

Peter's Denial Predicted

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] of a servant girl would be enough to make him shake like a leaf and deny his Lord. But to disown Jesus Peter did and deny him three times he did. We must be very careful when we say never Lord because our hearts are more sinful than we can ever imagine and our wills weaker than we may fear. How careful we must be to diligently seriously and completely guard our thoughts words and actions for in a moment our never Lord may become now Lord.

Here is the good news of Jesus that is forgiveness for all who have denied Jesus for he has gone before us into a world of mercy. He knows our sin and our weakness and such is his grace that he forgives and restores and delights to do so. He recommissioned a repentant Jonah and as we'll see in a few weeks time he uses a humbled Peter. Nonetheless before we boast to God about how strong we are it is important that we recognize that even the best of men are but men at best and weak and sinful at that. Well here in these verses we have the account of Jesus prediction of Peter's denial.

Well not just Peter's but but all the disciples. On one hand this is a very dark passage but on the other hand this is the very heart of the gospel because where the power and resolve of men fails the love and purpose of Jesus does not fail. Whereas Peter gives up and is unwilling to suffer for Jesus Jesus does not give up in his willingness to suffer for Peter and for all those like him.

And I want us today to notice four things from this passage. Cowardice and closeness in verse 31. Again in verse 31 sovereignty and situation. And then resurrection and ruin in verse 32. And lastly reality and resolve in verses 33 through 35. Far from this passage eroding our assurance of faith it adds to it.

For just as it was by the grace of Christ we first stood. So it's by his grace offered to us in the gospel we still stand. First of all then at the beginning of verse 31. Cowardice and closeness. Cowardice and closeness.

[3 : 09] There is something tragically pathetic about this passage of scripture. We find it sandwiched between two passages which speak of the closeness of Jesus with his disciples. In verses 17 through 30. We have the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper where Jesus and his disciples shared a meal together and Jesus tells them it is for you I am pouring out my blood. In verses 34 through 36 through 46 rather which we will look at next week. Jesus takes his disciples with him into the garden of Gethsemane where they watch him praying so earnestly and being broken so utterly before God that his tears would seem to drop as great drops of blood. And so immediately prior to the prediction of the disciples' betrayal of Jesus we have the closeness of the disciples' betrayal of Jesus. We have the closeness of the disciples' sharing in prayer together.

These are times of genuine intimacy and closeness where these men laugh together, work together, eat together, and cry together. They bear their hearts to one another so much so that they see their master Jesus broken before God.

I don't think it's just a man thing but these men were a band of brothers. Three years spent together breeds camaraderie and an unbreakable sense of loyalty.

Think of our special forces. Men who have been trained to within an inch of their lives but whose predominant feature is their fierce loyalty to their brothers in arms.

During the First World War, mates' units went over the top and met their doom and they went to their death because they went there together. That's the kind of closeness and intimacy of the relationship these disciples had with Jesus.

[5 : 22] And therefore, we can scarce imagine the impact Jesus' words must have had upon them when he said, This very night, you will all fall away on account of me.

It's as if you had said to a section in the SAS, Tonight, you will leave one of your brothers to face the enemy alone while you will run away in fear.

It's as if you had said to one of the mates' units on the morning of the attack, You will stay in your trench, coward, while your childhood friends cry for help in no man's land.

This is what makes the passage so tragically pathetic, you see. Those who Jesus predicts will fall away that very night are those who share his bread and share his tears.

Those he treated as closer to him than his very mother. Those he will pour his lifeblood out for. How fickle the heart of a human being that one minute we can experience the closest of grace and the next we may fall away.

[6 : 37] How fickle our hearts. Such is the weakness of our wills and the sinfulness of our hearts that we may enjoy the highest of intimacies with Jesus today on a Sunday in worship.

But we may return to work tomorrow and forget Jesus altogether. But you say to me, Well, that's okay for you to say these things.

You're a minister. You don't have anyone criticizing or undermining your faith on a Monday in the university lecture theater. You don't have to be afraid.

