

# In the Judgement Hall

by G.W. North

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*The sermon examines the contrasting responses of John and Peter during Jesus' trial, highlighting themes of loyalty, fear, and the necessity of spiritual refinement through trials.*

**Scripture:** Luke 22:31

**Topics:** "Discipleship", "Loyalty and Denial"

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## Description

G.W. North explores the contrasting responses of Peter and John during the trial of Jesus in the Judgement Hall, emphasizing the importance of loyalty and the struggle between fear and love. While John boldly identifies himself as a disciple and remains close to Jesus, Peter, overwhelmed by fear, denies his association with Christ three times. North highlights that Peter's denial is a profound moment of self-reflection, revealing the need for spiritual sifting and the breaking of self-confidence. Ultimately, the sermon illustrates that true discipleship involves recognizing our weaknesses and relying on God's grace, as exemplified by Jesus' prayer for Peter's faith. The message encourages believers to embrace their trials as opportunities for growth and deeper understanding of their relationship with Christ.

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## Transcript

It is said that comparisons are odious and Paul says that they who compare themselves among themselves are unwise. For the greater part and in certain circumstances both these statements are true, but sometimes comparison is inevitable and can be very profitable. The Spirit of God sets this so very firmly before us toward the end of this Gospel that comparison is almost unavoidably thrust upon us even if we would wish to refrain from it. It concerns John and Peter in the Judgement Hall of the High Priest. They had come there in the wake of Jesus. He had sought and had been granted permission from the captain of the band which came and arrested Him in the garden for His disciples to be allowed to leave in freedom, which they all did. They all forsook Him and fled; how far they ran is not disclosed. Some fled away entirely, but Peter and John only fled to a safe distance from which they could keep everything under surveillance; when captors and captive moved off to the city they followed at a discreet distance. They knew what was afoot, Jesus had said one of the disciples would betray Him and they had heard and seen how He had exposed Judas and despatched him on his treacherous errand. They also recognised the type of men who had come to arrest Jesus; they were not the Roman guard, they were the Pharisees' and chief priest's thugs; Jesus was being taken to the high priest.

By the time the band reached Annas' palace things had been resolved between the two disciples, whatever the content of their conversation they both wanted to be in that palace and witness what went on. John was known to Annas and must have wondered how things would go with him, but he determined that, despite his fears about possible consequences, he was going to use the old acquaintanceship to get in. So by the time Jesus reached the entrance John caught up with Him and went in with Him, noticed but unchallenged; but not Peter. Dear John, what a loyal soul he was. He had heard the Lord say He was going to be crucified, so he could have entertained little doubt about the result of His capture, and his own association with Him was too well-known to deny if he had wished to. But the love that existed between them was so great that, despite possible danger to himself, he approached the door-maid and declared himself to her and requested Peter's admission to the proceedings also, which was granted.

What contact beyond that the two disciples had within the Judgement Hall cannot be established, but it is pretty apparent that Peter, from the moment of his entry, sought to become an anonymous observer only. Unlike John he had no intention of identifying himself for what he was -- he wished to see and remain unseen, but it was not to be. Poor Peter, who can tell what he thought and felt? Fears and apprehensions gripped him; fighting with loyalty and a sense of duty to Jesus and John, he could not identify with either of them and tried to hide himself among the soldiers standing round the fire. Failing to identify with the Lord and his faithful fellow-disciple he identified with the enemy -- it was inevitable, and so was what followed. The door-maid came to him and said, 'thou art one of His disciples'. Immediately he denied it; once he said, 'I know not the man', and another time he denied Him with an oath; it was categorical and effectual.

The cock crowed. Perhaps it declared the day of crucifixion was at hand; certainly it announced to Christ that He had been denied as well as betrayed by an apostle. Perhaps it also heralded the dawn of Peter's salvation -- Jesus turned and looked on Peter and Peter went out and wept bitterly, a broken man, his heart full of sorrow, his mind surging with uncontrollable thoughts; what had he done? Memories of recent events flooded him, breaking through the dam of the frightful fear that had so effectually held back Love's fear -- that fear of God which sustained his brother John, keeping him loyal to Christ and free from the fear of man. John had not been afraid to let everybody know to whom he belonged: he loved Jesus and remained true to Him and His call: love is stronger than death or the threat of it. What he thought when the cock crowed he does not say -- he too was a disciple and had been in the upper room. True he had fled with all the others at first when Jesus was apprehended; the whole incident had been such a shock to everybody, but he had speedily recovered; love had won. He knew it was not his to judge his fellow-disciple; Jesus did all that was necessary with a look that only Peter caught.

So much was in that look, far more than could possibly be pressed into words; it revealed Jesus' heart and uncovered Peter's, breaking it open deep and wide till remorse flooded him. Where his attestations of love and devotion now? Where his declarations of loyalty, his martyr spirit, his longings to be washed all over and have part with his Lord and Master? What had he done? Had his discipleship been outward only after all? Perhaps he had spoken the truth when he had denied he was a disciple of Jesus and said 'I know not the man'; truer than he knew or had intended. Did any of them know Him? Jesus did not seem to think so and had said as much to Philip in the upper room. 'Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me?' Who among them really knew this man? No-one seemed to know Him; before long Pilate was to put the question to Him, 'Whence art thou?' But Jesus gave him no answer.

