

Luke 22:47-62 "A Tale of Two Sinners"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I want to say thanks in advance for praying for me, for my family. And I hope you do that when I'm in the United States, not just when I'm in India.

I need it here too. And I'm grateful for many of you that do and let me know that. Thank you. Our passage this morning is a hard one as Jesus is betrayed and arrested.

And then while he's being mocked and beaten, we hear Peter's denial of his Lord. Two really famous blunders here with Judas and Peter, right?

It's a tale of two sinners. But before we read about them, I want to encourage you not to keep the betrayal and denial of Jesus out there at arm's length.

[1 : 06] It's easy to do that, right? These are terrible things. Dante puts Judas in the very darkest place in all of hell, right there with Brutus and Cassius, betrayers of Julius Caesar, in one of Satan's three mouths at the center of it all.

Way removed from me, right? I'm definitely not there. It's easy to put Peter's denial up there with famous lies like Richard Nixon's denial, I am not a crook.

Bill Clinton's denial of inappropriate relationships. Way removed from me. I haven't done that. But if we do that, we will miss some hard realities of what sin looks like in our own hearts and lives.

A lot more like them than we wish it were. And what's worse, if we miss that, then we'll miss a view of our Savior that our hearts really need.

Spoiler alert. The tale of two sinners is really a story of a Savior for sinners. We need to see Him. So as I read these familiar stories, remember, these are two of Jesus' twelve disciples, His close friends.

[2 : 25] They've been there with Him, heard His teaching. They've shaped their lives around Him like many of us. So put yourself in the shoes of these characters and feel some of the tension and angst that's in the air as midnight approaches in Jerusalem.

Thursday night in a dark garden. Jesus, with great drops of blood still dripping from Him in His agony, is urging His disciples to pray when some others enter the garden.

Luke 22 at verse 47. While He was still speaking, there came a crowd. And the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them.

He drew near to Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? And when those who were around Him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword?

And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, no more of this. And He touched His ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come out against Him, Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs?

[3 : 47] When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness. Then they seized Him and led Him away, bringing Him into the high priest's house.

And Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled 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.

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.

[5 : 02] And he went out and wept bitterly. This is God's Word. Let's pray. Father, I confess that I would like to think how much better I am than Judas or Peter.

When the truth is, I need to know how much like them I am and how much better Jesus is. So would you show us that this morning?

Show me that again. Amen. Teach us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. The stories of Judas and Peter diverge significantly at the end.

But they begin by revealing some shared realities about sin that are still realities in our hearts too. The first of those is the self-protective nature of sin.

Consider Judas' story first here. How does the treasurer of the disciples end up leading a band of people coming to arrest Jesus?

[6 : 17] Well, earlier in this chapter, we read that Satan entered Judas and stirred him to seek money in exchange for betraying Jesus. Jesus. Apparently, Judas has made this intentional decision to cash his chips in, as it were.

That he's got to get something for this. Jesus is not turning out as he hoped. Maybe he's not the political messiah Judas had hoped for. Maybe it's not getting Judas the power and influence that he longed for.

We're not really sure why, but Judas decides to be opportunistic with his close relationship with Jesus. To take what he can get for it.

Thirty pieces of silver, as it turns out. So in an effort to come out ahead, to be on the right side of history, Judas has positioned himself with the powerful.

Right? He's sold out for some financial stability. Determined that what is best for him is not to go down with this Jesus, but instead to protect himself.

[7 : 25] To get what he can for him. Sometimes our sin is like that. It involves those intentional decisions to find safety and fulfillment in things other than Jesus, doesn't it?

We call those idols. You know how it happens for us. We stay in close proximity to Jesus, but I use my church going as a means to build my business and network socially.

Because money and power and influence are what I really think I need. Or we may decide this relationship on the side is what I need.

Even though I know it's not what Jesus would have for me. But getting what I can for myself is priority number one. And comfort and pleasure and security are what I really long for.

And I'm going to have to go get them my way. Have you decided that Jesus is fine to hang around, but is not ultimately the one who will fulfill you?

[8 : 29] And determined even if maybe you wouldn't use these exact words to make the best life for yourself? Sometimes that's the way our sin works.

Sometimes that self-protective nature of sin is less premeditated. But sneaks up on you.

Sometimes we plot our sin, but perhaps more often it ambushes us.

