

John 13:36–38

36 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.”

37 Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

38 Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.

“Peter’s Promise”

John 13:36-38

At our wedding, Sharon Noll sang “O Jesus I Have Promised.” It says,

“O Jesus I have promised/ To serve Thee till the end/ Be Thou forever near me/ My Master and My friend/ I shall not fear the battle/ If Thou art by my side/ Nor wander from the Pathway/ If Thou wilt be my guide.”

I love this song, not so much because of its music, but because of the commitment contained in the lyrics. Have we promised to serve the Lord Jesus until the end? Have we promised not to wander from the pathway as long as He is the guide? Many of us have. But we have not always succeeded in keeping our promises to our Master and our friend. This is why this passage in John 13:36-38 is so important. We once again are the “fly on the wall” in the upper room listening as Jesus talks to His headstrong, but big-hearted disciple, Peter. There are two things that we need to explore in this text.

I. Peter’s Promise (v. 36-37)

II. Peter’s Problem (v. 38)

I. Peter’s Promise (v. 36-37)

A. We find Peter’s problem summarized for us in **verses 36-37**. **“Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, where are You going?’ Jesus answered, ‘Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.’”** Jesus has been talking about His impending death for quite a while now. Maybe it is because of the atmosphere of the upper room, or the strange way that Jesus has been acting, but all of a sudden the message has sunk into the disciples’ minds. So, Peter, the outspoken leader of this band, asks the question that is on everyone’s mind.

1. What do you mean you are going away Lord? Where are you going that we can't follow you? Jesus clarified just a little more than He did before. ***"Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."***

2. This answer was not only cryptic to Peter, it is cryptic to us too. What was Jesus talking about? Some see in this statement an allusion to His own cross and the fact that Peter himself, someday would die on a cross for his Lord and Savior. This is something Jesus told Peter later in ***John 21:18-19 "Verily, verily, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This He spoke, signifying by what death [Peter] would glorify God."***

3. The Lord also could have been talking about how Peter and the other disciples would in due time die and go to be with the Lord Jesus and God the Father in heaven. This is supported by the discussion that follows in John 14:1-6.

B. Whatever Jesus was saying, Peter's answer makes it clear the Lord being taken from them is far too painful for him to bear. This was why Peter blurted out a promise which he sincerely meant. ***"Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.'"*** Peter had been there when all the threats against the Lord's life were uttered. He knew how Jesus' enemies tried to stone Jesus more than once and the Lord miraculously escaped. He wanted Jesus to know that if it came down to a fight, He could count on Peter to stand fast for Him! In effect, Peter said, "Lord, if you are talking about dying, I am willing to die for you! I will not let them take you without a fight!"

1. We are prone at this point to put on our hobnailed boots and walk all over Peter! We are tempted to say things like:

(1) Peter was not sincere.

(2) He was overconfident, and he was arrogant.

(3) Further, he failed to carry through on this because he failed to pray and to ask God for help to be faithful unto death.

(4) Finally, he failed because later we find him following "far off." He wasn't walking close enough to Jesus.

2. After considering this for a while, I realized it is shortsighted. The moment these words sprang from Peter's lips, he was as sincere as he could be. He intended with all of his heart to carry through. How do we know? In ***John 18:3 and 10-11*** we read about the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus is betrayed and they come to arrest Jesus. ***"Then Judas, having received a detachment [cohort] of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. . . Then SIMON***

PETER, HAVING A SWORD, DREW IT AND STRUCK THE HIGH PRIEST'S SERVANT, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?'"

3. A cohort was a detachment of 600 men. This was no small band of men here. This is a small army! In the face of this overwhelming force, what does Peter do? He drew his sword and tried to attack the army. Why? Because Peter was a coward, right? No! Because he was sincere about dying for Jesus!

II. Peter's Problem (v. 38)

A. Knowing all things, Jesus saw the sincerity in Peter's heart and at the same time He knew the foolishness of this commitment at this point. He prepared Peter for the coming devastating disappointment. He softened the blow by telling Peter what would happen. **"Jesus answered him, 'Will you lay down your life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.'" Peter, listen to this because it is important you understand. You will fail in your desire to die for me.**

B. Why? Since, Peter was so sincere in this promise, why was he destined for failure? It is because he did not understand some things.

1. First, Peter did not understand God's plan! Let me repeat a part of what Jesus said in the garden to Peter. **"So, Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?'"** There was no point in Peter dying in defending Jesus, because it was the timeless plan of God for the Son to die for our sins. Peter's death would not change that. God had a different plan for Peter's life. Indeed, someday the promise that Peter made would be kept. Peter would lay down his life on behalf of his Lord and Savior! But not before the Lord would use him greatly!

2. Second, like Job, Peter did not know what was happening in the realm that he could not see! Listen to a detail Luke supplied. **Luke 22:31-34 "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.' But he said to Him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.' Then He said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.'"**

Satan was involved in all of this in a big way. Satan had asked God the Father for permission to severely shake Peter up. It appears God the Father granted Satan's request. Why? First, so that Peter would learn a lesson about how weak he really was. Second, so that we could learn the same lesson through Peter's

experience. Third, so God would be glorified through Satan's failure in destroying Peter.

We too need to recognize that we do not know what is going on behind the scenes in the unseen reality. Satan may be right now in the presence of God asking for permission to shake up your life. Let me show you a passage that has long intrigued me. ***Ephesians 3:8-11*** ***"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** If I understand what Paul is saying in these verses, he is telling us some things God is doing in His church, the Lord is doing so the angels can see His multi-faceted wisdom and glorify Him. How many things in our lives happen for the same reason?

3. Third, Peter did not understand how important the principle of grace is in our lives. You see, Peter did not understand the warning Paul wrote in ***Romans 12:3*** at the head of his instructions for serving the Lord Jesus. Paul wrote: ***"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."*** At this point, Peter was thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think.

Jesus was going to teach His disciples on the road to the Garden a valuable truth which Peter hadn't grasped. ***John 15:5*** ***"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."***

If we are going to successfully serve the Lord, it is only by the grace of God. Let me close by reading a passage in ***1 Corinthians 15:8-10***. ***"Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*** Paul wrote in effect, the blessing of being an apostle and the work that I have accomplished is not a product of who I am or what I can do. Rather, it is all because of the Grace of God given to me. To God be the glory!

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