

Peter's Denial

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[0 : 00] I'd like us for a short while to think about Peter's denial tonight, which is recorded for us in the chapter we read.

But I want to look at another account of it in Luke's Gospel, if you turn with me to Luke chapter 22. And we'll read the section where Peter's denial is recorded by Luke. Luke chapter 22 at verse 54. This is when Jesus was captured.

We read, Then they seized him, that is Jesus, and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. And Peter was following at a distance.

And when they had killed a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, This man also was with him.

[1 : 06] But he denied it, saying, Woman, I do not know him. And a little later, someone else saw him and said, You also are one of them. But Peter said, Man, I am not.

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.

But Peter said, Man, I do not know what you are talking about. And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 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. And he went out and wept bitterly.

Among the things which Jesus suffered during his ministry in our humanity was this denial of one of his closest disciples, Peter.

[2 : 19] You all know very much, I suppose, about Peter from the Gospel accounts. And also, later on, the amazing transformation that Jesus brought about in the life of Peter.

When the Spirit was pulled out, and Peter, as one of the apostles, the appointed apostles, was commissioned to write letters to the Lord's people in various parts of the then world of that time. Three times, Peter here denies the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, this is recorded for us in all four Gospels.

It's an amazing thing how some accounts of Jesus' dealings with his disciples and with others, we have maybe one or two accounts in some Gospels.

But this is one of these situations where we have a situation accounted for us from four Gospel writer points of view.

[3 : 34] And I believe that God in his sovereign purpose is a reason for that. And it is for us to believe that there is something here for us in the fact that this is a full-time account given to us of something that is anything but glorifying to God.

But at the same time, what we find as we look beyond the denial of Peter, that there is hope for each and every one of us, no matter who we are, even as the Lord's people, we can fall very much far behind and slip and slide on the way.

But the Lord is able to restore us. But I want tonight, I don't want to be negative entirely in looking purely at the denials of Peter, but I want to look at these and look as well at the other side of the coin, how Peter was so dramatically changed by the work of God's Spirit.

Now, isn't it amazing that here, when the chips were down, when the challenges for the Lord's people were really there, Jesus is captured and his betrayal by Judas Iscariot.

He was captured and he was now under God's providence. By the hands of wicked people, he was brought to be crucified. And the mysterious thing behind all of this is that here we have in Scripture for us, a denial, a downright, the very opposite of confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 30] It's the antithesis of trusting in the Lord and exalting him, lifting him up. It's the very other side of that, the opposite side to the coin.

And Peter denied knowing Jesus in spite of having spent all of his earthly ministry with him, having been called from being a fisher of fish to be a fisher of men.

And when Jesus called him, he said to him, follow me, and Jesus, Peter was done that. And of course we all know how it was his brother Andrew who was instrumental in bringing Peter to Jesus in the first instance.

So Peter denied knowing Jesus despite being with Jesus right from the beginning of his earthly ministry. There are various instances where we see Peter with James and John, this inner circle of disciples who perhaps had a more intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ than any of the other disciples.

We know from Scripture that John was the beloved disciple. But Peter, James, and John. We hear more about Peter and James. We learn from John in his own gospel and his letters.

[6 : 59] We hear about Peter through the gospel accounts we have, and later on through his letters. We don't hear very much about James. But look at what we find here.

The denial of Jesus in spite of being with him from his early ministry. He was with him, for example, at the healing of his very own mother-in-law.

A very close and intimate relationship there. And of course Jesus came to the disciples. Peter being on the boat with the other disciples on the Sea of Galilee, walking on the water.

And perhaps the best known, most intimate meeting of all with Jesus, or the accompaniment of Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And what a privilege that must have been. And yet, in spite of all these examples of closeness and proximity to the Lord in his company, here we find Peter failing.

[8 : 07] Now, as I said a few minutes ago, I don't want to be negative here. But I believe that from this narrative, there are quite a few important lessons to be gained for us as those who are seeking to follow the Lord.

Perhaps you are here having been on that journey for quite a number of years. Perhaps you haven't yet started, but are right at the beginning of it. Seeking to take the first steps.