And we fall where we thought we were standing firm. See, while Judas has been plotting against Jesus, Peter has been loudly professing his allegiance to Jesus, right?

He's self-confident. Perhaps even self-righteous. When Jesus prophesies Peter's denial. No way, Jesus.

No, not me. I'll go with you. No matter what. To the death. Peter didn't set out to deny Jesus, did he?

[9 : 31] But when the heat is turned up, he lashes out with a sword first to protect himself. Other gospels tell us it's Peter, in case we couldn't have guessed, who impetuously cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant before Jesus can even answer the question.

And then in a desperate attempt to save his own skin, he denies three times with increasing intensity his relationship with Jesus.

Picture it this way for what's happening to Peter. There are storms coming. We all know what that's like, don't we? Seen one of those? And in this split-second decision that I have to run for cover somewhere because there's danger around, my heart tells me I'm not safe with Jesus.

And my sin runs for refuge over here to something else. And in the moment, something else seems like that's the safe place. So many of you have shared with me a struggle that I relate to myself very well.

I call it self-protective silence. We can deny Jesus without even opening our mouths, can't we? It goes like this.

[10:47] There's water cooler conversation at work. And I feel the prompting to jump in and testify to the greatness of Jesus. But I find it easier to go back to the computer and carry on with my day.

Silence seems safer. The other adults on the playground are talking about parenting struggles. And the conversation turns towards how these really are revealing struggles in our own hearts.

And you see the opportunity to share about your own need for Jesus. But silence seems safer. The other students in class or co-workers in the office are talking science, right?

Happens sometimes. And they're saying things like, can you believe there are actually people who really think? Fill in the blank. Something you really think. And silence seems safer.

Self-protective silence. Y'all, when we are surrounded by people who need the good news of Jesus.

[11:56] But we think what we need is safety and protection. And that we can give it to ourselves.

Judas and Peter aren't the only ones who find sin leading them to look out for themselves, are they?

Perhaps even more poignant in this passage, as you read through it, is the relational nature of sin. Sin is not merely, as we sometimes think, breaking a rule. It's breaking a relationship. Judas infamously betrays Jesus.

How? With a kiss. Verse 47. Here he comes. The man called Judas, one of the twelve. One of Jesus' twelve guys is leading them.

He drew near to Jesus as he had been to kiss him. And Jesus said, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? This was a normal greeting, by the way, in these days.

[12:58] Of respect and intimacy for a friend. And Jesus points out to Judas that he's using this personal sign of favor as a sign of betrayal.

Judas, are you missing the relational nature of this? You're turning against me. It's even more painfully obvious with Peter, isn't it?

As they lead Jesus away, Peter is following at a distance. Verse 54 says, I think there's some double entendre there.

Peter is following Jesus at a distance. I'm right behind you. Behind you all the way. Way, way behind you. Way behind you, Jesus.

One denial that he doesn't know Jesus, that he's not associated with him, turns into three really quickly, doesn't it?

[13:58] Stronger and clearer denials of their close relationship. Doesn't sin always seem to snowball like that? And then there's the moment of realization for Peter when what he's doing really hits him.

Just as he's denying again, knowing about this Jesus. Verse 60. Man, I don't know what you're talking about. And immediately while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. We don't know exactly where they were in this process at the high priest's house. But as it turns out, Jesus and Peter are able to make eye contact.

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.

When does the weight of his sin hit him? When he locks eyes with Jesus. When he remembers Jesus' words warning him of this moment.

[15:04] When he sees the sadness, I suspect. In the now half-beaten face of Jesus. See, it's not merely that I've said something I shouldn't.

Or I have failed to say something I should have. That's not really the essence of the sin. It's that I've denied the one who has embraced me.

I've abandoned the one who has always been there for me. I've chosen not merely my way over God's way.

But myself over God himself. That's the ugly reality of our sin. Ron was referring to it earlier as we confess.

It has to sink in for us this morning that that's what our sin is. We were created for relationship with God. To trust him.

[16:07] To find life in his design for us. To have joy in knowing him deeply. That's what we're created to be about.

And sin rejects him. The value of that relationship. As you've heard me say many, many times. The heinousness, the evil of our sin.

Is primarily in the greatness. The glory of the one we've sinned against. You and you only, God. Have I sinned against. We don't always think of it that way. One of the ways we rationalize and minimize our sin. Is to look around and say.

