

Luke 22:31-24; 54-62

The Pain of Denying the Lord

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly (vv. 61,62).

Peter and Paul both would have had incredible and life-changing memories of their experiences with Christ. Peter recounts the time in his 2nd epistle when he beheld the glory of Christ in the mount of transfiguration. *We were eyewitnesses of his majesty* he writes in 2Pet. 1:16 *For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.*

And Paul could never forget his Damascus road experience when he beheld Christ in a blinding revelation of His glory. He would refer to that experience on numerous occasions before the Jews and before King Agrippa. *Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me* he says in Acts 26:12,13

As great as these Apostles were, however, there would also be very painful memories that they could never forget. Paul would never forget or get over the fact that he had been a persecutor of the church, and hence a persecutor of Christ Himself. *For I am the least of the apostles, he writes in 1Cor. 15:9 that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

Peter's painful memory would have been the memory of what our text this morning records – that he denied his Lord 3 times. And while we have no recollections on his part of those denials in the book of Acts or in his epistles yet we do have the account of the immediate impact of his denials upon him when the Lord turned and looked at him and he remembered the word of the Lord how he would deny Him thrice before the cock crowed that day. It says in the next verse that *he went out and wept bitterly* (v. 62). Makes me wonder what thoughts would have gone through Peter's mind in the after years every time he heard a cock crow.

We certainly see with these men as we do with just about every character in the Bible that they are fallible and they're sinners. *Even the best of men are but men at best*, Spurgeon once said. And if this is true of Peter and Paul and other characters of the Bible that we regard as great and godly men, how much more regarding ourselves? How often do you deny the Lord? There's a sense, you know, in which every time you sin you do just what Peter did – you deny the Lord.

You deny His Word and His law. And though you don't use Peter's words you say practically – *I don't know him*. How can you know Him and sin? How can you believe in

Him and still practically deny Him in so many ways? And if our sins and our practical denials are not astonishing enough, what is even more astonishing is Christ's response to our practical denials. How did He react to Peter's denial? It is true, we read it in our text that He turned and looked at Peter. And who can imagine the impact of such a look coming from Christ? But as we'll see in the course of our meditation this morning, that was not the only thing Christ did.

So this is what I want to think on this morning in preparation for the Lord's table.

The Lord's Mind and Actions Toward Our Denials of Him

Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice – v. 61. Let's think first of all on the truth that:

I. The Lord Foresees our Denials

Peter's denial was predicted by the Lord. *I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me* (v. 34). Peter didn't see his denials coming. Quite the opposite – he was quite sure that he'd be faithful to his Lord even to the point of dying with him and dying for him, no matter what anyone or everyone else did. *Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death* he boldly announced in v. 33. Matthew adds this detail in his gospel *Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended* (Mt. 26:33).

There must have been something contagious in Peter's bold resolution. So we read in Mt 26:35 *Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.* And yet it's the Lord who knows the end from the beginning and it's the Lord Jesus who is able to foresee and predict what will actually happen. And the Lord not only predicted Peter's denials but He also predicted how they all would forsake Him and flee. Joh 16:32 *Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*

And so we may affirm this morning that the Christ we worship and serve is God. Only God is omniscient; only God could know and predict the things would happen to the disciples. And we should note this morning that God knows the end from the beginning on a very broad scale.

He foresaw the sin of man before He even created man and the solution for man's sin was already in place – it was Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). He knew the sinful direction that the nation of Israel would eventually go. This is the emphasis in the major prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. They all place a very strong emphasis on the fate of Israel and Judah and it fell out to them just as the Lord said it would.

And Christ Himself predicted the downfall of Jerusalem again. *For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, 44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.* (Lk. 19:42-44).

It's comforting to know that Christ sees the big picture, especially so when we only see what's immediately before us. We see wickedness today like we've never seen it and we see it on a worldwide scale. It would be tempting to think that the forces of wickedness are going to prevail and this temptation becomes all the stronger when we walk by sight instead of by faith. Know, therefore, that the One who knew in advance Adam's sin, and Israel's captivity and Jerusalem's destruction and Peter's denials and the disciples being scattered also knows that His own cause prevails in the end. He sees the big picture.

