

## Luke 22:54-62 Peter Denies Jesus

After Jesus and the disciples finished the Last Supper, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mt. of Olives.

Judas led a mob to the Garden and then betrayed Jesus with a kiss. The disciples were ready to fight, but Jesus submitted himself to the mob; he allowed himself to be arrested. He knew what was about to happen, and he was willing to lay down his life that we might be saved.

Now we are ready to consider the next part of the text. The scene shifts from the Mt. of Olives to the home of the high priest, where Jesus had been taken upon his arrest. We find here more evidence that Jesus truly is a prophet. What he foretold about Peter denying him is about to happen precisely as Jesus said it would, in spite of Peter's objections (cf. vss. 31-34).

We also have more proof of the weakness and failure so common in sinful people. The text records Peter's infamous three-fold denial of Jesus.

The time is now about 2:30 am. The place is the home of the high priest. Jesus was about to face five or six individual trials or interviews—two or three before the Jewish officials (Luke records only two of them) and three before Roman officials.

I. .54 Jesus had submitted to this arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (vss. 51a, 53).

A. .54a The word “took” (συλλαμβάνω) often refers to being arrested. Jesus was seized and taken to the home of the high priest for his first interview or trial.

B. The high priest at this time was Caiaphas. Another man—Annas (John)—is also referred to as the high priest. Annas had been the high priest previously, and he was Caiaphas' father-in-law.

Although Annas had no official position when Jesus was arrested, he was still the power behind of office and was still referred to as the high priest. The hearing before Annas was likely an informal event that gave the Sanhedrin time to gather later that morning.

It seems likely that both Annas and Caiaphas lived in the same complex—probably a very large and imposing palace or mansion. Perhaps Annas lived in one wing and Caiaphas lived in the other.

II. .54end Peter followed the mob at a distance—“afar off.”

- A. We learn from the other Gospel accounts that all the disciples ran away when Jesus was arrested. But we also know that both Peter and John followed the crowd to the home of the high priest to see what would happen to Jesus.
  - B. So we can at least give Peter some credit for following Jesus after his arrest. He and John, as far as we know, are the only disciples who, after running away, came back to follow Jesus.
- III. .55 Peter joined several others in the courtyard.
- A. John, in his Gospel, tells us that he knew the high priest, so the gatekeeper let him in to the courtyard. Then John arranged to let Peter in.
  - B. .55b The text mentions that Peter sat down with several others in a courtyard. The buildings would have been situated in a U-shape, with the courtyard in the middle. People could enter this courtyard through a door or gate. A gate-keeper would be there to let people in and out.
  - C. Someone had started a fire, and several people were sitting around it trying to keep warm. Remember that this was in the spring of the year, so the evenings could get chilly.
  - D. And the language is interesting: “Peter sat down among them.”
    - 1. He wasn’t lurking in a corner somewhere trying to avoid being seen.
    - 2. He’s sitting with the others around this fire. These people were the enemies of Jesus, yet there is Peter, sitting among them. That sets him up for this three-fold denial.

**App:** Ps 1 tells us, “Blessed is the man that walketh not . . . .” The Bible doesn’t command us to avoid *all* contact with unbelievers. But it does tell us to avoid relationships with unbelievers that will compromise our Christian testimony. Surrounding ourselves with unbelievers can be an occasion that leads to compromise and sin; that’s what happened to Peter.

It’s one thing to be surrounded by unbelievers because you have to be (e.g., your job, school) or because you want to be a Gospel witness. But when unbelievers influence you to compromise or to deny Jesus in some way, then it’s a dangerous place to be. The Bible tells us to avoid situations or relationships that hinder our relationship with Christ.

So Peter is in somewhat of a compromised position. He put himself in a dangerous situation, and that led to his downfall. Don't make that same mistake. Avoid situations that may lead to spiritual compromise.

IV. .56-60 Peter denied Jesus three times.

We now come to what must have been one of the most personally disappointing events in the life of Christ up to this point. One of Jesus' chief disciples denies him. Judas betrayed him, and now Peter is about to deny him.

Jesus had foretold that Peter would do this (vs. 34), and in spite of his objections to the contrary, he now he does it. He denies the Lord three times.

The word "deny" in the Bible is opposite to the word "confess." To confess Christ is to acknowledge him, to believe in him, to accept him publicly. Disciples deny themselves and confess Jesus as Lord. Peter is a disciple, but he does just the opposite— He denies Christ in order to protect himself.<sup>1</sup>

Each time Peter denied the Lord was an opportunity for him to stand up for and defend Jesus. He had three opportunities to preach the Gospel or at least affirm that he believed in Jesus. Instead, Peter denied knowing Jesus or having anything to do with him.