That didn't really hurt anyone, did it? You know. No big deal. And your sin hasn't overwhelmed you.

[17:05] Because you haven't considered the glorious God. Who loves you. Whom you've turned your back on. And walked away from.

When you realize that. I've seen the weight of that. Knock a room of elders back. Like they've been punched in the gut. I felt the guilt that wells up quickly.

And begins to feel overwhelming. Our sin is never theoretical. It's never impersonal.

It's always relational. Against our God. Can you see that? In your own heart. In your own life. Both Judas and Peter.

In an effort to protect themselves. Sin relationally. Against God himself. And so do we. But here's where their stories split.

[18:10] Their paths diverge. In such a way that impacts the rest of their lives. And their eternities. Judas demonstrates no sorrow here.

Matthew tells us that within 24 hours. He's decided. He's made a mistake. Judas gives the money back. And goes out. And hangs himself.

In his guilt. And despair. He sees no hope. Even though he has seen. Jesus heal his enemies.

Right? Right there that night. In the garden. As he reaches over to heal. The ear of the high priest's servant. Even though Judas has heard. His gracious words.

Over and over. First hand. Even though he's been close. To the Savior. Day after day. For years. His sorrow. Is apparently.

[19:05] Only worldly. Sorrow. That I got caught. That. That things didn't work out. As I hoped. That I wasn't. Strong enough. To be successful.

And that sorrow. Leads. Only. To death. Peter. On the other hand. When he sees. His sin.

What does he do? It says he. Weeps. Bitterly. He weeps. Bitterly. I remember the first time. That this. Bitter weeping.

Happened. In my life. I was a homeschooled kid. I don't remember. Exactly. How old. And I was supposed to finish. The work I had.

For the day. And I said. I was done. And part of that work. Included. Reading a story. About a bird. I wanted to play baseball. And that story looked too long.

[20:02] So I just skipped it. And I pronounced myself. Done. And as parents tend to do. My mom was on to me. She knew this was going on.

She says. Did you read this story? Yes. You're not lying to me? No mom. No. So she asked questions. About the story. None of which I could answer.

But I persisted to deny it. She left it alone. Waited until my dad came home. You always got to be careful for that. Dad got home.

And I denied it again. I was several hours into the line. Now it was eating at me. I couldn't give in. I was too good of a kid.

Maybe some of you kids know what this feels like. To think I've got to be a good enough kid for God. I can just be the good kid. I was trying to make sure I was good enough for God.

[21:02] I would never lie. Good kids don't lie. And I remember my parents had church friends over that night. And my dad came upstairs before they went to dinner and said, I'm praying that God won't let you rest until you confess your sin.

But I needed that. And I remember lying in my bed alone that night and finally breaking. And just weeping bitterly.

Alone in my bed. Part of it was because I knew my lying had hurt my parents. But most of it was because I was realizing that I wasn't a good enough kid for God anymore.

I knew what I'd done. And I knew that I had to be perfect for Him. And I wasn't that. I was coming to the end of myself and realizing I'm not a good enough kid for God anymore.

I saw that I turned my back on Him. I was a lot less righteous. In fact, a lot more sinful than I cared to admit. And that's scary, isn't it? When you see your sin like that, when you realize you're not good enough, it's a scary feeling and you may weep over that.

[22 : 23] And yet at the end of all of that, the end of myself and the end of not being good enough was Jesus. That's actually where God was.

Peter wept bitterly. And this is some speculation, but I believe biblically directed speculation. Peter wept bitterly.

Why? Because he was coming to the end of himself after professing that he would stand.

Remember that?

It'll never happen to me, Jesus. I'll stand with you. And now he's seeing his capacity to fall. He thought he was good enough.

And now he knows that he's not. And at the end of that was Jesus. I love that verse.

[23 : 29] It's when his eyes met Jesus' eyes. Right? What do you think they saw in Jesus' eyes? My guess is deep sadness, the relational breaking hurt Jesus.

I bet also deep compassion. Jesus mourns the evil of sin and the way it wreaks havoc on us. And I bet deep love for a broken sinner.

Love that oozes out of Jesus to the point that he's willing to die for such sinners. And Peter is overwhelmed with grief that he would deny such a savior.

And right there at that lowest point when he sees Jesus looking at him, he remembers Jesus' words, it says. And Peter realizes Jesus, he knows what he's talking about.

