

Peter's Denial of Christ

Setting: The last Wednesday I stood we looked at Jesus being arrested and brought before Annas. We learned from studying several chapters up to this, a look at Jesus' special time with his disciples in the upper room discourse. There he taught them many things, made promises, and gave warnings of what was to come. Chapter 18 kicks us off with what Jesus had foretold would come. Having been betrayed by Judas, and bound by these Jewish soldiers, we'll look at Peter's denial.

John 18:15-18 & 25-27 - Read

For context, all of this is taking place as Jesus, who is completely guiltless, stands trial. Not long after this Jesus will be beat, have a crown of thorns placed on his head, and crucified. If there was any time for Peter to be bold, and courageous it was now.

V15-18: Prophecy coming to pass

To understand how we arrived at this scene with Peter we will go back to scripture and a setting we have already studied in John 13. In John 13 we see so many things were going on. Jesus knew that his hour had come, the devil had already put it in the heart of Judas to betray Christ, and Jesus makes 2 prophecies. A) One of them would betray him. B) Peter would deny him.

1) THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

- We cannot look at this scripture and ignore the foreknowledge of Christ. Nothing has ever taken him by surprise; not Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, even his own crucifixion, death, and resurrection. In studying this scripture, I found that some actually argue that Jesus made the statement about Peter's denial based on an assessment of Peter's character, but we know that is just not true. Did Jesus know and understand what kind of man Peter was? Yes, absolutely. Did Jesus know long beforehand what would take place regarding him and his disciples? Yes!
- I won't dive into it too much at this point in the lesson but let's give some thought to that real quick. Jesus knew long before Peter denied him that it would happen, and what did he do? He chooses Peter to be his disciple. He loved Peter anyways. I've said this a few times when I've had the opportunity to stand and teach, but the fact that God set his love on us through his Son, before we were even thought

about, its so amazing to me. I was reminded when thinking on this of **1 Cor 1:26-31** that says:

(a) For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, [not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

- God in all his Glory chose to take a fisherman, who was “uneducated”, by the standard of formal education, according to the customs of that time, and use this man to bring him Glory. (In spite of his failures)

2) THE SURRENDER OF PETER’S COURAGE

- Peter and another disciple (likely John) followed Jesus after his arrest, but Peter stood outside the door. This other disciple who was known to the high priest, got Peter in. Peter, it appears at this point, is doing what he said he would do **“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away” & “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!”** **Matt 26:33 &35.** According to the scripture, Peter and this other disciple were all that remained, and all the others had scattered. Though Peter’s intentions earlier when he cut off the high priest’s servants’ ear was incorrect, we know that Peter was determined to be true to what he had committed he would do. Peter’s stubbornness shows so many times in scripture, to which Jesus corrects him often, but his zeal does come off as genuine.

In **Matt 26:30-35; Mark 14:27-31 ; Luke 22:31-38** we see in more detail than John’s gospel, Peter’s brashness, courage, outspokenness – really we just see Peter as the disciple with the biggest personality. He is often times the first to blurt out his opinion, the first to jump into situations without questioning and the first to stick his foot in his mouth.

In Matthew 16, directly after Peter had declared Jesus to be **“The Christ the Son of the living God”**, we see him try to rebuke Jesus for telling the disciples he would go and suffer and be killed and raise on the third day. He says in Matt 16: 22: **“Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”** To which Jesus replied **“Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**

A word about Self Sufficiency

**A major danger in life is the thought of self-sufficiency (Christians and Unbelievers). Great philosophers throughout history would have us believe that one of the greatest freedoms we can have, is to only be dependent on ourselves. All around the world we celebrate people who have “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and made a way”. Who doesn’t love a good Cinderella story, right? As we read about Peter pre-resurrection, we see a man that is often brash, and extremely zealous in his..... I’ll call it “grit and ability”. As dedicated as Peter was to fishing before Christ came along, he was determined to be just as persistent in following Christ (so he thought). We love this about Peter! He was a “no holds barred” type of guy.

The great pitfall of misplaced courage and self-reliance is that it can very quickly make us look at ourselves and how “sincere or determined” we are. Sincerity and determination are both great things, but they must be kept in the proper context in our lives as Christians. We couldn’t even get out of bed this morning without God allowing us to do so. To have any confidence in our abilities and our sufficient seemingly robs God of the Glory he deserves.

Total reliance on God allows us to look outside our ourselves and then we can say with the 24 elders we read about in **Rev 4:11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created”**. As we have learned the past couple Sunday’s in the preaching in regards to the gifts, that the empowerment to do anything comes from God. The last verse in **1 Cor 11** says regarding gifts **“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.** We have probably all heard the old saying “If you want to make God laugh, tell him you plans”. Peter did believe the Lord to be worthy but like most of us in our walk with the Lord, he often got in his own way. *****Dedication often fails based on our circumstances, but what God does he does to perfection!***

My goal is not to have us all looking down our noses at Peter as we learn about his denial of Christ, but to look at the frailty of our own hearts.

