

Text: Matthew 26:69-75

Title: Peter's Denial

Truth: We learn precious lessons from Peter's sin.

Date/Location: December 7, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

Earlier in the evening, Jesus had prophesied Peter's denial (Matt. 26:34). Now it comes to pass. We know the story quite well. But what can we learn from it?

I. The Narrative

A. Peter was as physically near as one could be to the Lord at this particular time. As I indicated before, this brought him into the most challenging area of temptation—the hottest part of the fire, so to speak, because the Lord was facing the hottest persecution that someone could ever face at that time.

Now, that does not teach a general spiritual truth that you can run with—for example, you think: it must be that the closer I am to the Lord, the worse the temptation will be, so I am going to stay around the fringes of “church” and “Christian life” so I don't feel the heat too much. That's flawed thinking. All that will do is put you into a place where you will be dull to recognize sin and temptation, and you will fall to temptation *even more*, and probably you will fall into even more obvious sins. I venture to say that you will never face the heat as much as Christ did, nor as much as Peter did. But you need to be ready for the heat that you will face.

B. Peter's denial moved in three phases:

1. “You were with Jesus of Galilee.” **Peter “denied it.”** That is bad enough, but hes went farther.
 2. “This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.” **Peter denied with an oath.** An oath means he invoked something or someone, likely God, to say that it was not true what the girl was saying. Something like “swearing on the Bible” that it is not true. Fearful.
 3. “Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.” **Peter began to curse and swear, saying, “I do not know the Man!”** What a lie, and to decorate it with “salty sailor’s language” adds to the force and strength of the denial.
- C. He is really trying to distance himself from Jesus, because I suspect he is trying to distance himself from potential persecution. So it all becomes a self-centered thing, like every sin does. He does not want his reputation tarnished, or his body to suffer for Christ. He was both with Jesus and knew Him very well.
- D. The rooster crowed, just as Jesus indicated it would. This triggered Peter’s memory.
- E. Peter left the area and wept bitterly. There is a verb there: to weep. And there is an adverb there, emphasizing and highlighting the verb. It speaks of a mental agony that comes with some emotions, like weeping.
- F. Compared to Peter’s next interactions in John 21 and in early Acts, it appears that this breakdown was a significant turning point in his life. Scripture testifies that he had been saved before, at least when he said that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God in

Matthew 16:16. But this denial and then mental agony in repentance over it was the turning point that launched him into Christian ministry no matter the cost. He saw what Jesus was going through for him; he must have figured that he himself could go through some things on behalf of Jesus.

II. General Lessons for Us

- A. The strongest Christians among us can fall into egregious sin, even temporarily denying the Lord. Peter fell again into a doctrinal error in Galatians 2. We *expect* such things and the possibility of such things, rather than being taken off guard by them, because of the nature of human nature.
- B. One's real character is found after a failure when it comes time to "fess up." The real Peter did deny the Lord, but later the real Peter confessed his sin and repented. Peter could say, "sin in me did that, a man who delights in the law of God in the heart, but who finds a contrary principle at work in me that when I want to do right, I do wrong anyway." Peter was thoroughly familiar with the teaching of Romans 7 before Paul wrote it!
- C. God is *very gracious*. We see later the Lord Jesus met with Peter (Luke 24:34), the tomb-guardian angel made special mention of Peter (Mark 16:7), Jesus restores Peter (John 21:15-23), and God uses Peter mightily (much of the book of Acts as well as the letters of 1 and 2 Peter, plus church history).

Failure might make you feel like a broken vessel and give you cause for bitter weeping, but God can restore you

and if you are a believer in Jesus, He in fact *plans to do so*.

- D. Every human being will at some time or other have a measure of that feeling that Peter had. Whether in this life or as judgment unfolds in the transition to eternity, everyone will feel some measure of regret or repentance about their connection to Jesus. “I should have followed what I heard from Christians!” “I should not have dissed Jesus like I did!” Or during this life: “I have wandered far from God, now I’m coming home!”
- E. Godly sorrow that leads to repentance (Peter) is different than “got caught” regret. We will see that Judas had the latter kind and did not respond well after his failure.

Conclusion

The world will throw at us some things to trip us up. It will keep coming, as Peter experienced three times. With God’s strength, we can endure. But when failure comes—for which of us does not fail?—we can be assured God will be gracious to us like He was toward Peter.

I am saying these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one who paid for all our sins (1 John 2:1-2).

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