There are important lessons to be gained. And Peter himself can help us through his failures. He can help us through his failures to avoid making the same mistakes he made when he writes as one who knows the dangers before us.

His example of failure is here, right in these Gospel accounts of his denial. But later on in his letters, when God was guiding him by his Spirit to write and to encourage the Lord's people.

I would suggest that there are various lessons. I'm going to just take a few. For example, why Peter betrayed, why he denied, rather, the Lord Jesus in the way in which he did.

[9 : 29] Well, the first suggestion I have is Peter was given over to pride. And I think that is one of the major enemies of the graces of God in our lives.

Isn't it interesting how when Paul is writing to the Philippians, that the humility that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, exemplified by the Lord Jesus Christ, is what is asked of us as his disciples.

As his disciples. And Peter, well, we know that he was always wanting to be in there. He was wanting to be first.

He was wanting to use, how shall we put it, human means to overcome what was effectively a spiritual battle. Remember how he cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest and Jesus healed that person's ear.

Peter was betrayed by pride. Remember how he boasted he would never deny Jesus. proudly proclaiming that even if all left Jesus, not him.

[10 : 51] If you look at words from Matthew's gospel, Matthew 26, which describe to us, tell us, something of how brash and how smug in his own attitude Peter was, though he was still a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We read in Matthew 26 at verse 31, these words, Jesus said to them, You will all fall away because of me in this night.

For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.

Peter answered him. Notice, Peter answered him. The leader, so to speak, the spokesperson for the rest of the disciples. Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.

And it was then that Jesus said to him, Truly, I tell you this very night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

[12 : 03] And then even after Jesus had said that, Peter says, Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. And all the disciples said the same.

And I'm sure many of us are like that and regret it. We feel that we've let the Lord down. When we started off on the wilderness journey, we were very enthusiastic and full of the enthusiasm that comes from coming to know the Lord and you.

And as time has gone on, it's been one failure after another. But you know, failure is not hopelessness nor despair.

Failure under God's hand can be used to bring us back. For example, the psalmist David, who fell with Bathsheba.

And we have these glorious words of Psalm 51, which I'm sure are precious to us in confessing. And what really gets to us is that it is afterwards that we realize what we've either done amiss or what we've missed out on, what we haven't done for the Lord.

[13 : 25] And that we've dishonored the Lord by saying something wrong or not doing the right thing. And here we have Simon Peter denying the Lord as the servant God came, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him.

Ah, what light was he sitting in? It wasn't the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It must have been a worldly light, a light that didn't penetrate into his being in a positive way.

This man also was with him, but he denied it saying, Woman, I do not know him. What a thing to say by a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, being betrayed by pride.

And in so doing, he took the first step in falling away. And as these denials progress, it seems that he's going down, down, down.

And that's what happens with sin in our lives. It has an avalanche effect once it starts. And only the grace of God can arrest that avalanche.

[14 : 43] And God has given to us the means of enabling us not to slide down the slippery slope of disservice to our Lord and Savior.

Peter was betrayed by pride, but later, isn't it amazing how in his letter he commanded humility to those who would read his letters.

He says, To be clothed with humility in chapter 5 of his first letter. And to humble ourselves before God, for he will raise us up at his own time.

Peter learned the hard way about the danger of pride. And we wonder if we will learn from the mistake of Peter and value the importance of humility.

Yes, and God willing, we look tomorrow night at the way God graciously restored this sinful apostle to his apostleship to serve him and to be a pillar of the New Testament church.

[15 : 52] There's also the sin of complacency, which can be said to each and every one of us. And complacency is a type of laziness.

It's a type of lack of effort to stand up for what you believe in, for what you have been taught, for particularly in this context, for the Lord's people, for all the teaching.

For example, that Peter heard from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ in his company. When Jesus, rather, proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount, for example.

And other times when Peter was with him and he heard forgiveness of sins being pronounced and he saw the healing hand of God working through his son in our sinless humanity.

Peter was besieged by a sort of complacency. It doesn't matter. I'll be okay. I don't need to make any effort here. And it was at a time when he needed to be watchful.