When confronted by one of the high priest's maids about being one of Jesus' disciples, all that courage and boldness that Peter had crumbles. He is quick to say "I am not". That quickly, all the bold declarations he made were retracted at a simple question by a maid of the high priest. Directly after the denial we see him warming himself by the enemies fire.

We jump to V.25 a pick up with more denial. We see the progression of hardness of heart that sin brings on. We can imagine Peter with his chest puffed out when he said, "If everyone forsakes you I will not", but now we see that bold man become a coward.

As we studied a couple Wednesday's ago about the willingness of our Savior, we see that contrasted this week from Peter's unwillingness to acknowledge himself as a follower of Jesus.

-Jesus willingly allowed the band of soldiers to arrest him vs. Peter who denies his master and tries to blend in with Christ's enemies by the fire, while the Lord is not very far away being questioned and soon beaten and crucified.

-Jesus went "as a lamb to the slaughter" vs. Peter who threw in the towel and gave in to sin.

-Jesus boldly marched on to do his Father's will knowing it meant he would die soon vs Peter who cowardly backed down from all the bold things he said prior to this.

As Peter denied Jesus 2 more times in V25-27 we see that at the last denial the rooster crowed. Imagine Peter's thought process when he heard the rooster crow. "He told me this one going to happen, and it happened exactly like he said." Wow, what sorrow, embarrassment, depression he must have felt. How could he have done something so stupid? What does this teach us about Peter and ourselves?

David's Great Psalm of Repentance in Psalm 51 says in V5 "**Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.** We are sinners by birth, not by choice. You don't have to teach a child to lie you just have to give them an opportunity. Even as a believer we are capable of great sin (David and Peter being a couple examples of that).

Paul said in **Romans 7:18** “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” We so desperately need God to do the work in us because we, like Peter do not have the ability to carry it out, because “nothing good dwells in us”.

I really like this quote from Alistair Begg, he said “At best we are but clay, animated dust; but viewed as sinners, we are monsters indeed. Let it be published in heaven as a miracle that the Lord Jesus should set His heart's love upon people like us.”

About 2 or 3 years ago I was watching a documentary called the “American Gospel” for the first time. I can’t quote it exactly, but in one part of the movie a gentleman asked this question, “Why does the bible go to such drastic lengths to show the faults of its heroes of the faith?”. The answer – to show that there is only one hero of the story and it is Jesus.”.

3) THE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

- **Luke 22:31** Jesus said “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.
- Comfort from Jesus
 - **But I have prayed for you:** One thing that has been crystal clear in the later chapters of John’s gospel, is Jesus’ love and care for his own. Christ specifically prayed for Peter’s restoration in this scripture in Luke. Corporately Christ loves and cares for his own, and individually he does too!
 - **When you have turned again:** Notice he didn’t say, “I’ve prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and *hopefully* you will repent *eventually, someday.*” This is the promise that repentance of this great sin of denial will come for Peter.
 - **Strengthen your brothers:** When you have come to the realization that you are ineffective and unable in your own strength, and have repented of your faithlessness, then you can “reprove, rebuke and exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine”.

- **Peter in the book of Acts**
 - Although Peter is often remembered for his failures, we know he did in fact come to repentance. This boastful, self-confident man is recorded preaching the gospel on the Day of Pentecost and about 3,000 people were saved in Acts 2.

- Peter writing to exiles in **1 Peter 1**:
 - **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

 - **Guarded through faith & tested faith** – Peter knew this preservation and testing to be true because he experienced it first hand.

 - **Result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ** – The result of trials and faith restored is to give glory and honor to Christ. As Jesus told Peter, “When thou are converted strengthen the brethren”. Peter could preach at Pentecost and exhort the elect exiles because he had been tested, failed, and restored. God chose to use Peter’s denial for Peter’s ultimate good. Certainly Peter didn’t see it that way when the rooster crowed, but he could attest to God’s goodness and longsuffering.

A few thoughts in closing

I hope that I have not made this a history lesson about Peter, if so, that was definitely not my intention.

Don’t compare yourself to Peter and try to fashion your life after his. Christians sometimes point people to men and women in the scripture and say, “Be like that

person”. Paul did urge those in his care to “imitate him” but only so much as he imitated Christ. That is the goal.

As **1 Cor 1:31** tells us **“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord”**.

Peter’s life is an awesome story of God’s redemption, though it is often marked by his failures... But isn’t that what redemption is about? God restoring us from sinning and falling short of his glory?

3 takeaways –

- 1) God knows everything: he knew we would fall short, deny him, and sometimes do things that are just plain dumb.
- 2) Only a Perfect man can make imperfect men capable to serve and glorify God.
- 3) Jesus said in John 13 when speaking of his people, that he “loved them till the end”. He has preserved us, and is sanctifying us, and we will without a doubt reach glorification one day.