But more to the point of our meditation this morning, Christ also sees every detail within that big picture. Peter's specific sin did not catch Christ by surprise. He saw it coming and He foretold it. And just as He saw Peter's denials coming He also saw what the result of those denials would be toward Peter. It's in this connection that He issues His warning to Peter in v. 31 *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.*

What does it mean to be sifted as wheat by the devil? The Lord shows us what it means when He goes on to say in v. 32 *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.* When the guilt of your own sin grips you hard and the devil himself like a roaring lion seeks to use the leverage of your sin to devour you, it's with this aim in view – that you lose faith. That's what makes your observance of the Lord's supper so important this morning. For this is where you reaffirm faith.

This is where you say through your partaking of these elements *I do believe, I will believe that Jesus died for me; that on the cross He shed His blood, from sin to set me free.* So take heart this morning dear Christian. It's good that you feel the weight of your sin. You have cause for concern when you're not bothered by your sin. But know this – your sin never catches Christ off guard. He saw your sin coming. He knew your sin. He could foresee it and predict it and still He set His mind and heart on you.

I have no doubt that Peter's denials of Christ would have a permanent impact on Peter. He undoubtedly attained a level of humility that he never knew before. But it wasn't the end for Peter. His faith would not fail, and neither will yours. The same Lord and Christ, you see, that prayed for Peter, prays for you and His intercession is the same. He prays that your faith will not fail. And He sets before you these elements to remember Him by that your remembrance of His broken body and shed blood and the purpose for which His body was broken and His blood was shed may be with you at all times.

So that's my first observation from the text – the Lord foresees our sins. Let's think next on the truth that:

II. The Lord is Effected by Our Denials

Only Luke records this detail about Peter's denials that is found in v. 61 *And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter*. I don't know of any statement in the Bible that so compels me to feel sorry for Peter as this statement.

Think about it in its setting. Christ has been apprehended and is being interrogated. The bloodthirsty council of the High Priest is determined to be rid of Him. They're hurling insults at Him. This was their hour and the power of darkness. And it's in the setting of this interrogation and these abuses and blasphemous insults that we read that *the Lord turned and looked upon Peter*.

Could the Lord hear Peter's denials? Was He in earshot of Peter when Peter said *Woman, I know Him not* (v. 57). The account given in Matthew's gospel seems to suggest that Peter's denials became louder and more intense as one maid after another accused him of being with Jesus. This crescendo of denials culminates in the statement of Mt. 26:74 *Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew*.

Perhaps he wasn't immediately within earshot of Christ but became so loud in his denials that they could be heard from quite a distance. At any rate, Christ, in the midst of all the other blasphemous insults He was being subjected to would turn and look upon Peter and that look from Christ would bring to his mind the word that Christ had earlier spoken *Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice* (v. 61).

It shows us, doesn't it, that Christ not only foresees our sins or our denials but that He's effected by them. If only we knew this, if only we felt this the way Peter felt it in that instant maybe it would compel us to sin less. What do you suppose that look from Christ looked like? What would the expression on Christ's face have looked like? What would have been the look in His eyes?

Would He have looked angry? Would there be a hint of *I told you so* in His eyes or His facial expression? I suppose at the end of the day we can only speculate but I think personally and based on other passages in the Old and New Testament that there would have been a look of hurt in Christ's eyes and there would have been deep sadness in His facial expression. This is the man, after all, who foresaw and predicted the fall of Jerusalem. And when He foretold Jerusalem's fall in Lk. 19, He did it amidst many tears. Lu 19:41 *And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it*. The word *wept* is described by one Greek expert as meaning that He burst into tears most likely with audible weeping.

And wouldn't you think that Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, who was on hand for the first destruction of Jerusalem would have resembled his Savior when he said in Lam. 3:48 *Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people*.

