

Debased and Denied

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0:00] Let's read together in God's Word in Luke chapter 22. Luke chapter 22 from verse 54 to verse 65.

! Luke chapter 22 from verse 54. Page 883.

And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly.

Now, the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, prophesy, who is he who struck you? And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

[2:01] Heavenly Father, bring your ancient and powerful Word into the present so that it can be delivered and heard with all the freshness of a new day, with all the immediacy of a friend's embrace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

One of the reasons I believe that the Bible is the Word of God is that it does not hide the failures of its heroes. It's not just that its heroes are flawed, but we sometimes wonder if they're heroes or villains. They're capable of doing great and noble things, but also capable of doing dirty and sinful things. Never is this more true than in the case of Simon Peter, the most famous of Jesus' disciples. Peter made great confessions about Jesus, but he also denied Jesus. In no other religious text would a hero of the faith be presented in such negative terms, which is one reason I believe the Bible is the Word of God. Like every one of us, its heroes, with the exception of Jesus, of course, are capable of both good and bad. Well, having been betrayed by Judas Iscariot and arrested by a mob of

Jewish soldiers, Jesus is now led away to the house of the high priest. Being a Middle Eastern country, the house would be more like a villa with balconies surrounding a central courtyard. And it was onto one of these balconies Jesus was taken. And he's standing in full view of everyone gathered on the other balconies and in the courtyard. He stands alone, surrounded on all sides by those who hate him.

And beneath him, hiding under his cloak at the courtyard, is Peter. Having watched his master being led away, Peter followed from a distance. The scene is set for one of the most dramatic episodes in history. It's nighttime, but the house and courtyard are filled with flaming torches casting their unworldly light. There are smells of burning naphtha and cooking food.

There are the sounds of people talking and the odd cackle of laughter. It's the house of the high priest, the successor of Aaron, brother of Moses. If there's one place Jesus should have been safe, it's here. But he's not safe. He stands alone in full view of everyone. Although his was a life of suffering, the suffering is close to reaching its climax. As we go through our passage today, Jesus debased and Jesus denied, we want to understand that it was for us He was suffering.

[5:10] It was because He loved us so much that He was willingly submitting to the torture. Bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place, condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood.

Hallelujah, what a Savior! It was for us He was debased and treated so cruelly. It was for us He was denied and stood alone against all the world. And it was for us He turned and looked into Peter's eyes.

We want then to see two things today, Jesus debased and Jesus denied. First of all then, Jesus debased. Jesus debased from verse 63 through 65. Jesus debased.

Even though verses 63 through 65 come after verses 54 to 62, they're happening at the same time. Verses 63 to 65 are the backdrop. So, the men who are holding Jesus aren't just guarding Him, they are torturing Him. In verse 63, they're mocking Him even as they beat Him. They blindfolded

Him and they're striking Him. The verb means to punch on the face or to strike with a fist or with another object.

So, a blindfolded Jesus is being assaulted. Jesus' loving hands reached out to heal the sick, give life to the dead, and comfort to the despairing. But the hands of these men are reaching out to strike Jesus. And they're going to strike Jesus on the face again and again and again.

[7:03] The literal translation is, prophesy. Who is hitting you? It's not a one-off. Jesus is continually being punched and beaten with fists and with rods. It's such a far contrast from the Jesus whose hands are so gentle and tender and tender and healing. To the guards whose hands are curled up in fists, ready to punch a defenseless man. Well, I say defenseless, but He wasn't really. At any point, Jesus could have called down from heaven an army of angels to destroy these cowardly men and save himself from their physical torture. He could have, but He didn't. And it was for us.

You know, they say, sticks and stones will break your bones, but names will never harm me. Well, that's not true. Broken bones heal very quickly, but some mental wounds never heal. Not only are they beating Jesus, they are laughing at Jesus and mocking Jesus over and over again. They're playing their sick game with their blindfold, their fists and their words. Prophecy. Who is hitting you? And it goes on for many hours. As we learn from verse 65, they were saying many other things against Him, laughing at Him, mocking Him, shaming Him, robbing Him of His dignity. They're torturing Him. They're debasing Him. The Bible is, thankfully, sometimes very economical with words.

And keeps us from the gory details of what this would have done to Jesus. Battered and bruised in body and mind, He stands alone.

