my church. Others may and do fall away, but not I." Yet in a little while they have lost interest in the Savior and His Word. It all depends upon the attitude you have and how you say a thing. If you say, "I'll always be a Christian and will never fall away from Christ because I have such strong faith," then you are making the same mistake which Peter made. God is not pleased with such thoughts and attitudes. But when we say, "I hope and pray that the Lord will give me His Holy Spirit so that I fall not from faith; I am weak, Oh Lord, and put my trust in Thee alone to keep me and grace," then we are speaking God-pleasing language.

How many times do not our members agree with outsiders, simply because they are ashamed to stand up for the truth, or are afraid to be given a look of pity and scorn! When people give them a look of disdain, they wilt, as Peter did. How many of our people are ashamed of their church when others ridicule them for belonging to a strict church that adheres to the Word of God alone! Do not give Peter a look of contempt and superiority, my friends, if you are no different toward your church and your Lord.

A look can cause a great deal of damage and heartache in the world. A look -- the look of a maid -- brought about Peter's denial. But a look can have a different effect upon a person. Someone else also looked upon Peter as he sat in front of that fire of coals. Let us consider that second look to learn how:

## II. A Look Caused Repentance

"And the Lord turned and looked on Peter." Jesus was led past the fire and past Peter. He had predicted that Peter would deny Him, as we read in Matthew 26:34, "that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me three times." His omniscient eye took in the whole situation and saw exactly what had happened. Christ is the all-knowing God, even in His state of humiliation. What a beautiful truth is here painted before our very eyes!

Jesus was facing an ordeal like of which no human being before or since has ever had to face. Yet Jesus did not say or think, "I have enough troubles of my own without bothering about that faltering and denying disciple." Nor did the Lord think, "I warn him about this very thing. If he will not listen, then let him go the way of Judas." On the contrary, He turned and looked at Peter, and His looks said, "I saw it all, Peter; I know what happened. Remember, I told you." Little wonder that Peter, after the Resurrection, said to Jesus, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Peter learned by personal experience that his Lord knew all things and could read the heart and mind.

The look that Jesus gave Peter was also one of pain. "Peter, you did not consider that you are hurting Me, your Lord and Master, when he denied Me to save your own self. You have almost joined the ranks of My tormentors because you denied Me and were ashamed of Me."

That look of Jesus pricked Peter's conscience and his memory. We can imagine Peter thinking, "Oh, how sure I was of myself, how certain I was that nothing could shake me. How frail and weak I am! How could I deny Him who always showed me only love? What a horrible thing I have done!"

But, above all, Jesus' look was a look of love. There was no anger in His face. Nor does the look express an icy difference, as if to say, "All right, Peter, you want it that way in spite of your warnings; so be it. You do not know Me; you do not want Me; you are ashamed of Me." But not Jesus, He gave Peter the look of love. The same the heart that pleaded for the forgiveness of His enemies; the same heart full of warm love that later accepted the dying thief on the cross; the same loving heart that had pity on His weeping mother and placed her in John's care; the same heart overflowing with love which caused Him to leave His Father's throne and glory in heaven to come into this world, to suffer and die for all men -- that same loving heart now brought to the Savior's face a look so full of love and tenderness that it melted Peter's heart.

"The Lord turned and looked on Peter." That look saved Peter. It spoke of pardon and forgiveness. It saved him from despairing, as Judas did. Perhaps Peter had not seen too much wrong in his denial, but this look of the Lord exposed his sin in all its horror. Peter was now sure than ever that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who was to come into the world. A look brought Peter to the brink of the abyss of hell, and a look suddenly recalled him and saved him.

"And Peter went out and wept bitterly." Tears alone can never wash away our sins. We sing, "Could my tears forever flow, All for sin could not atone." But tears shed in true repentance and sorrow over sin, in the knowledge that the love and compassion of Christ alone washes away all sin -- such tears always find real forgiveness, even forgiveness of a denial. Although Peter's sin must have cut him to the quick every time he thought about it, that look of love from the Savior sustained him and kept him from despair.

Jesus continued to show His love for Peter after the Resurrection. "Go tell the disciples and Peter," were His instructions to the women on Easter morning. It was as though He were saying, "Peter, see, I still love you. I meant that look of love which I gave you any hour of denial." When Peter sank on the water, Jesus gave him a helping hand; when Peter sank by a look of contempt, Jesus gave him a helping look of love. That look of love is still more remarkable when we consider that it took place while Jesus was being tried, marked, spit on, buffeted, condemned, and about to be crucified and to suffer the torments of the damned in hell for the sins of the world. Such love for a fallen sinner is far beyond our comprehension. But if it was Jesus' love for poor sinners which caused Him to come into the world to redeem us, than the love He showed to Peter seems a little more understandable.

Friends, if any has fallen or denied the Lord, there is still hope. Jesus is always ready to take you back. "When Thou see me waver, With a look recall," must ever be our prayer. Through some father or mother or wife or friend Jesus is still giving us a look of love. May the Savior look at us again with love and grace and forgiveness, and made that looks sustain us in the hour of trial and temptation!

Peter, any hour of prayer you slept. You missed one of the holiest hours in all the world. Now in the hour of denial you were weak and ashamed to acknowledge Jesus as your Lord and Master.

May we all be worn by Peter, and let us not make the same mistakes he did. Instead of saying, "I will never leave Thee," let us rather say, "Lord, give me Thy Holy Spirit that I may faithfully be Thy witness and confess You unashamed before men. And, Oh Lord, if I fall, remember me in love as Thou did Peter, and recall me with Thy look of love." Amen.

### **The Prayer**

Oh Lord Jesus, we must bow our heads in shame when we sink back over our past lives, remembering how often we have denied You in thought, word, and deed. We are no better than Peter in this respect, and we are deeply grieved by our perverse nature, to think that we should ever be ashamed of You, oh wonderful Savior. Look upon us with a look of love and pity and forgiveness as Thou did look upon Peter. Maybe compassion shining from Thy face cause us to shed tears of true repentance and sorrow for all our wrongs.

Oh Redeemer, we have no confidence in ourselves. Our only confidence is in Thy faithfulness and love and tenderness. When we began to sink, stretch out Thy hand to save us, dear Lord. When we begin to deny Thee, recall us with a look of love. Keep us in our confirmation vow "to continue steadfast in the confession of this church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it." O Thou who reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, keep us faithful until we see Thy glory and eternally praise Thee, world without end. Amen.