

To Seek and to Save the Lost

Peter Denies Jesus

Luke 22:54-62

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Scripture

On Thursday night, Nisan 15, 30 AD Jesus had his last Passover meal with his twelve apostles. He also instituted the first Lord's Supper. After a lengthy meal, which included discussion, teaching, and prayer, Jesus and the eleven apostles went to the Mount of Olives, where they planned to spend the night. When they arrived, Jesus went further and spent time in prayer before Judas came and betrayed him to the religious authorities. Jesus was arrested and led away, and at this point we learn about Peter's denial of Jesus.

Let's read about Peter's denial of Jesus in Luke 22:54-62:

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54-62)

Introduction

In 1995, an American scientist named Clifford Stoll boldly predicted that the Internet would be just another passing fad. He wrote

an article for *Newsweek* titled, “The Internet? Bah!” Here’s what Stoll said in an interview with Minnesota Public Radio:

I expect the value of the Internet for communications in general isn’t very high. I don’t think it will ever replace face to face meetings and real rallies – things that get commitment and involvement from people. Rather, it induces a very shallow. . . involvement and as such, I think it’s grossly over-promoted and there’s a great deal of hyperbole surrounding it.

I think it’s grossly oversold and within two or three years people will shrug and say, “Uh yep, it was a fad of the early 90’s and now, oh yeah, it still exists but hey, I’ve got a life to lead and work to do. I don’t have time to waste online.” Or, “I’ll collect my email, I’ll read it, why should I bother prowling around the Worldwide Web. . .” simply because there’s so little of value there.¹

Well, Stoll presumed to know what would happen with the Internet, and he was, of course, very wrong!

When Jesus was with his apostles in the furnished Upper Room having the last Passover meal and first Lord’s Supper, he told Peter that Satan had demanded to have him, that he might sift him like wheat. But, Jesus said, he had prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail him. In reply, Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33). Peter was completely sincere. He did not think that his faith would fail him. But that was a very dangerous presumption, as we shall learn. For Peter’s faith did fail him. And as Jesus predicted, before the rooster crowed later that morning, Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus.

Commentator Kent Hughes notes, “We often see this kind of presumption in a naturally gifted athlete who finds it hard to listen to coaching advice because he feels no need. Sadly, the sidelines are strewn with has-beens who refused to learn from the wisdom of others and never developed the technique and understanding they needed. Perceived natural strength can be a disadvantage – especially

¹ Molly Bloom, “The Internet will be a fad, claimed scientist in ‘95,” MPR News (2-16-12).

in spiritual matters.”²

We are in great spiritual danger when we think that we are beyond ability to fail. Peter presumed that his faith would never fail him, and that he would follow Jesus to prison and even to death. And he said this after Jesus had warned him that Satan demanded to have him and sift him like wheat. That is massive presumption about his ability to follow Jesus in his own power.

Lesson

Peter’s denial of Jesus in Luke 22:54-62 shows us the danger of following Jesus in our own power.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Path to the Denials (22:54-55)
2. The Particulars in the Denials (22:56-60a)
3. The Pain in the Denials (22:60b-62)

I. The Path to the Denials (22:54-55)

First, let’s look at the path to the denials.

Judas led a band of religious leaders and soldiers to Jesus on the Mount of Olives. There he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. **Then** the soldiers **seized** Jesus **and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house** (22:54a). Caiaphas was the current **high priest**, and he most likely shared a home with his father-in-law, Annas, who had previously served as high priest. Commentator William Hendriksen suggests that the high priest’s house may have looked as follows:

Such a house looks into its own interior: that is, its rooms are built around an *open* courtyard. An arched passage leads from the heavy outside *door* or (better) *gate* into this inner court. In this passage there is a place (in some houses a little room) for the gate-keeper.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 349.

Sometimes, as also in the present instance, the court was *lower* than the rooms which ranged around it. It is not entirely impossible that the room to which Jesus had been led was a kind of gallery, from which what happened in the court could be seen and heard.³

Though all the other apostles deserted Jesus and fled after his arrest, **Peter** – and another apostle, most likely John (John 18:15) – **was following Jesus at a distance** (22:54b). Because John was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So John went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in to the courtyard (John 18:15-16). **And when** the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against Jesus (see Luke 22:52) **had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them** (22:55).

Peter was **following** Jesus, even if **at a distance**. Commentator Philip Ryken says, “This was one of Peter’s best moments, right up there with walking on water (however briefly) and confessing Jesus as the Christ. Peter wanted to go farther than anyone else down the road that Jesus walked to the cross.”⁴ So far, so good. Peter wanted to make good on his promise to follow Jesus to prison and even to death.

But things went downhill from there.

II. The Particulars in the Denials (22:56-60a)

Second, let’s examine the particulars in the denials.

Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed that morning (Luke 22:34). And that is exactly what happened. Peter denied Jesus three times.

Let’s look at each of Peter’s three denials.

³ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 993.

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 525.

A. *A Denial of Association (22:56-57)*

The first denial is the denial of association.

By looking at the Gospel accounts, it is clear that there were a number of people gathered in the courtyard of the high priest's house. Most likely there were soldiers, chief priests, officers of the temple, elders, and servants who had gathered together. Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself (John 18:18). **Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him" (22:56).**

We are not told how the **servant girl** knew that Peter was with Jesus. However, given Jesus' immense popularity with the people and Peter's prominence as Jesus' apostle, it is very likely that she had seen Peter with Jesus, perhaps even earlier in the week.

Maybe Peter was surprised by the **servant girl's** statement that he was with Jesus. Immediately, however, **he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him" (22:57).** That was, of course, a bald-faced lie. Peter denied any association with Jesus.

One has to ask how Peter came to deny any association with Jesus? Bishop J. C. Ryle gives an excellent answer, to which we do well to pay heed:

The various steps in Peter's fall are clearly marked out by the Gospel-writers. They ought always to be observed in reading this part of the apostle's history. The first step was proud self-confidence. Though all men denied Christ, yet he never would! He was ready to go with him both to prison and to death! The second step was indolent neglect of prayer. When his Master told him to pray, lest he should enter into temptation, he gave way to drowsiness, and was found asleep. The third step was vacillating indecision. When the enemies of Christ came upon him, Peter first fought, then ran away, then turned again, and finally "followed afar off." The fourth step was mingling with bad company. He went into the high priest's house and sat among the servants by the fire, trying to conceal his religion, and hearing and seeing

all manner of evil. The fifth and last step was the natural consequence of the preceding four. He was overwhelmed with fear when suddenly charged with being a disciple. The snare was round his neck. He could not escape. He plunged deeper into error than ever.⁵

Ryle's analysis is so helpful. One does not deny Jesus for no reason. No, there is a process that leads to a denial. First, proud self-confidence. Second, indolent neglect of prayer. Third, vacillating indecision. Fourth, mingling with bad company. And fifth, overwhelming fear when suddenly charged with being a disciple of Jesus. Ryle concludes his analysis by saying, "The denial was only the disease coming to a head."⁶

Great sin is always the result of not dealing with smaller sins. Listen to Ryle's application, which is helpful to each one of us:

Let us beware of the beginnings of backsliding, however small. We never know what we may come to, if we once leave the king's highway. The professing Christian who begins to say of any sin or evil habit, "it is but a little one," is in imminent danger. He is sowing seeds in his heart, which will one day spring up and bear bitter fruit. It is a homely saying, that "if men take care of the pence the pounds will take care of themselves." We may borrow a good spiritual lesson from the saying. The Christian who keeps his heart diligently in little things shall be kept from great falls.⁷

B. A Denial of Discipleship (22:58)

The second denial is a denial of discipleship.

After Peter's first denial of knowing Jesus, I imagine him and the others sitting around the charcoal fire with some awkwardness. Peter probably did not make eye contact with anyone. He just looked at the fire, or perhaps up at the gallery, where Jesus was being interrogated by Caiaphas. **And a little later someone else saw Peter and said,**

⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 436.

⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 436.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 436–437.

“You also are one of them” (22:58a).

Again, we are not told how the man knew that Peter was with Jesus. However, it was not only that Peter was with Jesus, but now the accusation was that Peter was **one of them**. That is, the accusation was that Peter was a disciple of Jesus. Now for the second time, **Peter said, “Man, I am not” (22:58b)**. Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus.

This is an astonishing denial. Peter had been specially chosen and called by Jesus to be one of his twelve apostles. He had been with Jesus for three years. He was the clear leader of the apostles. He had walked on water, and he was the first to confess that Jesus was “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20). He was warned earlier in the evening by Jesus of the danger he faced from Satan. He protested loudly that he would follow Jesus to prison and even to death. And yet, his courage completely failed him when the environment became hostile, and he was accused of being a disciple of Jesus.

The lesson for us is that the best of saints is prone to failure. Bishop Ryle makes the following application for us:

When we read the falls of Noah, Lot, and Peter, we only read what might possibly befall any of ourselves. Let us never presume. Let us never indulge in high thoughts about our own strength, or look down upon others. Whatever else we pray for, let us daily pray that we may “walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8).⁸

C. A Denial of Speech (22:59-60a)

The third denial is a denial of speech.

Jesus’ interrogation by Caiaphas, and perhaps now even by Anas, was continuing. Peter was still in the courtyard, following what was going on with Jesus. Maybe Peter thought accusations about his association with Jesus and being a disciple of Jesus had been put to rest. However, **after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too**

⁸ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 437–438.

is a Galilean” (22:59).

This time the accusation about Peter being with Jesus was made on the basis of his speech. Peter, like Jesus, was from Galilee, and he spoke with the same accent as Jesus. **But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about” (22:60a).** Peter denied that his speech identified him as a follower of Jesus.

