

Luke 22:54-62

54 Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance.

55 Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.

56 And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This man was also with Him."

57 But he denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him."

58 And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

59 Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean."

60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

You are all probably well aware from reading the Bible that if there is a lesson that the Lord really wants to teach us, he repeats it several times. Well this is apparently one of the lessons that the Lord wants us to learn, because the sad story of Peter's threefold denial of Christ is repeated in all four of the gospel accounts. Ok, so God wants you to learn from it. But what does He want you to learn.

Well we can come at the story from a very shallow angle and simply shake our heads and say "*tsk, tsk, naughty Peter! How could you deny that you even knew Jesus?*" But that keeps the story conveniently at arms length, and is in fact the kind of analysis that a hypocrite would give. What I believe you need to do is to get into the story, and realize that as uncomfortable as it makes you "*that's me as well*" not in the same way perhaps and hopefully not as completely. But once you have done that, you learn some invaluable lessons about God's grace and mercy.

What happened here? Well, Christ has been arrested in the garden, and the same Peter who had declared "*Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.*" Had forsaken Jesus with the other disciples and fled into the darkness. He apparently doubles back though, and is brave enough to follow the band at a distance as they take Jesus back to the High Priest's House.

Now we know from John's gospel that one of the disciples, probably John, was apparently "known to the high priest" and was able to go in to the courtyard of the high priest when Jesus was let in. He speaks with the servant girl who watched the door, and brings in Peter with him.

He is let inside, and the door is closed behind him and the bolt is thrown and Peter is now smack dab in the middle of the enemy's fortress. He apparently tried to simply mingle or fit in with those who were already in the court yard, so he goes and stands with them by the fire. But then to his horror, the servant girl recognizes him. She had probably seen Peter with Jesus while he was preaching in the temple and she calls him out. *This man also was with him!*

What does Peter do? Keep in mind this is the same Peter who heard every sermon, who witnessed every miracle, who was with Jesus on the mountaintop when his glory was revealed, and who had

declared he was willing to go with Jesus both to prison and to death! Now's your big chance Peter! Your moment to shine. So what does he say? ***“Woman, I do not know Him”***

Has that ever happened to you? I don't mean have you ever been in the courtyard of the high priest's house and a servant girl accused you of being a disciple. I mean have you ever been presented by the world with an opportunity to shine for Christ, to take up your cross and follow him? You are presented with that singular moment in time, and it's almost like there's an audible trumpet fanfare, and... you blow it. The trumpet fanfare suddenly sounds like the band marched off a cliff. A moment of extreme temptation when the correct answer would have been, ***“I'm sorry I can't do that, I'm a Christian”*** or a conversation on spiritual or ethical matters where no one ever became aware that you were a follower of Jesus or worse were they would have assumed exactly the opposite from your speech or actions?

Have you ever stopped to consider the fact that almost without exception, the bible shows us how all of the great heroes of the faith stumbled and fell into great sin in essence denying what they knew by their actions.

Abraham who lies and says that He is Sarah's sister and not her husband, because he is afraid that a king will kill him and take her. This happens not once but twice, and in doing this, Abraham is essentially denying his belief in the promises of God towards him. Noah, who drinks himself into an unconscious stupor. Moses who disobeys the commands of the Lord and makes out that he is the one who gives water to Israel, striking the rock instead of speaking to it. David who steals the wife of one of his own most faithful men, and then conceals the crime by having him killed. And on and on and on.

These are not unbelievers. All of them were men who knew the Lord first hand, who had spoken with him just as I am speaking with you now, who knew his power and his promises, and yet who in moments of temptation and sometimes just out of base fear committed terrible sins.