But I do. You may be right that although you you may be right, although you shouldn't underestimate the impact a secular society has upon all of us.

But but I say these things to forewarn us all so that we will not depend upon ourselves for strength and resolve tomorrow but upon Christ himself for the courage to overcome our cowardice and for grace to overcome our fear.

[7 : 50] It's okay It's okay to pray on a Monday morning before you go to school before you go to work before you go to university when these days come again.

Lord, I'm afraid that I may deny you today. Give me grace to stand for you and courage to overcome my fear.

It's not just okay to depend on God and not just yourself it's the pattern of a life surrendered to God. Our Christian lives are from one perspective a battleground littered with traces of pathetic failures but also containing and I pray with increasing regularity for you all trends of gracious overcoming and of the victory of faith.

Secondly, we have here sovereignty and situation. Sovereignty and situation. When I was a boy perhaps you were somewhat similar I tried to picture in my mind the various stories of the Bible in real life.

How did the voice of David sound when he was singing to Saul and did David ever pluck a wrong note on his clarsach? How red was the blood of Christ as it poured from his head and his hands and his feet on the cross?

[9 : 23] What did Calvary smell like? Was Jesus short, tall or average? Given that we are all visual people I think it's unavoidable that we try to picture these events in our minds and place ourselves in them.

So here's the situation that night on the Mount of Olives. There are 12 men Jesus and 11 of his disciples and they're seated on the ground and they're talking together.

Perhaps there's a fire in the middle of them and the 11 disciples are watching to see what their master will do next. You can smell the wood smoke and the faintly distant scent of that bottle of expensive perfume which had been poured over Jesus' head earlier in the day.

These men themselves, these 12 men aren't finely made up like they are in the Renaissance paintings. They're all a little bit rough and ready and some of them at least could do perhaps for the bath.

You can see the light from the white of their eyes. You can hear their quiet speech though you don't understand what they're saying because they're speaking in Aramaic and you don't understand it.

[10 : 43] It's in this situation with the wood smoke, the darkness, the light of their white of their eyes, with these real people, Jesus says, tonight you will all fall away on account of me.

It's one thing to say it in private, perhaps even say it to a close friend, but these very people, to say it to the very people who will deny you, that's the real life situation and I wonder whether we can place ourselves this morning into the sights and the smells and the sounds of reality on the Mount of Olives.

It all seems so abstract but so immediate. but what will happen has been prophesied in Scripture.

In Zechariah 13 verse 7 the prophet writes, strike the shepherd and all the sheep will be scattered. A prophecy which Jesus is seen being fulfilled before his very eyes.

The shepherd, Jesus, will be struck by the cross and the sheep, the disciples, will scatter for fear. When he needs them most, they will run away.

[12:00] In other words, what's happening on the Mount of Olives that evening, the wood smoke and the white in their eyes is according to the sovereign plan of God.

Before Peter was ever born, he was destined to deny his Lord. That doesn't take away from his guilt but it does reassure us that God knows what he is doing with Peter and it's the Lord who is in sovereign control of all the events of this Passion Week and not the Pharisees and the authorities of Israel.

Does this not remind us that the sovereignty of God is not an abstract doctrine which belongs only in dusty old books and dry sermons?

It reminds us that God's sovereignty is at work in a group of twelve ordinary men sitting round a fire on a hill overlooking Jerusalem.

It reminds us that God's sovereignty is at work in the messy reality of our lives when we experience crushing loss in the death of a loved one.

[13:24] When we receive a discouraging diagnosis from the doctor, when we experience the exhilarating joy in the birth of a new child, this messy reality with all its wood smoke and its mutterings, this is life.

This is the theater of the sovereignty of God. the sights and the sounds and the smells of our daily life. This is where God is at work and where the events which he had purposed for our good, even before we were born, are being played out.

It reminds us that Jesus was not the helpless victim of a ruthless plot devised by wicked men and that in his death the love of God was overshadowed by the malice of men and the power of God is overcome by the might of this world.