And His torture is being witnessed by all those gathered on the balconies of the house, no doubt accompanied by the odd cheering voice. Perhaps they are treating themselves to fine wine and choice food as they're being entertained by the sufferings of Jesus.

[9:12] Did these guards and those watching on know what they were doing? Who they were mocking? Who they were torturing? When we think of the final sufferings of dictators like Mussolini and Saddam Hussein, the sad truth is that they deserved everything they got.

But Jesus didn't deserve any of it. He was innocent, pure, unspotless. And He stood alone. What crime had He done to deserve such torture?

He had loved the unlovable, touched the untouchable. He had preached the message of the kingdom of God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Was one of those who so mercilessly beat Him and mocked Him, the servant of the high priest, we learned last week, whose ear had been cut off and Jesus had healed.

What a fine way to show His gratitude. But still we're far short of understanding who it was suffering there. Because the Jesus who stood alone in that balcony was not just the greatest of men.

[10:24] He was God Himself. The God of heaven and earth. The God who had appeared on top of Mount Sinai to give Moses the law. The God of infinite majesty and glory, hiding His divine glory behind the weakness of flesh.

The God before whom the angels must hide their faces, such as His burning holiness. And yet, that very face before whom the angels hide their faces is now being struck by these vicious men who know no shame.

Perhaps this is one of these episodes to which the Apostle John referred when he wrote these words, He came to His own, but His own received Him not.

They didn't just fail to receive Him. They beat Him. They tortured Him. And as we'll see in coming weeks, they kill Him. Who are they beating and mocking? Who are they torturing and blaspheming? They're God. We do not read that Jesus cried out in pain when they were punching and kicking Him, but we can scarce imagine the physical and mental torture.

[11:35] And again we say, it was for us. Jesus was not suffering as a tragic victim of His own criminality.

Jesus was not in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was exactly where He was meant to be. The Son of Man was beginning His journey to the cross on which He would die as the sacrifice for our sins.

He knew it was coming. So great was His love for us. He willingly embraced the suffering, knowing that if He did not suffer, we would.

And if He did not die, we would. There are many in history who have suffered like Jesus. None as greatly as He.

None for the same reason as He. A nun with such effectiveness as He. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, but He did not open His mouth. And He did it all for you.

[12:43] No wonder the great Robert Manning McShane wrote his famous hymn, which perhaps we should have sung today. When this passing world is done, when has sunk yon glaring sun, when we stand with Christ on high, looking o'er all life's history, then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe.

For me, He was beaten and blasphemed. For me, He was maimed and mocked. We began by talking about flawed heroes, but here's the ultimate hero with no flaws.

Jesus, who even though He is being provoked and mocked and tortured, bore it patiently and in love. And we want to ask this question to all of ourselves today, those of us going through difficult times in our lives, or those of us who do not yet know Jesus as Lord and Savior, those of us who are not yet Christians, what more does God have to do to prove that He loves us?

What more does God have to do to prove that He loves us? What more does He have to do to earn our trust? If we're not trusting in Jesus today, it's not because of any fault on His side.

It's not because He hasn't given us sufficient warrant or evidence to trust Him. It's because our eyes are closed to Him and we do not want to believe because ultimately, it was not for His own sins He is suffering.

[14:23] It's for our sins. Jesus debased. But secondly, Jesus denied. Jesus denied.

From verse 54 through 62. So the suffering of Jesus forms the backdrop to Peter's denials. The Jesus Peter denied was a Jesus whose face was being scarred by the punches and blows of the guards and who was being mercilessly mocked.

It's not a stoic, heroic Jesus Peter denied. A Jesus holding His own. It's a suffering Peter Jesus denied.

Jesus who is being battered into insensibility. And this makes the denials both more understandable but also less acceptable. So after Jesus is arrested, Peter's following from a distance and he settles down in the courtyard of the high priest's house to see what's going to happen.

To be fair to Peter, we don't read of any of the other disciples doing this. They had already fled. Peter, who so recently had wielded his sword and cut off a man's ear, still had his sword by his side and perhaps he had some harebrained scheme in his mind to rescue Jesus.

[15:48] Who knows what's going through Peter's mind? Even he didn't know. Maybe he just wanted to see what would happen. After all, whatever else may be said about Peter, as Irene so correctly reminded us, he loved Jesus.

It is entirely possible for someone to love Jesus but to deny Jesus. With shame, we all know it's true that there are many times in every Christian's life where he or she denies Jesus.