John Butler says, “Our speech says much about our life.”⁹ Of course, he does not mean it in the sense of an accent, as in the case of Peter. He means it in the sense of how and what we say as followers of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we talk with someone and we can sense in the way they speak that there is something different about them. And very often we learn that they are fellow disciples of Jesus.

So, speak as a follower of Jesus Christ. As Paul said to the Colossian Christians, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:6).

III. The Pain in the Denials (22:60b-62)

Finally, notice the pain in the denials.

Peter’s words were hardly out of his mouth, **and immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter (22:60b-61a).** Ryle says, “Surrounded by bloodthirsty and insulting enemies, in the full prospect of horrible outrages, an unjust trial, and a painful death, the Lord Jesus yet found time to think kindly of his poor erring disciple. Even then he would have Peter know, he did not forget him. Sorrowfully no doubt, but not angrily, he ‘turned and looked upon Peter.’ There was a deep meaning in that look. It was a sermon which Peter never forgot.”¹⁰

As Jesus looked at him, **Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times” (22:61b).** All his self-confidence was

⁹ John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: Luke* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2009), 427.

¹⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 438.

gone, all his bravado was gone, and all his presumption was gone. He got up from the warm charcoal fire, left the courtyard, **and he went out and wept bitterly** (22:62). He found out from personal experience the truth of the prophet Jeremiah's words, "Have you not brought this upon yourself by forsaking the Lord your God, when he led you in the way?" (Jeremiah 2:17). He keenly felt the truth of Solomon's proverb, "The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways" (Proverbs 14:14). And surely he could say with Job, "Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

Once again, I want to quote Bishop Ryle, who helps us to understand the difference between remorse and repentance:

Sorrow like this, let us always remember, is an inseparable companion of true repentance. Here lies the grand distinction between "repentance unto salvation," and unavailing remorse. Remorse can make a man miserable, like Judas Iscariot, but it can do no more. It does not lead him to God. Repentance makes a man's heart soft and his conscience tender, and shows itself in real turning to a Father in heaven. The falls of a graceless professor are falls from which there is no rising again. But the fall of a true saint always ends in deep contrition, self-abasement, and amendment of life.¹¹

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Peter's denial of Jesus in Luke 22:54-62, we should remember that Jesus is always willing to restore us when we repent of our sin.

When Jesus warned Peter that Satan had demanded to have him, that he might sift him like wheat, Jesus said two further things to Peter. First, Jesus said to Peter, "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32a). Although Peter sinned by denying Jesus, his faith did not fail. He repented, and he did so because Jesus had prayed for him.

And second, Jesus said to Peter, "And when you have turned

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 439.

again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32b). Jesus died about twelve hours after Peter’s three denials and bitter weeping. He was buried in Joseph’s tomb, and was there until Sunday morning. Then, he rose from the dead.

We know that Peter was with the rest of the disciples, no doubt sad at the death of Jesus, and bitterly repentant over his own denial of Jesus. What was going through his mind? Was he thinking about how massive his failure was? Was he wishing that he could have done things differently? We don’t know. We do know that early on Sunday morning the women came back from the tomb to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive! Peter and John raced to the tomb and saw that it was empty. We also know from the disciples who were walking to Emmaus that Jesus had appeared to Peter sometime later on that same day, Sunday (Luke 24:34).

Later, Jesus met the disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Peter reaffirmed his love for Jesus three times – one for each of the three times he had denied Jesus. In response, Jesus commissioned Peter to care for his sheep, the Church, like a good shepherd (see John 21:15-19).

And that is exactly what Peter did. His fearful denials of Jesus turned into a bold proclamation of the truth. On the night of Jesus’ betrayal and arrest, Peter was afraid to let a servant girl – and others – know that he was a disciple of Jesus. But within weeks he was proclaiming the good news of the gospel to any who would listen. Peter was restored to service because of his repentance.

Have you fallen into sin? Know that Jesus will do the same gracious work of forgiveness in your life too. Let me conclude with these words from Bishop J. C. Ryle, “Let us learn from [Peter’s] sad experience, to watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. If we do fall, let us believe that there is hope for us as there was for him. But above all, let us remember, that if we fall as Peter fell, we must repent as Peter repented, or else we shall never be saved.”¹² Amen.

¹² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 439–440.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the narrative of Peter's denials of Jesus.

We know that we are guilty of the same sin too. Jesus, we deny that we know you. We never speak of you to anyone. People around us do not know that we have a relationship with you.

We also deny that we are your disciples. People around us do not know that we worship with brothers and sisters in Christ. They would be surprised to learn that we read the Bible, pray, serve others, and worship you on the Lord's Day.

We also deny you by our speech. Our talk does not give evidence that we are children of the light. Our speech is not gracious, seasoned with salt.

O Jesus, will you enable us to repent? Will you forgive us, as you forgave Peter? And will you restore us to service, as you restored Peter to service?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!