In that we are reminded that no believer, no matter how high or exalted he may be, is incapable of falling into great sin. As JC Ryle soberly put it: ***“the best and highest saint is a poor, weak creature even at his best times. Whether he knows it or not, he carries within him an almost boundless capacity of wickedness, however fair and decent his outward conduct may seem. There is no enormity of sin into which he may not run if he does not watch and pray and find himself upheld by the grace of God.”***

We need to be reminded of that lest we fall into the trap of believing that we could somehow save ourselves, or reach a point where we are above sinning, no longer subject to temptation. Stories like Peter's should expose how ridiculous the notion that we can be saved by “Keeping Covenant” with the Lord really is. No mere man, not even the best, can do it perfectly. It should also remind us to avoid hero worship. The real hero of the bible was not Peter, but the one whom Peter denied on that night. *[And that is critically important brothers and sisters, because I have seen the faith of men rocked when their heroes fell into terrible sin. Worse, I have seen men and women going to ridiculous lengths to protect their heroes from church discipline because it just seems inconceivable that such an exalted individual could have fallen. A while back World Magazine had a shocking article detailing how commonplace it is for churches to drive out the sheep who was sinned against instead of the wolf]*

Well, in the courtyard that night, Peter's denied Jesus not just once, but as he fled from place to place seeking perhaps to hide himself from any who might recognize him he denied him 2 more times, and each time his denials became more vehement. Matthew tells us that the second time he denied knowing

Jesus, he did so with an oath. That is he swore before God that he didn't know Jesus. And then the final time, when his accent gave him away as a Galilean, and why else would a Galilean from way up north in the sticks, have been in that courtyard in the middle of Jerusalem, he began cursing and swearing. After the first denial, it got worse, not better. And that too should remind us, that sinning is progressive, the more we do it, the lower we will be willing to go.

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

But how does it all end? Peter denies Jesus for the third time, and then Christ, the compassionate one turns to look at Peter, but not obviously in an "I told you so" kind of way. Although Christ had told him so. I know from personal experience, there is no satisfaction that comes when a shepherd, who has warned a sheep against continuing in the course that they are on, sees what they feared coming come to pass. Only at that point sorrow, and a desire to see the person come to repentance.

Well the look that Jesus gave Peter was worth a thousand sermons, and immediately Peter runs out and weeps, but these are not the same hopeless and self-pitying tears that Judas shed. Peter weeps for his sins, weeps for his weakness and foolishness, weeps out of conviction. Those bitter tears, as agonizing as they are were the first steps on the road to restoration. Sadly that full restoration that Peter had from the Savior isn't recorded in this gospel, you'll find it recorded in John chapter 21 at the scene of the breakfast by the sea after Jesus rose again. 3 times Jesus asks Peter "do you love me" paralleling the 3 base denials in the courtyard, and three times, Peter then answers that He knew that He loved Him.

Peter is restored, but he is restored because unlike Judas, He truly loved and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and because Jesus had been praying for him – Peter persevered even through this lowest of all moments. It is as Christ prophesied in Luke 22:32 ***"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."***

Well what applications can we draw from this, I want to suggest 4

How did Peter fall so low:

- 1) Vain Self-Confidence (pride) – "This can never happen to me"
- 2) Failure to Watch and Pray (lack of attendance on the means of grace) – "not important"
- 3) Bad Company – This third can hardly be avoided, as Paul put it to entirely avoid the immoral we would ***"need to go out of the world"*** But mix 1 & 2 with 3 and you have a deadly cocktail that will inevitably lead to Sin. Also simply trying to remove item three without 1 & 2 WILL NEVER WORK! Parents take heed.

APPLICATION FOR KIDS – COLLEGE!

- 4) From this account I want us to learn mercy – Here we have a brother in Christ who fell in the same sin, not once, but three times. Will we not extend mercy then to our brothers and sisters in Christ who fall into sin? I don't mean indulgence, I mean mercy.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual **restore** such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Yes Peter sinned, but what was Jesus doing in that courtyard that night anyway? Preparing to pay the price for all of the sins of his Sheep. Even Peter's denials! Even your sins, the ones you'll commit tomorrow included. Brothers and Sisters, the two categories the world is divided into are not THE SINLESS AND THE SINNERS, It is SINNERS WHO HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE and SINNERS WHO HAVE NOT. So lay aside all pride. If you haven't gone to Savior yet, the way is clear. Run to him now. If you have, then take heed of Peter's trial and watch and pray, and be ready to extend mercy far and wide.