**App:** Likewise, every time we face hostility and opposition because of our faith in Christ, it's an opportunity to stand up and boldly proclaim the Gospel. We should see opposition and hostility as opportunities to defend the faith and proclaim the truth. Instead of being ashamed of Jesus, we should boldly defend and proclaim him. Peter did the very opposite.

A. .56 A servant girl (παιδισκη—"a certain maid") asserted that Peter had been with Jesus.

1. A servant girl in that culture was very low on the social scale. What a servant girl said could easily be ignored. Peter didn't have to respond to her at all.
2. For Peter, a grown man, to be intimidated by a young girl of low social status reveals his deep level of fear.
3. .57 Apparently this bold assertion caught Peter off guard. In spite of his previous promises of loyalty, he denies that he knows Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 1035.

- B. .58 Someone else saw Peter and claimed he was one of Jesus' disciples. Again, he denies it.
- C. .59 About an hour later, another person "confidently affirmed" that Peter must have been a disciple because he was from Galilee. Peter's dress or his accent probably revealed his cultural background.  
.60 Peter claimed not to even know what the man was talking about; he has no knowledge of Jesus. Matthew tells us that Peter accompanied his denial with cursing and swearing.
- D. Peter claimed that he did not know Jesus, he was not a follower of Jesus, and he doesn't know what they are talking about. This was just about as thorough denial as he could make.
- E. The one who had just hours before confidently affirmed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," now fervently denies that he even knows him or anything about Jesus.

**Quote:** Thus, everything central to Peter's ... new identity since becoming a follower of Jesus he has now thrust aside. Peter had boldly proclaimed that he was ready to go *with* Jesus to prison and death (v 33), then denies that he was *with* Jesus at all (vv 59–60).<sup>2</sup>

- F. What motivated Peter to deny that he knew Jesus or that was one of the disciples? He probably felt that his life was in danger. I get the sense that Peter panicked in this pressurized situation.

Peter's denial is driven by the fear of man. Peter denies Jesus because he fears what would happen to him if he becomes known as a disciple of Jesus. Maybe they'll arrest him, too. Maybe his life is in danger. He seeks to protect himself by denying any association with Jesus.

*Prov 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.*

**App:** Most of us are susceptible to the fear of man. We may fear what others think or what they might do to us if we affirm that we are followers of Christ. Our fear of man is greater than our fear of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 787.

When you face opposition and hostility, how will you respond? Will you be like the disciples and run away? Will you be like Peter and deny that you are a follower of Jesus? Will you compromise enough to avoid detection—will you become a “secret” Christian that no one suspects of being a follower of Jesus? Or will you stand strongly in the face of opposition and affirm that you are a committed believer in Jesus?

I believe that in the coming years, it will be more and more dangerous to be known as a disciple of Christ. Genuine Christians who live a godly lifestyle will encounter increasing levels of opposition and hostility. Some of us may be tempted to deny that we are Christians in order to avoid conflict. We may be tempted to change our value system or cave in to the world’s point of view to avoid problems. I hope none of us would deny the Lord.

You might think that you would never compromise your Christian testimony. But given the right set of circumstances, you might do almost anything, especially if you felt that your life was in danger.

Remember what Jesus said:

*Luke 9:26 whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed ....*

*Luke 12:9 But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.*

*Rom 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Disciples of Jesus should not be ashamed to stand up boldly in defense of the Christian faith and values. We should not hesitate to be known as followers of Jesus. Millions of Christ-followers have stood up boldly under persecution and abuse without denying their faith in Christ. We can do the same. Failure to do so is compromise and sin.

There are other ways that people deny the Lord. Some people claim to be followers of Christ but deny the Lord by their works. Certain government officials claim to be Christians, but what they do clearly shows that their claims are empty.

*Titus 1:16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

When our political leaders support and promote abominable and reprobate behavior, we know that their claims about following Christ are false and empty. They deny their profession of faith by their actions. We know that their claims are false if their works contradict their supposed faith.

1Jo 2:4 *He that saith, I know [Jesus], and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Jesus told us that a good tree brings forth good fruit, and a bad tree brings forth bad fruit. If your life is bringing forth bad fruit, it doesn't matter what you claim about Jesus. You are denying Jesus by living an unrighteously.

We should not be ashamed to be known as followers of Christ. We should stand up boldly for Christian teaching and morals. We should live the kind of lifestyle that is consistent with our profession of faith. We should value what God values and hate what God hates. Our lives should be a shining light pointing toward Christ.

I think standing boldly for Christ is especially important now. We may not have freedom to speak the truth for much longer. We should use the opportunities we have while we still have them to preach the Gospel.

**Trans:** Peter denied the Lord. This was a very serious failure that we don't want to imitate. We should take steps to avoid those situations that would lead to spiritual compromise or denial.

