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How the Disciple Became the Denier; Matt 26:69-75

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Introduction – A disciple is a follower of Christ, and a denier is one who claims no affiliation whatsoever. Two totally different positions. How do you go from being a disciple to being a denier? How do you move from announcing that you are willing to die with Jesus to denying you even know Him? How do you get from a faith full of zeal for the Lord to what seems to be no faith at all? How do you get to the place in your Christian journey that you actually do what you said you would never do? This is the lesson we learn today from Simon Peter.

If we did not already know Peter would be the disciple to deny Jesus, we would have never guessed it would be him. We would have more likely said it must be one of those disciples you never really hear a lot about. One of the less significant ones. Surely it couldn't be the frontman, the spokesman! Look at Peter. Rugged and tough and stout. This man once carried a net filled with 153 fish by himself. I mean we could call Simon Peter, Samson Peter. This is the one who boldly declared his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. His was a courageous faith. This is the one, out of all the disciples, that drew his sword and took a swipe at the mob when they arrived in the garden. Peter alone tried to fight back. No, there's no way he will ever deny Christ. And yet, the strongest among them became the weakest among them. How did this happen?

That is the great lesson for every one of us today. If Simon Peter can fall back in his faith, so can we. And it's actually an easier fall to take than we may think. Apart from the grace of God, we could all become deniers of Christ. That's why Paul calls the Christian life a fight of faith, a race to run, a call to discipline ourselves for godliness. Spiritual life in a world filled with spiritual death is nothing short of spiritual war. So let's see together how this occurred in Peter's life and pray for God's grace to keep us from slipping down the same path in our own lives.

- I. Small Steps in the Wrong Direction (vv69-70)
 - a. When we find ourselves miles away from Jesus, it doesn't happen with one large step. It happens when we begin to take little, small steps in the wrong direction.

- b. Look at v58. Now look at v69. Do you see Peter's physical location? His physical location is a sign of his spiritual location. First, he was inside the courtyard. Now he's outside the courtyard. V58 said he was following Jesus at a distance.
- i. The first step in the wrong direction for Peter was that he created a little distance between him and Jesus. And then he created a little more distance between him and Jesus. And that put him in the wrong spiritual direction.
 - ii. Why the distance? It was a little safer for Peter to keep some distance between him and Christ. He took a few small steps away from Jesus for his own ease and safety.
 - iii. That's why we often begin taking small steps in the wrong direction – away from Christ – create a little distance between us and the way, the truth, and the life. It's safer to go along with the crowd rather than oppose the crowd. When our friends are denying truth and denying Christ, it's easier and more comfortable to walk with them and allow a little distance from Christ. Sometimes our faith in the gospel will be costly. It's safer in those times to take a few steps away from Christ. What we don't realize at the time, steps away from Christ, a little distance from Christ, is going to cost us far more than keeping in step with Christ and counting the cost.
- c. But there's another small step Peter takes in the wrong direction in v70. He told a little lie. Maybe he thought if I denounce it now in a fuzzy kind of way, I'll put this behind me. Small step for comfort and safety in the wrong direction. Here's the thing about little lies. They are never satisfied on their own. They are always seeking the company of bigger lies to take the spotlight.
- i. That my friends is the temptation for us when our faith is called into question, or the Scripture is brought up in conversation, or someone asks does your church really believe that? So you think this is a sin? Do you believe Jesus is the only Savior? How easy it becomes to take that small step and say I don't think so, I don't believe that. Well, not really.
- d. Small steps away from Jesus begin when we allow a little distance in our relationship with Christ and when we fudge the truth a little to stay comfortable outside the courtyard.

- II. Continue to Follow the Wrong Path (vv71-72)
 - a. Once you establish the trajectory of distance and being ashamed of the truth, it becomes increasingly difficult to change course. The easiest thing to do, is to continue to follow the wrong path.
 - b. That's exactly what Peter does here. Notice first, he's created even more distance between him and Jesus. Now he goes out to the entrance.
 - i. A little distance will begat a greater distance, just as drawing closer to Jesus will begat greater communion with Christ. Little things, little compromises, lead to greater compromises. When we allow this one thing to take priority over worship, soon something else will take priority over worship. When we grow lax in our personal time with God, soon we will neglect private worship altogether. When we give room to a little sin in our hearts, soon more sin and greater sin will follow. When we tweak God's Word on this point to suit us, soon we will tweak another point to suit us. And the distance grows.
 - c. But it wasn't just the trajectory of distance was it? He had to tell another lie to attempt to reinforce and reassure his previous lie. Small lies begat bigger lies. A fuzzy denial becomes an outright denial – I do not know the man. That's a whole lot more than just I don't know what you mean.
 - i. The same happens in our spiritual lives as the distance grows between us and Christ. Those little steps continue until where we are looks nothing like a follower of Christ. It happens. And it's happened to you, and maybe even someone here today. Just like Peter, recent actions and words of your own life give no indication that you are a true follower of Christ.
 - d. There's another progression taking place here. The circle of consequence has grown along with the distance. The further Peter got away from Christ, the greater the number of people took notice. Now it's not just the guards and a servant girl. Now it's two servant girls and a group of bystanders.
 - i. Someone is watching and listening to our lives. It may be our children. It may be our friends, our co-workers. Are we convincing them that Christ is the greatest treasure, worth everything or are we convincing them otherwise?

III. Commit to the Wrong Way

- a. If you stay on this path away from Christ, at some point you have to commit to it, and that's where we find Peter in vv73-75.
- b. Peter is now farther away from Jesus than he's ever been. He has placed himself in a position from which he sees no way out. If he admits he knows Christ, he's going to die too. So he commits to the wrong way and digs in his heels. With curses and swearing, he denies Christ as forcefully as one can ever deny Christ.
- c. And the rooster crowed. And the words of Christ echoed in his heart. And he ran and he wept bitterly.
- d. You see the distance from Christ cost him far more. The safety and ease it promised did not come. For he has now moved from disciple to denier. Looking back, he would give anything to have stayed with Christ and never took that first little step.
- e. The same is true for us. If we are true believers committing to the wrong way, the time will come when God will awaken us from our slumber and it will hit hard on us just how far we have gone from Christ. And we would do anything to never take that first step away.

Conclusion - How do we respond today? For some of us, we have never truly given our lives to Christ, never truly surrendered to Him as our Lord and Savior. We made a decision, but it wasn't to follow Christ. We were baptized, but it wasn't to mark the beginning of a new life. We went through the motions, but we never came to Christ. Now is the time. Today is the day.

For some of us, as believers, we have drifted away. Sin has crept in. Compromise here has led to compromise there and today we are as far from Christ as we have ever been, just like Peter. So what do we do?

1. Close the gap. Do away with the distance. Repent and confess sin. Return to your Savior and Lord. Run back to Christ. Get rid of the sin. Do away with the temptation. Stop the compromise. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you! Close the gap. Don't go down the wrong path one more step!
2. Count the cost. Quit being ashamed of the truth. Start proclaiming the gospel. Stand for righteousness. Renew your passion for Christ. Rekindle your faith. If you will look back to Christ, you will find Him looking for you!