It reminds us that from before the universe came into being, the sun began to shine, the Son of God had sovereignly chosen to die as the sacrifice for our sin and enthroned himself not on a golden chair in Israel but on a wooden cross.

It assures us that our salvation is not the haphazard outcome of a regrettable event and a mistake on the part of God. It is the eternal and unchangeable decree of a sovereign God whose love for the world is infinite.

[15:05] So you see, even here, in the prediction of Peter's denial, we have assurance of God's higher control over all things. Yes, even over coronavirus and lockdown.

in the prophecy of the scattering of the sheep, we have the assurance that though our shepherd may have been struck on the cross, his sheep are safe in his salvation.

The third thing we want to look at this morning is in verse 32, resurrection and ruin. Resurrection and ruin. to what extent the disciples understood anything Jesus was talking about, I'm not so sure. Did they really believe that he was going to die? And did they sincerely believe that having died, Jesus would rise again on the third day? Well, who knows? We can't look into their minds.

But surely what Jesus said to them in verses 31 and 32 must have brought them great sorrow. What is to be my fate? Peter must have thought.

[16:15] If my shepherd is to be struck down and I am to be stuttered, will I not also be hunted down by the religious authorities of Israel?

In what purpose does my life consist, Peter must have thought, if Jesus is not with me? I can quite understand how they must have felt rather disconsolate and despairing at this point.

Everything was going to be ruined. They had thought that Jesus, as the Messiah of Israel, would assume the throne of Israel and transform God's people into the greatest empire in human history. Rome would be defeated and the reign of God's kingdom would be seen here on earth. But no, Jesus says, the shepherds are going to be struck, and in addition, you're all going to deny me. They're being told that they will not even have sufficient courage to die with their Lord, but in his hour of greatest need, they will abandon him. I want you to imagine the scene, a post-apocalyptic future.

[17:30] future. Everything that you know and love about Glasgow today will be gone. Even the house where you were born and grew up and live now will be gone.

Tumbleweed will blow down Buchanan Street, and the trains will no longer run. Glasgow will be no longer our dear green place.

It will be a city of ruin, with no one left to protest its destruction or to cry out in its empty ruins, ruin, ruin, ruin.

That's how the disciples must have felt. Hear now the comforting words of our Lord. But after I have risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

after Jesus' death, he will rise again, and he will go before them into Galilee. When they get back home to where they're from, he'll be waiting for them back when it all began.

[18 : 44] They'll see him walking by the Sea of Galilee, and they'll shed a meal with him once more. He'll stand on one of the slopes of Galilee's hills, and he'll say to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Now go, make disciples of all nations. The ruin of Jesus' messianic mission, in the minds of the disciples anyway, will be transformed into the resurrection of Jesus' messianic kingdom.

Having risen again in the third day, he will go before them. Their denials shall be reversed. Their disowning of him shall not be repaid by his disowning of them.

Their ruin shall be swallowed up by his resurrection, and their sin of cowardice shall be forever forgiven. You see, the resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

From the disciples' own psychology and weakness, to their understanding of the whole mission of God, they were so sure that Jesus would sit on an earthly throne and subdue his enemies at the point of a sword.

[20 : 04] How little did they know that Jesus would sit on a heavenly throne and subdue his enemies by the gospel of his love. The resurrection of Jesus reverses the ruin of man.

make no mistake, these words in verse 32, the words of Jesus, after I have risen, I will go before you into Galilee, are words of the greatest comfort, for they show that the desire of Jesus for them shall finally overcome their denials of him.

And then lastly, from verse 33 through 35, we have reality and resolve.

Reality and resolve. Whatever else we might say about the disciples, their resolve to follow Jesus was admirable. They could have never dreamed it was misplaced because at this stage they thought they had what it took to follow him even unto death.

In verse 33, Peter said, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. Good old Peter, the Peter we give such a hard time to because like us not, he only ever opened his mouth to change the foot he had in it.