It doesn't mean to say that we don't love Jesus or that he doesn't love us. What it does mean is that our love for him is weak and we remain sinful and flawed until the day we die.

There's a fire kindled in the courtyard. Remember, Jesus has been tortured in the balcony in view of everyone and people sat around that fire for warmth, for company and for chat and perhaps to get a clearer view of what's happening on the balcony.

So Peter could see Jesus being beaten and he could hear the jeers and the mocks. How it must have hurt him also. He must have felt every punch. But how it must have scared him too.

[17:08] Peter had never seen this before. Even in the city, people can tell a stranger and a young servant girl stared at Peter and said, this man also was with him.

Perhaps she had seen Peter in the temple at some point or other with Jesus. She knew it in her heart and so she said, this man also was with him. It was not a mighty warrior who defeated Peter, but a weak girl.

If a strong warrior had spoken these words, perhaps Peter would have reacted differently, but it wasn't. It was a weak girl. The devil knew exactly where Peter's weak point was and exploited it mercilessly.

There's so many times in the Christian's life when we're tempted from unexpected sources and from unexpected people. If it had come from anywhere else or from anyone else, we could have resisted it, but not in this way and not from this person.

So perhaps we struggle with our tempers. We've figured out how to stay calm when people are trying to goad us and make us angry. Only for a member of our family to do something which hits us when it hurts and before we know it, we've flown into our rage.

[18:31] It's the servant girl syndrome. The last person in the world we would have expected to break down brave Peter's defenses, but she did.

Peter said, I don't know the man. Not only has Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus, Peter's denied knowing Jesus. How could this have happened with just a few words?

This servant girl has broken Peter's faith. Early in the chapter in verse 33, Peter promised Jesus, saying, Lord, I'm ready to go with you to prison and to death.

And now he says of Jesus, woman, I don't know him. And I'm sure it was weakness and fear which prompted Jesus, which prompted Peter's denial.

More on this in a minute. Well, a little while later, another person saw him and said, you also are one of them to which Peter replied, man, I'm not.

[19:28] Clearly, Peter actually was quite a well-known associate of Jesus. An hour later, all that time that hour, Jesus is still being beaten, punched, mocked.

The people around the fire having whispered to each other as they watched both Peter and Jesus, another one stood up and said, certainly this one was with him for he too was a Galilean.

Now, if you're like me and Ben Campbell and Katie Sullivan, you can't hide our accents. We're from Sutherland. We're from the north. And Galilee was a long way north of Jerusalem.

These people could tell by the way he spoke that he was a stranger and a Galilean. To him and to the rest of the crowd, Peter cried out, man, I don't know what you're talking about.

Weakness and fear, not intentional sin. That was what prompted Peter's denials. For all his bravado, Peter, watching what was being inflicted upon Jesus, was afraid for his own life.

[20:33] So he denied him. Now, what Peter did was wrong. What Peter did was very wrong. And he knew it. But as I look at Peter today, I cannot think, cannot but, think that if I was in the same situation, I might do the same.

As I look back on my Christian life, out of weakness and fear, I have denied my Lord many times. So in this flawed hero, Peter, we see ourselves.

How many times have we denied Jesus even this last week? Every time we give in to temptation, we deny him. Every time we let him down, we deny him.

Every time we want to blend in with society rather than stand out, we deny him. Every time we don't want to be identified as Christians, we want to hide our badge, as Irene said, we deny him.

So outspoken, so brave, Peter, the alpha male of the disciples, so confident of his own abilities, but now disgracing himself by denying his Lord. Lord, we cannot excuse Peter's denials, nor do I want to excuse myself for the ways in which I have denied my Lord.

[21:48] But you know, I am so thankful, profoundly thankful, for the words of the English Book of Common Prayer in its famous line of confession.

Maybe you've never heard this before, but you need to hear it. It changed my life the first time I came across it five years ago. This is its famous line of confession. Lord, we have sinned against you and against our fellow men in thought, word, and deed through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault.

Through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. Peter did not set out that night to deliberately deny Jesus. weakness. Peter fell through negligence and weakness.

Would I, would you have done any different? Maybe an older and wiser Peter would have done different. Maybe a spirit-filled Peter would have done different.

But we know that from history that Peter eventually did die for Jesus. His tomb is under St. Peter's Basilica in the city of Rome. And he knew then, and we know that there is no excuse for denying Jesus when all the time Jesus never once denies us.

