

# Trial by Fire

by Ray Comfort

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*The sermon 'Trial by Fire' explores Peter's denial of Jesus and the fear of the cross that led to it, encouraging listeners to examine their own faith and willingness to share it with others.*

**Scripture:** Mark 8:38, Luke 22:54, John 18:25, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18

**Topics:** "Fear And Faith", "Sharing The Gospel"

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## Description

Ray Comfort delivers a powerful sermon on Peter's denial of Jesus, highlighting the mistakes Peter made that led to his denial, including sleeping while Jesus prayed, following Jesus from afar, and sitting with the ungodly without concern for their eternal well-being. Peter's fear of the Roman cross, a symbol of torture and suffering, ultimately led to his denial of Jesus, despite his previous bold actions. Comfort challenges listeners to examine their own faith and commitment to sharing the message of Christ crucified, urging them to overcome fear and shame in proclaiming the gospel.

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## Transcript

Peter thawed his cold hands by the warm fire. He said that he would never be ashamed of Jesus. But he was about to deny Him...to a maid. He was about to go through a fiery trial, and three times be found guilty of being ashamed of the one he called his Lord.

Peter made a number of mistakes that dark night. He slept while Jesus prayed (see Luke 22:45). He had missed his Gethsemane experience, and when the hour of temptation came upon him, in one sense he was still asleep. It would take the loud crowing of a rooster to waken him. He was supposed to be a follower of Jesus--a fisher of men, but he followed Him "afar off." Peter seated himself in the midst of the ungodly (see Luke 22:55) without any thought for their eternal well-being. He didn't want to rock the boat by casting out any nets.

Scripture tells us "a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire." She was sure that she had seen him with Jesus, but Peter adamantly said, "Woman, I do not know Him." Two more accusers, then two more denials. The accusations came out of the mouth of three witnesses. The trial by fire was over. He was three times guilty.

When he came to himself Peter went out and wept bitterly (see Luke 22:62). He had already lamented over his own sinfulness when he once fell at the feet of Jesus and said, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." But this experience was different.

Peter's denial at first seems a mystery. He had unashamedly walked with Jesus of Nazareth for three years. He had even stayed by His side when he knew that the Jews sought to kill Him (see John 11:8). How then could Peter be afraid of a maid? He stepped out of the boat to walk on water. He had boldly taken his sword into his hand in defense of his Lord. He was no wimp. No, his fear was not simply because he belonged to Jesus. It was something deeper.

It would seem that it was the Roman cross that Peter feared. This instrument of punishment was no mere lethal injection. This was a torture stake. It was cruel and usual punishment. The Romans used the cross to execute lawbreakers as if it was going out of fashion. They had raised the crossbar of human suffering to a higher level.

The cross was meant to be something that caused fear. Its grizzly public display was a freeway billboard, designed to deter the busy traffic of crime. Peter, no doubt had seen men writhe like worms, as barbed Roman steel penetrated their tender flesh. He had seen soldiers dutifully hold down unwilling and grasping hands. He had heard the unforgettable thud of the hammer as it pushed cold nails through warm human flesh, releasing gushes of blood from hands and feet. He had been a silent witness as hardened men suddenly became screaming animals, horrified by the stark reality of their terrible plight. One look into their eyes was enough to terrorize the most callous of human hearts.

He had also watched the unspeakable torture as the cross was heartlessly dropped into the ground, ripping apart mortal flesh like a great beast viciously tearing its helpless prey. No. It wasn't the maid he feared. It was the terrifying threat of the Roman torture stake.

Perhaps you too once dropped to your knees at the feet of the Son of God and confessed your sins. You know what it is to lament over your wicked heart. Now you belong to Jesus...and you are not ashamed to confess Him before men.

Let me therefore ask you a few probing questions. It's a cold night. Come closer to the fire so that you can warm your hands. Come nearer to the light so that we can see your face. Let's see how cold you are. When did you last share your faith? I'm not asking if you have a "God is good" sticker on your car, or if you wear a "fish" badge. I'm not asking whether you are ashamed to say that you belong to Jesus. Of course you're not. I'm asking when you last shared the bloodied cross. When did you last preach Christ crucified? When did you last beg with a sinner to flee from God's wrath, and to shelter in the cross?

Perhaps you have been following Jesus, but you've dropped back just a little... because of the cross. Any mention of its bloodstained frame will mean that a sinful world will stop smiling at your walk with Jesus. It will instead begin to spit out its hatred. You are afraid of what the Apostle Paul called the "offence of the cross." Like Peter, you dread it because of the personal pain it would bring. The hymn-writer's "To the old rugged cross, I will ever be true. Its shame and reproach gladly bear" have been nothing but empty words.

Perhaps this is because you have been sleeping when you should have been praying. You have missed your Gethsemane experience. You are following Jesus "afar off." You have been sitting with the ungodly with no real concern for their eternal welfare.

Are you guilty of denying your Lord? Do you hear the crowing of conscience? Has its voice woken you? Perhaps you need to go somewhere and weep bitterly.

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