[21 : 31] But as we learn from verse 35, all the other disciples did and said exactly the same thing as Peter. They pledged their undying loyalty to Jesus.

Did they do wrong by this? Was it wrong to pledge their loyalty to Jesus? Not at all. There is nothing at all wrong with pledging our resolve that forever we shall follow the Lord.

It is not presumption to offer him the loyalty of our lives. it is in fact a glorious offering of praise to him that we should say to Jesus in the words of the hymn writer Robin Mark all my ambitions, all my dreams, all my plans, I surrender them now into your hands.

After all, what is the alternative? Did we offer him nothing at all? I'd like to think that all of us here gathered this morning, every one of us, from the youngest to the oldest, would say to Jesus, even if I have to die with you, Jesus, I will never disown you.

I would hate to think that any of us are so double minded that we could not make such promises to the Jesus who bled and died to take away our sin, and who from the cross calls out to us all, even though I am dying for you, I will never disown you.

[23 : 08] The surrender Christ desires and deserves from us is total, complete, and holistic.

Everything we are, everything we want to be, everything given for him, we do no wrong by pledging our lifelong loyalty to Jesus, and that if it should ever come to it, we'd be willing to die for him, rather than deny him.

But we do wrong if we should pledge it, and think that somehow in our own strength we shall last even one more second in his service. And we do wrong if we should think that we shall be unswervingly faithful to our promise and that we will never need to be forgiven nor restored.

Because the reality is that just like Peter, we shall all of us deny our Lord at one point or another. It may be subtle, it may be public, but deny him we will, and for that we shall need forgiveness.

And if we should be self confident and believe that the strength for daily perseverance rests only in us, we too shall fall.

We need God's daily grace for our daily faithfulness. Which brings us, we're almost finished, to a question which perhaps like myself, you've wrestled with.

[24 : 45] And it gets to the very heart of the gospel in this passage. Namely, in what way was the denial of Jesus by his disciples less serious than the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot?

In what way was the denial of Jesus by his disciples less serious than the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot? Was his betrayal not also a form of denial?

And yet Jesus never spoke to him with the compassion that he spoke to the other eleven disciples. The tragedy for Judas wasn't so much the severity of his sin, but the fact that he never had any intention of returning to Jesus for forgiveness and restoration.

The hope of the gospel in this passage is that despite the severity of their sin, the disciples of Jesus will return to Jesus and he will forgive them and he will restore them to spiritual health.

Peter's going to make such a mess of things and the crowing of the rooster is going to remind him all of it. But Peter repented and he returned to Jesus and Jesus will meet him back in Galilee.

[26 : 04] Yes, and we too shall deny Jesus. We shall. But there is forgiveness and restoration in Jesus for us also. Confession time.

I really don't like singing the hymn, My Jesus, My Savior. Not just because of the sentimentality of the words, kind of, my Jesus, my boyfriend kind of language, but the presumption of one line in that hymn.

Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand. The truth is that's a lie. I know I won't. But there shall be times in my life when my love for Jesus will wane, and rather than stand, I'll fall.

The good news of the gospel isn't my resolve to follow Jesus steadfastly, but Jesus' resolve to forgive me completely.

me. Never, and I say again, never say never when it comes to your faithfulness to Christ. We will stumble, we will fall, just like Peter did.

[27 : 21] In the heat of the temptation, we shall deny Jesus. In the situation, in the workplace, we shall disown him. But even here, in the deepest darkness of our own cowardice and our weakness and sin, the sovereign love of God shall overcome.

Make your promises to God, yes, by all means, even as a child makes promises to her mother. But know you need his grace to stand and that when you do fall, there will be grace for your restoration. But in the here and now, all things notwithstanding, are there any who are willing to do the right thing? And though they know that they cannot in and of themselves keep their resolve and will need times without counting to be forgiven and restored, are there any who are willing to pledge their lives and loyalty to Jesus Christ, to follow him, yes, perhaps even into the suffering of living and dying for him.

Amen. We're going to close now as we sing the hymn, O great God of highest heaven, the for him.