He's a trustworthy prophet who told me this sin was going to happen. And I think he realizes Jesus is just as effective and trustworthy a prayer as he has said he will pray for Peter.

[24 : 35] That his faith will not fail. And that he will repent and strengthen his brothers. And that comes to mind. And I think as it overwhelms him, Peter realizes that Jesus really does heal.

He sees that posture of healing towards his enemies, towards those who are against him. And for the first time, maybe in a new way, Peter realizes it's not just the servant whose ear he cuts off that's one of those out to get Jesus.

But he sees who else? Himself. As one of those who's put himself against Jesus. And he realizes Jesus heals people like this.

He looks into the eyes of his savior. I love the way B.B. Warfield said it. As our savior was being tried and preparing to bear the sins of us all on the cross, He had time to give one glance to a faltering disciple and so save his soul in the saving of the world.

Sin is personal and relational. And so is Jesus. Isn't that such good news? Jesus is personal and merciful and a healing savior.

[25 : 56] And that's where repentance starts. Repentance for us begins with this godly sorrow that turns back to God himself. If sin turns from him, right, away from God, then repentance is not merely starting to do some good things.

Repentance begins with turning back to God himself in that relationship. That's the difference between Judas and Peter, by the way. Judas remains alone and his sorrow leads to self-hatred and death.

While Peter turns back to Jesus and his sorrow leads to sin, hatred, and life. Reinstated by Jesus as a leader of the early church.

Paul had some hard things to say to the church in Corinth. And it caused them sorrow over their sin. But Paul says this in another letter, 2 Corinthians chapter 7.

Paul tells them about the difference between worldly and godly sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7 verse 9. It says, Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.

[27 : 16] For you became sorrowful as God intended and were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

But worldly sorrow brings death. You see how those bitter tears, even those can be sweet.

Repentance actually turns back to God in relationship.

Runs to find protection in Him from a premeditated or spontaneous decision to run for refuge somewhere else in that moment. Back to God and saying, I'm only safe there are tears then.

The sorrow is over the emptiness of self-protection. The shame that we ever left the Father's arms looking for safety anywhere else in the first place.

And the joy that our Father welcomes us back with open arms so eagerly. Have you ever wept bitterly over your sin?

[28 : 24] Have you realized that your sin has turned your back on the God who loves you and told Him that you can find life and joy and safety somewhere else?

Have you ever been there in the early morning darkness like Peter, wondering if there's ever any light to come again? If you haven't, there's a good chance you haven't really met God either because that's where He is.

I mean, maybe like Judas, you've been close to Him and you know a lot about Him. And you've heard lots of things. But if you've never experienced that running to yourself is completely empty, and that Jesus is the only safe refuge for sinners like you and me, then you don't really know and trust Jesus as your Savior.

May it not be that any of us would leave here today just with ourselves and despairing to death over the sinfulness that we have.

No, no. For none of us. But even if you're more like Peter and like me, hoping for years, pretending to be strong enough, thinking God would be found at the end of good enough, you can come to Him this morning.

[29 : 55] Come weeping bitterly over your sin that's so awful that it sent Him to the cross. And see as you're weeping, see through those tears your Savior loving you, praying for you, going to the cross for you.

Listen, sinner, idolater, betrayer, denier. It is God who justifies, who brings you home.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus died, more than that, was raised to life, and is at the right hand of God, interceding for you. You don't need anything else.

He looks on you with love. He loves to forgive. He prays for your repentance and your return to Him. Won't you run to Him? See, this table is here because even as you consider that and think about what it would mean for you to run to Him, He has come running to you first.

[31 : 09] That's what this table is reminding you. Jesus sat with betrayers and deniers who would leave Him alone later that night. And He took bread and broke it and gave it to them and said, this is my body broken for you.

You. Do this in remembrance of me. And then He took the cup and said, this cup is a new covenant in my blood which I'm going to pour out for the forgiveness of sins like yours and mine.

Drink from it. In His behalf, I have the privilege this morning of offering you Jesus again.

His body and blood given for you. No matter how often you've denied Him. No matter how your life has betrayed His goodness.

No matter how heavy your heart is over your own sins. Come to Him and receive Jesus. He is running toward you.

[32 : 18] Look into His eyes and come to this table both weeping and rejoicing. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

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