[17 : 08] And that is what he wasn't. It's easy for us to fall into this sort of complacency, to be not on the watchtower of prayer, not being aware of the forces of evil that are constantly besetting us in the present world in which we come.

And all the various ways in which the word of God is being contradicted through people's denial of scripture and their direct contradiction of what the word of God tells us about how we ought to live, particularly in our present day and age in the field of sexuality and all of that.

And there are many other ways in which we can become complacent and lazy as well. We can become watchlessness, not being on the watchtower, as I said, of prayer and looking out for one another.

We can become complacent and fall into the trap of what Cain said, am I my brother's keeper? Selfishness creeps in when complacency takes a hold.

And this was at a time when Peter needed to be watchful. And when is there a time for us? Is there a time when we don't need to be watchful?

[18 : 38] Well, I don't think there is. Because as we're taught in scripture, we're told that the devil goes about as a roaring lion. And it was Peter himself who said these words he must have learned, seeking whom he might swallow up.

His laziness led to a lack of preparation. And the same thing can happen to ourselves. These services before a communion are known as preparatory services.

But our preparation shouldn't just be for communion. It should be for living for the Lord every day of our lives. We should prepare day by day for each day.

And that is why the Lord gave his disciples the prayer to pray. Give us this day our daily bread. The Lord has prepared for us that bread.

And that bread is found in the word of God for us to prevent us from falling into complacency and into laziness. And we're all guilty of it.

[19 : 45] But thanks be to God for his patience with us. And isn't it interesting how when we look at this watchlessness on the part of Peter that when he wrote later on having learned the lesson the hard way Peter commands he commands vigilance against the devil calling for diligence that we might grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The very opposite which he was doing here when he was denying him. Grow in grace and the knowledge. What did he say? I do not know him.

Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ tonight as your saviour? But are you conscious also of letting him down? Perhaps at your place of work.

Not standing up when you hear the Lord's name being taken in vain. It's a tragedy when we fall into these sorts of complacent attitudes.

And again we're all guilty as charged. And that is why we have to come to God's word for learning about these errors and by the errors learning how to correct ourselves and how to be kept from falling into these traps.

[21 : 16] We're weak. We're prone to forget about what the Lord has done for us. And sometimes the devil will use our failures for us to dwell on these failures forgetting that my grace is sufficient for you says God.

My grace is sufficient for you. And the devil will make us believe that no God won't have anything more to do with you. You're not good enough. That's the devil's favorite rules.

You're not good enough. Well humanly speaking we might say to about Peter well who would put their trust in him? who would have him as a trusted friend?

Who would have Peter as somebody you could rely on to bear a good testimony to give you a good reference? He certainly didn't do that for the Lord Jesus Christ and we like him in so many ways.

And we have to ask ourselves the question do we allow simple laziness to keep us from be prepared to face the onslaughts of the spiritual warfare that we are involved in?

[22 : 35] Flesh and blood is not what we are against but the powers of darkness. Do we fail to for example do we fail to attend worship services at the drop of a hat?

Do we fail to spend time in God's word as much as we ought? Or even pray because well something else has come it's a question of what are our priorities and Peter lost sight of that.

What is your priority? What is my priority? My priority is to seek the Lord to follow the Lord through thick and thin it's very easy to say that but it's not so easy to do it except by God's grace.

how can we hope to stand up for Jesus when we are put to the test unless we are diligent as soldiers of the cross prone to failure how can we hope to stand up for Jesus and like Peter we must continue to stand up and be counted but Peter was also thirdly having been taken over by

complacency the third point of God here was that he was afraid there was fear you see we read here he denied it saying woman I do not know woman a little verse 58 in Luke 22 a little later

someone else saw him you also are one of them but Peter said man I am not and after an interval of a point and now still never insisted saying certainly this man also was with him for he too is a

Gavilean and he repeats this denial of the

Lord because he was afraid of what might happen to him as a result of making a stand for the Lord Jesus Christ and I am convinced I know it for myself we will all be said by that fear because our

focus is drawn away from the Lord Jesus Christ and our focus is placed more on the things of time and sense ourselves so what happened to Peter here was that he was beset by fear he became a bit of a coward and it's not what the Lord wants us to be for him and especially in the day in which we are living he wants us to be fearless and not to be afraid he wants us not to follow Jesus at a distance as Peter did but to follow Jesus in close proximity isn't it interesting how we can picture use this idea walking from