Pilate wrote a title for Him and put it on the cross. It was Pilate's conclusion about Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews'. It was a short-sighted assessment of Him, correct as far as he could see. Pilate could not evaluate Him aright, he could not be expected to do so, but he had never been one of His

disciples, while Peter had been proud to call himself one. What was he now? He had not caught men, men had caught him. He could recall the words of Jesus, 'Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not'. Was Jesus still praying for him? He was at the end; where could he go? What could he do? Nothing! Peter was in the devil's riddle, being tossed and turned and shaken and Jesus was content to leave him there. He was confident, He knew that underneath all Peter was wheat: His Father had given him to Him, he was His, a family gift to Him. Nothing satan did to the disciple could alter that, he was in His hand; all the devil could do could only rid him of the husk and the chaff and in the end prove him genuine.

The Lord knew that. There is no other way for a disciple whoever he is -- to some degree he must be sifted as wheat as Peter was; every principle of righteousness must be fulfilled in him. If Peter had been in a fit state to do so he could have rested in his sore distress, knowing that in one sense in measure the things that were being fulfilled in him were being worked out in his Lord and Master also. Jesus was the great corn of wheat and who could doubt that at the same time as Peter He was in the sieve also? Not for the same reasons as Peter though. The disciple had sin in him -- Jesus had none, but they were both in the sieve. What was taking place in Peter was a modified illustration of the judgement Paul later passed upon a believer in Corinth, 'In the name of our Lord Jesus deliver such a one unto satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus'. There is no comparison between Peter and that unnamed man, and 'the days' were different, but the element of truth is the same: God wanted some things in them dealt with and rid from them, so they both had to go into the riddle.

Dear Peter, chosen of the Lord, gift of the Father, disciple, apostle and friend of Jesus, who had accompanied his Lord into glory and was first promised the keys of the kingdom; he who had preached the gospel, healed the sick, cast out devils and was first named among his companions, oft-times their leader and spokesman, a man with great potential and ability, whose future in the kingdom of God seemed absolutely assured -- this mighty man needed to be put in the sieve and stripped. Was not the Lord stripped of everything, cruelly stripped and hanged on a tree? So do we all need stripping. Jesus was stripped and beaten, clothed and mocked, stripped and hanged, clothed and buried; even His body was as a husk -- He was as a corn of wheat. When at last He died He had passed through the hands of men and the sieve of satan in the hands of God and had fallen into the ground and died. As with Jesus, so with all His disciples, though to a lesser degree and for different specific reasons under many varieties of circumstances, the end in view is the same -- we all must be stripped of the husk.

Because Peter was so great a man and a companion of Jesus he is prominent in scripture, but the record of his life and activities has not been given to us so we may blame him for his mistakes and failures. It is there for us to read and learn from it in all humility. In company with the great apostle we all have to learn Christ, and in order to do so we have to learn ourselves. An old chorus springs to mind: 'Make the Book live to me dear Lord, make the Book live to me, show me myself and show me my Saviour and make the Book live to me'. The man who taught it me said his favourite verse was 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me', and at times adapted Stephen's word about Israel to himself, 'forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness'. When Paul saw himself he said he was a wretched man needing deliverance, others saw him as a dragon breathing out threatenings and slaughter; he said he was a blasphemous murderer. When he discovered Jesus he discovered himself also, so did Peter, so do we all, and like them we must let Him put us in the sieve that everything unlike Him may be shaken off us.

God's dealings with us may at times be very severe and sometimes just as obscure, we may not always understand why things happen the way they do; does He allow Satan to have his way with us and sift us as wheat as seemed to happen to Peter? Maybe if a man is destined to become a foundational apostle it will be necessary, but if that is the reason for such drastic measures most of us may expect less harsh treatment. Nevertheless all true disciples must be mentally prepared for some such test, so that when it comes we may not be like the man who replies against God. Peter uses an apt phrase, 'arm yourselves with the same mind' and goes on to say, 'he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin'. That is always the objective when God deals with a man and in the end, if not at first, all His disciple/saints confess how kind He is to deal with them so. Let all who feel themselves to be in the riddle (whether rightly or wrongly) comfort themselves with these words of Jesus to Peter, 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not'.

Let us all notice too that Jesus did not say, 'that thy strength fail not'; He wanted Peter's strength to fail, that was the precise reason for the sifting, Peter was a strong personality, too strong altogether; he had to be broken. Lots of things needed sifting away from him, natural things such as self-confidence, egotism, boastfulness, self-opinion, over-hastiness, cowardliness, pride -- pride of position and possessions and so much more. When these all are compounded with sin in a disciple they amount to a fearsome image of old Adam and the principle of them is in us all till the Lord deals with it and them and us, even the very best of us. The transition from mere discipleship to sainthood is very real in a man's life and very radical.

As Peter is an illustration of the vulgar and distasteful things of natural man we all despise, so John the beloved exemplifies much that is admirable and desirable. Whatever he felt like within when his friend Peter was identified as a disciple in the Judgement Hall we cannot certainly know, but we may guess much. His feelings are not disclosed but his actions cannot be misinterpreted. He was known for what he was, a disciple and apostle of Jesus and that is how he wanted it to be; throughout the entire proceedings he remained with his Lord, as near as it was possible to be. Possibly Mary stood with him too, watching and listening while her precious son was so treacherously denied. Betrayal seemed to be natural to these men; Judas had betrayed Him into the hand of sinners and bears the name of Traitor, but is not denial a form of betrayal? Had not Peter also betrayed the Lord's trust? Only John seemed true and loyal. She was grateful to John; he loved her precious Jesus as much as she did, but where were all those others He had chosen who had sworn allegiance to Him and had left all to follow Him? Those He had called His mother and sister and brother, where were they now? Hiding, looking after their own skin. Peter had at least tried and John stood with her; would he stay to the end?

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