

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 27th June 2010

'The 3 Deniers'

John 18:12-19:16

Introduction

Palm Sunday is at the beginning of Holy Week. That's the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the people welcomed him by waving palm branches in their hands. He didn't enter the city like a warrior King, riding on a war horse, no instead he came as the Prince of Peace, gentle and riding on a donkey. That day many hailed Jesus as the Messiah/King but within a week they would shout "*Away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*"

During the course of that week a lot of heart-searching went on as people weighed up what they thought about Jesus, until finally Pilate made the decision to crucify him.

The passage before us tonight deals with the well known story of Peter's Denial. He denied any knowledge of his Lord, not once but 3 times, until in fulfilment of Jesus' prediction in ch.13:38, the cock crowed, reminding Peter of his failure, and his Lord's displeasure.

This is a well known part of the stories leading up to the cross. But did you notice that there were actually **three** people in our passage tonight. And if you look closely at them you will find that each one of them was **a denier**. The three people are:- 1. Peter. 2. A Priest 3. Pilate. I want us to look at these three men tonight in order to see exactly what each one of them was denying, because each of them has an important warning for us tonight.

1. Peter (vs.15-18, vs.25-27) - He Denied his Lord.

Peter was one of Jesus' closest friends while he was here on earth. Peter, together with James and John, were part of the inner circle of disciples. These three were closest to Christ. They had more privileges and insights into who Jesus was than any of the other disciples had – e.g.

At the healing of Jairus' daughter,

On the Mount of Transfiguration,

And Peter had actually walked on the water towards Jesus!

Surely Peter more than any of the others should have been the one to stand true to his Lord right to the end.

But, "*Let him who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall!*" Those who've been exalted more than others - usually have further to fall, and harder!

None of us as Christians is beyond failure. Any of us can give in to temptation. Peter was tempted to deny his Lord, and he did give in - under pressure.

Peter knew that his Lord's life was in danger.

Perhaps he thought his own life was at risk too? - Perhaps he was *afraid*.

Perhaps he was *disillusioned* that his master had been arrested.

(He'd expected him to become King in Israel!)

Perhaps he was just *unwilling* to admit that he was the disciple of a man who was now being treated as no better than a common criminal.

Whatever the reason - Peter denied his Lord 3 times!

But notice what it says in v.15:

(v.15) - "*Another disciple*" – This is John's cryptic way of referring to himself again. John was with Peter - he wasn't on his own when he denied his Lord! John was known to the High Priest. Perhaps the High Priest even knew that John was a disciple of Jesus - but John didn't deny his Lord!

And yet Peter did! Why was it that Peter refused to admit that he was a disciple to 3 different people?

(v.17) - First of all to a servant girl (just one person).

(v.18,25) - Secondly to a group of servants & officers round the fire (a group).

(v.26) - Thirdly to the relative of the man that Peter had injured in the garden!

As you see, each time it became harder and harder for Peter to admit who he was. When you deny the Lord once, it becomes harder and harder for you to take your stand for him later. It's best to take your stand right from the beginning. Otherwise it becomes easier just to go with the crowd, and to keep quiet about Christ.

Peter was in the wrong company anyway:-

(v.18) - "Peter stood with *them*" - who? – He stood with the enemies of Christ.

(v.18,25) - He "warmed himself" at their fire - he was in the wrong place.

And so he gave in to their questioning.

In vs. 17 and 25 their questions expected the answer "NO."

But the question in v.26 expected the answer "Yes", but by now Peter was implicated and he couldn't admit to being with Christ. Peter was trapped.

So he lied.

Can you imagine how much that must have hurt the Lord?

When the cock crowed and Peter came to his senses - it hurt him too!

He was under conviction of his sin, and he went out and he wept bitterly.

Don't grieve your Lord by denying Him before others. Like Peter you'll never be happy if you do. Take your stand, take the flack. It will be worth it in the end. The Lord will honour you, even if men don't. Don't deny your Lord.

