

Through Peter's Eyes: Betrayal and Restoration

Well, I'll tell you one thing for free — I sure didn't understand what was going on at the time! Confused? Yeah, we sure were — but events were moving so fast we didn't really have time to think much about it at the time.

There we were, coming up to Jerusalem for the Passover (though some of us didn't think it was such a good idea — the authorities were getting a bit too upset at Jesus), and we didn't even have anywhere arranged to eat the Passover! You know what Jerusalem's like at Passover — absolutely heaving, stuffed full of folk! Hardly a cubby hole free, never mind space for the twelve of us. Mind you, Jesus didn't seem particularly worried — not that he ever did. I certainly thought he'd left it a bit late — its not even as if us "country folk" from Galilee knew all that many folk in the big city . . .

Anyway, we didn't like to say anything — until the Thursday morning, that is. When we asked him about it, he sent me and John (yeah, I think it was John) off into the city with the strangest instructions: a *man* carrying a water jar! Follow him! Just turn up on a stranger's doorstep and ask for the use of a room for Passover! (*sarcasm*) Nae problem! Still, it was exactly as Jesus said (even after three years we hadn't really learned to trust him!), and so we got the meal ready in time for everyone else turning up in the early evening.

Pause

The meal seemed to be going fine — maybe I'm not the world's greatest cook, but I hadn't burned anything this time! *Suddenly*, in the middle of the conversation, Jesus came out with the most startling, upsetting comment: "**One of you will betray me**"!! . . . One of you will betray me.

WHAT!?! Just dropped something like that into the conversation! What a hubbub — once we'd all stopped spluttering, we realised he was serious. Surely not . . . "Surely not *me*?" We were his friends, the ones who'd followed him since the early days in Galilee. We'd been there when he fed the crowd, when he healed the sick, when he cast out the demons — some of us had even been there when his glory shone through on the top of the mountain! — if one of us was to betray him, that'd be the lowest form of treachery. But it proved true in the end. Jesus didn't say who it was at the time, though afterwards it was clear he knew — one of the twelve, one of his closest friends.

When I stop and think about it, perhaps this was where Jesus' love was most amazingly shown — for he still loved Judas, the one who betrayed him. We didn't know it at the time, but the love that took Jesus to the Cross for our sake was equally offered to Judas . . . though ultimately rejected.

Pause

Our minds were reeling, but Jesus went on with the meal. Being around Jesus means you have to get used to strange things being said — some of those parables! — but this was even harder than normal to take in. I felt as if I could hardly concentrate — yet the events of that night are indelibly burned into my memory.

Towards the end of the meal, Jesus took up a loaf of bread that was left over: “Take it, this is my body”. Come again? “Take it, this is my body” Bemused, we all had a bit, as Jesus broke it and passed it round. I sure didn’t realise at the time what was going on. Then Jesus took up a cup of wine, gave thanks, and passed it round: “This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God’s covenant.” As we drank in turn, his eyes watched us — full of love, but sad. None spoke.

It was only later – after he had died, after he had risen again — that understanding began to dawn. It was a Passover meal, that special night in the year when we remember what God did for our forebears in Egypt, protecting them with the blood of a lamb. So there we were in that upper room, having just eaten a lamb killed to help us remember God’s intervention, not realising that we were eating with the very Son of God who was in the act of making the final intervention, the *Lamb of God*, the one whose death would save all of us from the consequences of our sin. And the bread and wine — unleavened Passover bread, reminding of the haste with which our ancestors had to leave Egypt and of the imminence of God’s activity, but now taken by Jesus and given a new symbolism. A reminder of how his own body would be broken — the very hands that broke the bread for us and passed it round were the next morning nailed to a Cross. And the wine, blood red, reminding us of the blood of the lamb, the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, shed for us.

Yes, there was purpose in Jesus’ actions that night. He wasn’t merely having a last meal with us, his closest friends, before he died — he was also showing us, however long it took for us to catch on, that his death was not in vain. Far from it! Looking back, I can’t think of a better way for him to have explained what he was doing. If he’d come right out and told us, we’d have missed half the significance, we’d have forgotten amidst all the terror and uproar of that night. As it was, it slowly dawned on us, leaving us stunned to have been so close to that one perfect sacrifice that brought us freedom — and we didn’t even realise!

Pause

After we’d finished the meal we sang a hymn, and then Jesus led us out to the Mount of Olives — we went there quite regularly when we were up in Jerusalem. Its quiet, and often cooler than the baking city.

As we walked, we continued talking, mostly just idle conversation. Then Jesus did it again, dropped a bombshell into the conversation: “All of you will run away and leave me . . .” Not just betrayed by one of us, but deserted by all the rest! But I’m not that kind of wimp! I’m a fisherman, prepared to go out on Galilee in the midst of the filthiest storm. I can look after myself. I wasn’t going to desert him — not after all he’d done and said! He was God’s Messiah, his promised one! What kind of person would desert him? So, big brash me stuck his foot in it again: “I will never leave you, even though all the rest do!” There was that sadness in Jesus’ eyes again . . . he just said that before the cock crowed for the following morning I’d have denied him three times. I didn’t know what to say — the look in his eyes took some of the wind out of my bluster. There was an uneasy silence as we continued to walk down one side of the valley out of Jerusalem and up the other towards Gethsemane.