[25 : 48] Jesus at a distance well I'm just going to keep him in sight but as long as I see him I don't want to hear what he says well it's it's very easy for us to have some sort of a self made vision of Jesus what he's like but we have to come to the word of God and there is where we find Jesus seen and heard and our ability to love him is blown out of knowing him in his word he still followed Jesus but now that Jesus was unpopular Jesus was now he was under the sentence of death humanly speaking of course the sovereignty of God was behind all of this it pleased the Lord to bruise him but God used means and that was the hands of wicked men to crucify the Lord but now that Jesus was unpopular what is

Peter do he stays far enough away so as not to be identified with him and that is the way it is for us it's very easy for us to get lost in the crowd having living in Dundee for just about two years now since I retired you know it's very easy to become anonymous I suppose the converse is true in close communities like the villages of our islands and in the highlands where virtually everybody knows everybody else but when you go to the big city where there are hundreds of thousands of people and thousands milling around in the city center on a whatever day of the week it is you are just another figure walking about and it is very interesting how sometimes we can use these anonymous means to keep our distance away from the Lord and like

Peter it can make us unprepared to face the challenge of being challenged about our faith and what we are the challenge of ridicule and persecution it is very easy for us to prefer the comfortable place to be comfortable and there are places in the world today where it is far from comfortable to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ where various other religions such as Islam and the various animistic religions of India and other far eastern countries it is not easy to stand up for the Lord so we have to ask ourselves the question might we be guilty of trying to follow Jesus but with colors can we say with the hell writer paraphrasing scripture

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord or to defend his cause maintain the glory of his cross and honor all his laws are you ashamed to be seen saying grace in a restaurant are you ashamed to be seen carrying a bible to church on a Sunday maybe it's not so difficult in some places but in certain places it's a challenge and you could be challenged for doing that are you ashamed to be identified with other Christians ashamed to be identified with the Lord following Jesus at a distance is not commendable it's not what will build us up to be men and women to be stalwarts strong in the Lord and the power of his might we must follow Jesus in close proximity because it's very easy for a child imagine in a huge supermarket following their father and in a in the blink of an eye out of sight child was too far from their parent and they lost sight of him and he's away altogether but Peter in spite of having followed

Jesus at a distance he charged us to glorify God by being in close proximity with him by being close to him thinking not of what things mean to us but what they mean to God thinking not of our own safety but the glory of God so we're exalted not to keep Jesus at a distance with paradise that's what Peter did keeping at a distance and he was a prime candidate for succumbing this was the downward track but Jesus is there for us isn't it amazing how God in his sovereign providence permitted not only this to happen but he made sure that it was recorded for us in scripture not only once but four times and does this not exalt and magnify the graciousness the glory of God in Christ before the rooster crows today you will deny me three times and although it's not written in scripture

[31 : 41] Jesus was saying perhaps in his own mind oh Peter you will deny me three times but I'm going to allow things God was in control Jesus was in full control of every situation that he was found in as the God man nothing was done without his knowledge and he went out and wept bitterly Jesus was saying ah Peter Satan has desired to win you like a queen but I have prayed for you this is where it all starts and finishes the great intercessor Peter was beleaguered by worldliness this is what really is the epitome of backsliding and losing sight of the Lord and being influenced by the values of the world around us rather than being influenced by the values of the kingdom of God the values of the kingdom are so different to the values of this world he was influenced by the world how was that when he sat down among them we read in verse 55 of

Luke's account he sat down among them and he was warming himself at a fire that was in a sense not of God's making he was beleaguered by worldliness by sitting with the servants of the high priest and warming himself by their fire he was the worldliness of which he was guilty apparently he was ashamed to be seen with Christ and he desired the practices and the company of those who have worldly values rather than those who want to have God as their chief focus in their lives and I think we must ask ourselves at this communion season what is my life all about why am I alive what is my chief purpose for living the shorter catechism the first question to glorify