[23:08] There he is on the balcony of the high priest's house in full view of everyone being physically and mentally tortured and all the time refusing to deny us, but resolving to suffer and die for us.

And there we are in the courtyard through negligence, through weakness, saving our own skins sins by denying Jesus. Well, was this the end for Peter?

And is it the end for you when you denied Jesus? Surely, if it was, and surely, if it is, there's no hope for any of us.

The cock crowed, and from where Jesus was standing on the balcony, he turned and looked at Peter. Perhaps we could translate this better as he stared at Peter, or he looked straight into Peter's eyes.

Jesus had always known that Peter was there, and now Jesus and Peter stared into each other's eyes, and Peter's eyes are filled with fear and weakness.

[24 : 24] Jesus puffed up and bloodshot eyes, from the beating he was getting. But what's in that stare? What's in that look?

Is it hatred? Is it revenge? Is it anger? Is it disappointment? None of these things.

I believe that Jesus looked straight into Peter's eyes with love. Peter remembered the words of the Lord of how Jesus knew that Peter would deny him three times and leaving the courtyard behind and the fire and the company, he went out and he wept bitterly.

Because he knew that rather than supporting Jesus in whatever way he could, even by just being there, he had stuck a knife into his master. He knew that his denial of Jesus had probably hurt Jesus more than all the punching and all the mockery.

And he went out and uncontrollably and violently he wept. When Jesus had turned to look at him, Peter saw Jesus' face bruised and bleeding, but it was the love that was in Jesus' eyes which broke Peter's heart.

[25 : 43] after all of Peter's denials, Jesus still loved him and that hurt Peter more than a thousand times if Jesus had blanked him.

If I had stood where Jesus was and if my closest friend had denied me, I'd have been heartbroken, I'd have been very angry indeed.

But Jesus, though heartbroken, was not angry. His puffy, bloodshot, bruised eyes were filled with love and pity toward his fearful and weak disciple and friend.

That's what broke Peter's heart. That's what opened the floodgates of Peter's tears. The old Peter died that day because for the first time he was aware that his alpha male act was just that.

it was an act. He was just as weak, in fact, probably weaker than everybody else. It was not the power of Jesus which broke down this man's defenses.

[26 : 52] It was the love of Jesus. I have seen so many tough guys, hard men, alpha males who think they are too hard to become Christians. What breaks them, brings them to their knees, isn't the superior power of Jesus over them?

What breaks them and brings them to their knees is the sovereign, supreme, and sacrificial love of Jesus for them. The denials of Luke chapter 22 are the tale of two Peters, the best of times and the worst of times, the best of Peters and the worst of Peters.

Peter went out and wept bitterly the failure and in this sense it was the worst of times. However, for the first time in his life, Peter realized just how weak he was about how much Jesus loved him and in this sense it was the best of times.

You know, these denials needed to happen for Peter to become the man he later became. They needed to happen. The rock upon which Jesus would build his church, the Peter who would depend not on his own strength but upon the power of the risen Christ.

This same Peter, two months after this, would preach a sermon in the temple on the day of Pentecost resulting in the conversion of 3,000 people.

[28 : 27] Maybe some of those present that day had been present that night and heard Peter's denials. Through Peter, Christ would perform many miracles and continue to build a church which grows even up until this day.

All of us have denied Christ at one point or another but we need to know this, our failures are not final. Our failures are not final. The love of Jesus overcomes our weakness and the forgiveness of Jesus overwhelms our sin.

He stands today on the balcony of our imaginations. His eyes are bruised and bloodshot our loving Savior suffering for our sin and through his word and by his spirit the risen Jesus turns and he stares at us each of us as individuals in the eye.

what does he say? Let us pray.

Lord, it's not often we thank you for the sin of another man but from what Peter did that evening we learn so much about ourselves about our own psychology but we learn even more about your power to forgive to restore and Lord we all admit that we have failed you and there have been times when we have denied you where you never denied us once in fact was not your cross in which Jesus died but he reached out his hands to embrace a world lost in sin was that not the ultimate message that failure is not final that there is redemption to be found with you plenteous redemption Lord we pray that you would help us then to come to you today with all our failures and all our denials through weakness through negligence through our own deliberate fault to lay them at your feet to weep bitterly and to experience for ourselves the shed blood of

[30 : 53] Jesus which cleanses us from all sin in Christ's name we pray these things Amen