- v. .61 The rooster crowed, and Jesus looked directly at Peter.
  - A. We might wonder how Peter and Jesus came into contact so that the two could look at one another. I think the most reasonable explanation is that the guards were probably moving Jesus from one place to another. This brought him into close proximity to Peter, and they were able to make eye contact.

- B. .61 “and the Lord turned...”
1. Luke frequently uses the verb “to turn” when Jesus rebukes or admonishes someone (cf. 7:9, 44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28). So that’s probably what is implied here when Jesus turns to look at Peter.
  2. Some suggest this was a look of love or forgiveness, but it’s more likely a look of rebuke; at least, that seems to be how Peter took it.
- C. This happened at the very moment Peter had denied Jesus for the third time and the rooster had crowed the second time, exactly as Jesus had prophesied (Mk 14:30).
- D. The crowing of the rooster and the look from Jesus brought back to Peter’s mind that he had promised his loyalty to Jesus just hours before. And then the reality hit him—he had denied the Lord just as Jesus said he would, and just as Peter promised he never would.

**App:** I wonder if you have ever done what you said you would never do. “I’m never going to commit that sin again.” But then a little while later, you do the very same thing. We sinful humans are remarkably weak when it comes to temptation. We are “prone to wander” as the old hymn says.

We should not underestimate our sinful tendencies or our weaknesses. Under the right set of circumstances, any one of us might give in to temptation. That’s why we must avoid those situations where we are most susceptible to temptation.

What are we supposed to do when we sin? We are supposed to repent.

- VI. .62 Peter went out and wept bitterly.
- A. Peter’s bitter tears demonstrated his genuine repentance for his cowardly, repeated acts of denial.
- Quote:** “Weeping” marks the beginning of Peter’s “turning.”<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lu 22:32 ... *when thou art converted* (i.e., turned/returned), *strengthen thy brethren.*

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<sup>3</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 789.

**App:** Peter was a flawed believer, but he was genuine. He felt the guilt of his sin and he repented.

One of the differences between a true believer and an unbeliever is their response to sin. Believers feel a sense of guilt over their sin. They are sensitive about sin and they confess their sins as sins. They don't try to excuse it or validate it. They repent. 1 John 1:9.

Unbelievers typically either ignore their sins or try to excuse them. They may be like Judas, who was remorseful over his betrayal of Jesus but ultimately not repentant. Being sensitive about sin is a mark of a genuine believer. If you can sin and *not* feel guilty about it, you should question your spiritual state.

Believers may commit very serious sins. Given the right set of circumstances, any believer could do something just as reprehensible as what Peter did. If Peter, the most fervent of Jesus' disciples, could do something like this, it follows that most of us could do something equally as sinful and shameful given the right pressures.

1Co 10:12 *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

We probably don't realize how weak and frail we are. Most of us have not really been tested by hostility and threats. Most of us have found it fairly easy to live the Christian life thus far. But it may be a different story when we face genuine opposition and the possibility of persecution. If we believed our lives were in danger, we might behave much like Peter did.

We must take steps to avoid this kind of sinful compromise. The Bible tells us to be strong in the Lord and to put on the whole armor of God. When we have a great fear of God, we don't have such a strong fear of man.

Heb 13:6 *... we may boldly say, The Lord [is] my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

We must not allow our natural fear to threaten our loyalty to Christ. We must "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." If we fear God, we won't be intimidated by hostile opposition. The Bible tells us to be ready to give a defense of the faith. We are expected to contend for the faith. We must stand strong and not compromise. And we should avoid those people, places, and pastimes that could lead to disloyalty.

God is well aware of human weakness and failure. Jesus' first disciples, even the most fervent of them, failed Jesus in his time of need.

All disciples fail. We may not betray Jesus and we may not deny him, but there will undoubtedly be times when we fail in our obligations as disciples.

Peter denied the Lord, showing that even a fervent, committed disciple may panic in a pressurized situation and do something shameful, something that he bitterly regrets.

Peter succumbed to the fear of man, and that's a weakness that we may still experience today. But we need not let fear control us. We must put on the whole armor of God and stand against the wiles of the devil. Instead of denying the Lord, we should be prepared to affirm our loyalty to Christ no matter the results. If we truly fear God, we won't fear what man can do to us.

Peter went out and wept bitterly, demonstrating his sorrow for his sin and weakness. And we should likewise repent when we respond to a crisis sinfully. The proper response is always humble repentance. Peter was eventually restored to full discipleship and went on to be one of the most powerful leaders of the early church.

When we face threats and hostility, we must be strong in the Lord; we must be faithful. We must persevere in our loyalty to Christ. We must not allow the fear of man to cause us to cave in or compromise.