God that is to worship God to follow him to recognize his saving to recognize that I need that salvation from him and it was easy for Peter to mingle with those of the world and enjoy their comforts it's very easy for us to do that as well I'll take a holiday from being a Christian I'll take time out from committing myself to the work of the gospel we can't as one commentator put it be comforted by the fire of the world without sooner or later getting singed by it and possibly being burnt by it so there is close contact with things that can harm and they have a very deep seeded effect in our lives they can quench the work of the spirit in our lives and seems to me that Peter had lost complete sight of the

Lord and by the time he came to his third denial he was using bringing down curses on himself as it were swearing on some false oath that he did not know who the Lord was now that was darkness at work in the life of Peter there well there's much more we can learn from Peter and I wonder how much more we could extract from this chapter and relate these things to ourselves in our weaknesses and how we can later on learn through what Peter has done he asks his people to live as sojourners and pilgrims abstaining from fleshly lusts and with honorable conduct among the people with whom we circulate wonders how many people know if you are a Christian how many people can tell that by the way you walk the way you talk the way you conduct yourself the way you seek to interact with different people for example one of the most difficult situations for us to deal with is when people are really up against us and when we're being accused of something when we're being wronged or being falsely condemned for having done something wrong which we actually have not and it's then that the spirit of Christ has to come into our lives as Peter would later learn Jesus who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her she is done so he opened not his mouth there is a time to speak and there is a time to be quiet and we need

[37 : 28] God's grace and wisdom to enable us to discern when these times are so to conclude that I've just touched on a few things regarding Peter's character here but as I said from the beginning I don't want it to be a negative thing I want us to see that here was Peter having failed miserably he wept bitterly afterwards because he realised the wrong he had done and you know as the gospel narratives tell us he was one of the first to go to the empty sepulcher racing between himself and John as to who would get there first and of course this is Peter's character again being brought out for us and later we'll see how the Lord graciously reinstated him so this warns us to beware lest we fall from what we think is our own steadfastness this is what

Peter wrote in his second letter the third chapter take care be on your guard don't trust yourself whatever you do but trust in the Lord and again as was mentioned earlier he exhorts his people to grow in grace it's as though Peter is exhorting in his letters for those to whom he is writing to don't keep your distance from Jesus perhaps as I did and to my to my harm and to the Lord's dishonor but the Lord was gracious to me and he brought me back and you know these admonitions that Peter later wrote in his letters they come from one who was very well qualified to speak in these terms for he knew how easy it was to fall through such things through pride pride in myself pride of the church

I belong to pride of my roots my ancestors whatever it is our pride should be in we should dismiss it lose it and find our boast in the Lord he knew how easy it was to fall through such things as these pride laziness cowardliness worldliness the list could go on and what he exhorts us to be engaged in by the grace of God later through his letters and having learned the hard way to learn humility to practice humility to be diligent for the Lord not earning our salvation but doing for the Lord because of what he has done for us being willing servants glorifying God giving God all the credit to you and to you alone belongs all the glory and remembering that while we are here on earth we are strangers and pilgrims and thankfully we know that

Peter though he denied Jesus three times though he went out weeping bitterly yet he was restored he received grace and when forgiven by Jesus he was permitted to fulfill his role as an apostle and

God willing we look at that while we've all been guilty of letting your Lord down let's look to him for the grace to repent and grow that he can only give us that grace to the grace of repentance which we need day by day and to grow to put the things of sin and worldliness and Christlessness behind us so we have to ask ourselves are you desirous of following Jesus if you haven't now is the time to start if you have there is no better time either to start or to continue keep on going on and Jesus calls each and every one of us no matter who we are brittle broken our backs to the wall burdened come and hear Jesus say to you that Satan has been defeated Satan has desired as we said to wear you as chaff from the wheat but Jesus has prayed for you just as he did for Peter and he is for his people even now at the right hand of God as our great high priest Jesus only is our saviour as he is despite Peter's utter failure and it is failures like you and me who need the saviour failures like you and me and Peter it's failures that Jesus comes to save may he bless our meditation to us let's bow our heads in the