The point I'm making now is that your sins, your practical denials of Christ, do have an impact on Christ. He is not indifferent to your sins any more than He was indifferent to Peter's denials. They effect Him and they effect Him deeply. They grieve Him, they hurt Him, they sadden Him and if we only knew and felt that truth we would come to resemble Peter much more closely ourselves by our own going out and weeping bitterly over our own sins.

Now I said in my introduction that Christ turning to look at Peter was not the only reaction He had to Peter's denials. And this leads to my final point. We've considered how Christ foresees our sins and how Christ is effected by our sins. Let's think now finally on the truth that:

III. The Lord Has Atoned for the Sins of Our Denials

Our reading today only took us as far as v. 62 which records how *Peter went out and wept bitterly*. Had we continued our reading we would have noted how Christ was mocked and smitten and blindfolded and struck on the face.

And if we had continued our reading into the next chapter we would have read how Christ was sent to Pilate and from Pilate to Herod and then back to Pilate again. At every stage He'd be interrogated and His persecutors would be searching only for one thing which would be an excuse to put Him to death.

That wouldn't be an easy thing for them to pursue because the fabricated stories would not only be false but they would be at odds within themselves. But eventually they would use Christ's own confession of His true identity as the excuse for delivering Him over to be crucified. Then He would be whipped and a crown of thorns would be driven into His head, the blasphemous mockery continuing at every stage.

Eventually He'd be led to Mt. Calvary so beaten and fatigued that it would take another, one Simon of Cyrene to bear His cross. And then we read in Lk. 23:33 *And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.*

I would suggest to you this morning that this torture and execution was due to many things but it was due at least in part to the awful sins of Peter's denials. Here, then, is the response from Christ that goes way beyond turning to look at Peter with an expression of sadness and a broken heart. He goes to Calvary for Peter. He allows cruel men to drive nails into His hands and feet for Peter. Simply put – He atones for the sins of Peter, even Peter's denials that he even knew Him.

And it's the same for you and me. Oh our sins break Christ's heart. Our practical denials of Him effect Him the same way Peter's actual denial of Him effected Him. And I hope that when you sin, you come to feel the impact of His sad and heartbroken gaze. I hope you're moved to weep bitterly. But don't ever forget that when Christ went to Calvary's cross, He went not only for Peter's sins and denials, He went for your sins and denials as well.

This is His response to your denials – He died for them. And we’re called upon to remember this morning that He died for our sins. The bread and the cup preach to us that He came and that He died for our sins. But Christ’s response to Peter didn’t end there. We know from the gospel accounts that when Christ rose from the dead He pursued Peter. So we read in Mk. 16:7 the angel’s instructions to the women at the empty tomb: *But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

Oh Christ would pursue Peter, in spite of Peter’s denials. Christ still loved Peter, you see. Christ still had a commission for Peter to fulfill. Christ had atoned for Peter’s sins. And it’s the same for you and me. Christ would not shun you for your practical denials. Quite the contrary – He pursues you. He loves you still and He desires your fellowship and He has a commission for you to pursue.

We might well ask – WHY? Why would Christ pursue one who had denied him? Why not let the denier go his way? Why not leave him to his sin? Why would Christ pursue Peter? Or more to the point – why would He pursue you? Why doesn’t He just give up on you?

And part of the answer is found in the fact that Peter’s denials of Christ were simply not true. *I know Him not* he says in v. 57. That wasn’t true. He did know Him. *And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not* (v. 58). But that wasn’t true either. Peter was of them.

Isn’t it the same for you and me? You may say by your practical denials that you don’t know Him and that you don’t identify with those who are of Him but you know that’s not true. You do know Him and you do believe in Him. And you do identify with those who follow Him. There’s no truth in your denials. You are His blood-bought child and so He pursues you this morning. He pursues you with these elements of bread and wine. He calls on you to remember Him.

Remember that He came for you that He died for you that He shed His blood for you. Remember that you’ve gained a saving interest in Him and even though you are still plagued with sin and denials, your hope is based on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. You dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name. May you sense His love this morning. May you be able to affirm by faith that He died for your sins, even those sins by which you, in a sense, deny Him.