Once we got there he took James and John and myself further on, to keep watch he said. It was late, and the three of us were tired — it’d been a hectic week, and since we’d been staying out in Bethany there’d been a few miles to walk each morning and evening. But he asked us to keep watch, and went on a wee bit to pray himself — just within earshot. He was praying that God would take some cup from him — he must’ve been fair vexed with us, ’cos even then we didn’t realise what was happening. It all seems so clear with hindsight.

Next thing I knew he was waking us up again — we were so embarrassed, but he had to wake us up a couple more times that night. How he kept patience with us . . . The third time there were lights moving around down the hill a bit. Jesus seemed to know who it was — Judas, and a crowd of armed men sent to arrest him.

Betrayed! Sold out by one of his closest friends — and with a kiss. Looking Judas in the eye and still managing to love him! So Jesus was right. I can’t remember much of the next few minutes, though I do remember having a go at someone with my sword — I couldn’t even do that right, and got his ear. Jesus, despite him being the one arrested, seemed the only one in complete control of the situation — he healed the slave’s ear — told me to put my sword away. At that point we all panicked and legged it out of there . . . Funny, they didn’t seem so interested in us, only Jesus.

Deserted! Not only had Judas, one of his closest followers betrayed him, all the rest of us left him. The grief we caused him! And yet he went through with it — you’d have thought that at that point he’d have reckoned we weren’t worth the effort, given up on us as a bad job! But no, he went through with it all. As he had said in his prayer: “Not my will, but yours Father”. I’ll never fully understand how he can love me so much that he was prepared to die for me, to suffer not only the physical agony, but the betrayal and desertion we, his “friends”, meted out. Yet he did . . . Though deserted, he never

deserted us; though betrayed, he never betrayed his Father's trust. *He died my death, that I might live with him in eternity!*

Pause

I was petrified — they'd come with spears and swords to arrest my closest friend, my Lord! Though I'd run with the rest, I knew I shouldn't, I couldn't really desert him . . . so I followed the light of their torches — at a distance, mind you. I didn't even know where they were taking him till we got there. It was the high-priest's house, of all places. There were loads of attendants and guards milling around — I don't think they'd seen such activity in the middle of the night for a long time. No one seemed to know what was happening, least of all me! I don't know what I was thinking, but I slipped into the compound and just hung around, waiting for something to happen, trying not to be too obvious in the confusion.

You'd think that in a country where it gets *really* hot during the day, night wouldn't be too bad — no such luck! It was freezing! I ended up warming myself by the fire, the same one the guards were huddled round. I suppose it was inevitable, but one of them who'd been in the party sent out to arrest Jesus thought he recognised me — the light wasn't too good, so I don't think he was quite sure, but he kept glancing in my direction. Rumbled! "No, I don't know Jesus" — what a thing to say! There I was, in the courtyard because I hadn't wanted to desert Jesus — so what do I say? "Never met him — don't know what you're talking about!"

Just then, a cock crowed.

What was it Jesus had said (and I'd dismissed)? "... before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." How could I? Not only had we run out on him as he was arrested, there I was breaking my own stupid, headstrong boast that I'd stick by him to the end. I really scarpered this time — though it was shame that made me run — weeping, ashamed to show my face. I went and hid. I could hardly live with myself, never mind face any of the others. I was too scared and ashamed to venture out the next day — I wasn't even there when they killed him. Some closest friend, some disciple me!

Once he was buried I eventually went back to the others. They weren't in much better shape than me — at least, not until the Sunday morning when the women found the tomb was empty! (John still needles me that I can't run as fast as him!) And of course later in the day Jesus came and showed himself to us!

But you know, it wasn't all hunky-dory again. I couldn't help wondering whether Jesus had really forgiven me denying I knew him — was he just being polite around the others? Its not everyday you talk to someone who's come back from the dead, but

even so talking to him was not like the old days — a bit tentative, like someone you've fallen out with and not really made up with properly — and I was scared I wasn't really worthy of following him — and with good reason!

I can't imagine how he had the patience to cope with me! He'd just died for me, for goodness sake, and yet here I was skulking around, not sure whether to talk to him! Phew — what a dim-wit! It all got sorted out eventually — over breakfast, actually! We'd been fishing, but hadn't caught anything — until Jesus appeared on the shore and told us where to throw our nets . . . I wonder if the insurance company had breaking nets because of *really* miraculous catches in mind when they put that "acts of God" clause into my insurance on the boat . . . ? Anyway, we eventually got ashore and cooked some of the fish for breakfast — Jesus had already lit a fire. Afterwards, as we were talking, Jesus took me aside. "Do you love me?"

"Yes — you know that I do"

"Take care of my lambs . . . Do you love me?"

"Yes Lord — you *know* that I do"

"Take care of my sheep . . . Do you love me?"

"Lord you know everything; you know that I love you"

And that did it — Jesus had been holding out his hand for me to come back to him all along, but I really couldn't believe that anyone could love me that much. And yet he came to *me* and made sure that I knew, knew that he trusted me with leading the church, undoing the hurt of denying him three times with his three-fold question. He was determined to love me, even though I couldn't really believe it. He had already died my death, his blood spilled willingly for me — even then, I was scared to trust him — so he came to get me. He'd broken down the barrier of sin that stood in the way of me knowing and following him — and he made sure I realised it!

What love! What patience! What care!

And what gratitude, what thankfulness fills my heart, every time I remember, every time I think back to what he did for me, every time we gather together and break bread and share wine. What a Lord! What a Saviour! What a friend! What a companion! What a Lord!

AMEN