2. The Priest (vs.19-24) – He Denied his Office.

He denied his responsibility.

What is a priest's job? It's to bring people to God.

He's a go-between to represent people before God.

His job was to bring people to God, and yet there was the Son of God standing in front of him, and he refused to recognise him!

Here was his opportunity to accept who Jesus was and to convince the people to accept Christ too and prevent them crucifying him, and yet he refused to recognise who Jesus was - The Son of God. This man was without excuse!

(i) The prophecies of Scripture were fulfilled by Jesus to the letter.

(ii) Jesus' miracles showed who he was (14:9-11)

(iii) Nicodemus could see that (ch.3:2).

(iv) Jesus' teaching. - *"No man ever spoke like this man."
"They marvelled at his authority."*

(v) The perfect life of Christ. - He was sinless, perfect. Absolutely "Not guilty" of anything, and yet (v.19) the priest tries to trump up a charge against him.

And in v.23 they couldn't convict him of any evil, and yet still they struck him in exasperation.

The Priest denied his office. He'd lost his opportunity to accept Christ.

In fact because he hadn't accepted Christ, he couldn't point the people to Christ either. Sadly the same is true today. If a priest or minister does not know Christ himself personally as his Saviour, then he can't point the members of his congregation to Christ either. Such men are denying the whole point of their office, and the Lord will one day hold them accountable for it. It's a very serious matter!

3. Pilate (vs.28-19:16) – He Denied his Conscience.

Pilate went against his better judgement. He knew Jesus was innocent, and yet he gave in and had him crucified, even though he'd done nothing wrong! Three times he said so:-

(18:38) - *"I find no basis for a charge against him."*

(19:4) - *"I find no basis for a charge against him."*

(19:6) - *"I find no basis for a charge against him."*

The Jews had no charge against Jesus either - (18:29,30).

They just wanted him dead! (v.31).

Pilate knew Jesus should be released:-

Three times he actually tried to get out of his responsibility:-

(18:31) - *"Take him yourselves and judge him..."*

(18:39) - *"But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner - do you want me to release 'the King of the Jews'?"*

(19:12) - *"From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free."*

(i) But Pilate was afraid of the Jews.

- So he had Jesus flogged (19:1-4) - hoping to please them.
But it didn't - they wanted him dead!

(ii) Pilate was afraid of Jesus, The Son of God. (19:7,8)

- So he tried to release him (v.12)

(iii) But in the end, Pilate was more afraid of Caesar (v.12-15)

- So he delivered Jesus to be crucified. (v.16)

Pilate went against his conscience. He denied his better judgement. He knew Jesus was innocent, "not guilty", perfect, but because of fear, he ordered his crucifixion!

Conclusion

So Peter denied his Lord, the Priest denied his Office, and Pilate denied his Conscience...

But in God's plan, there was one thing Pilate couldn't do, and that was deny you and me a Saviour!

Jesus went to the cross, and He did die for your sin.

And he rose again on the third day to be your Saviour!

So what will you do with Christ?

Will you deny him, and reject him?

Or will you accept him as your Saviour?

Peter, the Priest, and Pilate, all had a choice to make regarding Christ.

So have we. What will your choice be?

Peter denied his Lord - will you do the same, or will you accept Him?

The Priest denied his office – today you don't need a priest, you can come to God yourself by putting your trust in Jesus as your Saviour (John 14:6).

Pilate denied his conscience.

- He asked in v.38 "What is Truth?"

We're all looking for "The Truth" aren't we? But it's not elusive.

It is to be found in God's Word, The Bible, if only we'd read it!

- We've all heard The Truth from John's Gospel tonight.

I hope none of us are rejecting the Truth, ignoring the Truth, or denying it.

- I hope you're not refusing to face up to the Truth; to go where it leads you? Whatever else you do, never deny your conscience.

It speaks to keep you right. It tells you what is right. We ignore it at our peril!

Don't be another denier tonight! You've seen the evidence, now trust in Christ

