

The Chicken Miracle
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It could have been me. It could have been me hanging there! I don't think I'll ever be able to erase that image from my mind. There he hung, my friend, my friend of three years. We'd done everything together. I'd never seen a suicide before. What was I doing when I heard? Oh, yes, I was just wandering aimlessly through the streets, my guilt was so heavy I thought I would die. I overheard someone say, "He hung himself" "He just threw the money down in the Temple and went out and hung himself."

I followed the curious and together we saw the authorities removing the body. Judas, I'm sorry! I'm sorry for the way I felt about you last night. As I see your body, I realize it could have been me. I was so pompous! When you kissed Jesus in Gethsemane - I could have killed you. In my anger I took a swing at one the high priest's servants and cut off his ear. As I think about it now, that started the longest and worst hours of my life. I went from foolhardy confidence to a betrayal as bad as yours. It wasn't six hours earlier that I had so boastfully claimed that even if everyone else ran when the going got tough, I'd be there. And even when Jesus said that before the morning came, before the rooster crowed, I'd claim I never knew him, I was so cocky I said I'd never disown him. And yet after Jesus scolded me for cutting off the man's ear I went from anger to unbelievable fear. I ran. Like a scared schoolboy, I ran - I deserted Jesus, just after saying that I'd never do that.

Jesus called me Peter, the rock. How wrong could He be? A rock? Huh! More like a jellyfish. I've never felt so unstable and weak in my whole life as at this very moment. What kind of a man am I? Like a spineless coward, I moved from tree to tree and then from shadow to shadow in the night following the guards as they took Jesus to the high priest's house. And there I sinned as surely and as wickedly as Judas himself. How can a man do what I did? I didn't just hide, I lied. - I said I didn't know Jesus. I didn't just lie, I took God as my witness that I didn't know Jesus.

And then came the worst moment of the worst hours of my life - - I heard a rooster crow. I consider that the worst miracle Jesus ever did. Do you know how many chickens there are in Jerusalem? Do you realize what had to happen for every one of them to be kept quiet except one? And then that one to crow at exactly the moment that I swore I didn't know Jesus? That sound cut through my mind and pierced my heart so that I didn't think I could stand the pain. I felt that crowing announced to the whole world what kind of man I was -but worst of all it announced it to me.

Yes, Judas, I understand the physical pain of guilt. It's like a rock in your gut. And the pressure on your chest seems more than you can bear. I ran from that courtyard and staggered through the streets sobbing - I didn't know where I was going but throughout those next hours all I could see in my mind were images of Jesus:

Jesus as he walked on the water,
Jesus as he healed the blind man,
Jesus as he raised Lazarus from the dead.
And with every image I saw I heard that rooster crow.

Is there any hope for a man like me?
Is Judas' fate mine as well?

Even now as stand here out of sight, I see them taking Jesus to Pilate. Will I intervene now? Will I step up and try to persuade them to let him go? Will I walk with Him and identify myself with him? I'm silent as stone as I hear the crowd cry out "Crucify him!" Couldn't I at least yell out "No!" Can't I even say to someone near me, "This isn't fair."? I continue in my tomb-like silence as he is publicly stripped and beaten. Can't I at least catch his eye and let him know that I'm praying for him? Can't I tell him that I'm with him?

They put a thorn crown on his head and a king-colored robe on his back and they spit on him as they mock him calling him the king of Jews. Can't I yell out that they are wrong - that he truly is the King of the Jews. Even if I'm the only voice for justice, can't I say something? And then as they put that heavy cross on his bleeding shoulders, I find that I am paralyzed not only in my tongue but also in my feet. I not only keep silent, I don't even step up like another man and take his cross. What kind of a person am I? I started so well, so I thought. I remember when Jesus first came to Galilee and called James, John and me to go with him and be his disciples. I'd heard of him, I'd heard of the miracles that he performed. I was impressed and thought this was a great opportunity to really be somebody. I remember the time he raised that little girl from the dead. I recall the pride I felt as it was just me and James and John that he let go with him into the house to raise her. I knew that Jesus and me, we were tight- you know. And who could ever forget that he took me to the top of the mountain where we saw him changed into light and speak with Moses and Elijah. I was in unique company - Jesus was someone that I could go places with. I felt the tallest however the time that Jesus asked me who he was and I told him that he was the Messiah. Right there in front of the others he said that I would be blessed and that to me would be given the keys to the kingdom. I knew it! Jesus and me, we could change things. Me and Jesus, we could get rid of the Romans and the Pharisees and create a great new society. WOW! I had such great plans - all that I was going to do for Jesus. And then that rooster crowed and all my plans came crashing down around me. I knew then that I wasn't going to do anything for Jesus. I couldn't do anything for Him. I was afraid, I was empty, I was powerless, I was me! And now I just blindly watch as that cross is lowered into the ground. And as his body hangs on those nails I suddenly see! Like a mirror to my soul - I see me on that cross. He who knew no sin became sin for me. The horror of his death reflects the ugliness of my pride. It is me in the depths of my selfishness that I see on that cross. Now I understand. All those miracles were not just to show me his power but were to show me that he is God. And when he chose me and called me to be his disciple it wasn't to see what I could do for him, but for me to see what he would do for me. Oh Jesus, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Naked, (I) come to thee for dress, helpless, (I) look to thee for grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly, wash me, Savior or I die."