

Denying The Lord Jesus

Luke 22:54-62

54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." 58 And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." 59 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." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 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." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54-62)

A question as we begin our consideration of these words of scripture . . . "at what cost of suffering are you, am I, willing to endure as we stand firm in our relationship with the Lord Jesus, and at what cost will we deny Him?"

As we would consider that question we are not, at this moment, under any form of crisis. We are comfortable and not under threat. And it is during these times of secure comfort that we usually think the best of ourselves, perhaps even declaring that we would have been more loyal to the Lord Jesus than was Peter.

And perhaps we would have remained more loyal to Him. I would "hope" that I would have been. But the truth is, I don't know how I would have responded. I might have been like the other disciples who quickly fled and are not mentioned at all in these accounts.

What is that controlling, even overpowering emotion that invades our souls and takes control over our hearts and minds during a time such as this? It is "fear", simple "fear". And may I interject here that while yes, "fear" is a normal "God given" emotional response, intended for our good in times of crisis, it is also a useful weapon within the demonic realms.

According to these scriptures, "fear" is an actual "spirit", a demon that employs that emotion, and especially at the wrong times and to the wrong extents, often

overwhelming and paralyzing a person, as probably took place with Peter and the other disciples.

In a sermon that I heard recently, the preacher spoke about our emotional responses and about the manner in which each of us reacts to sudden confrontations. And he acknowledged that our modern day psychologists seem to have it correct in that our responses are either “Fight or Flight”, and oftentimes both.

Earlier, on this particular evening, as the temple guards and chief priests approached the disciples there in the Garden of Gethsemane; Peter’s first response had been to draw his sword and to fight. You will recall that he cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the Chief Priest.

And those heroic responses do seem often to come to a person of Peter’s disposition. These gospels reveal to us that Peter was an impulsive man, given to strong immediate responses.

He demonstrated his impulsiveness earlier in the evening while they were still in the upper room. There, Peter had valiantly declared to Jesus that he would go anywhere with Him and suffer any cost.

But Jesus knew better and had very kindly warned Peter that he would do exactly as He did, that before the cock crowed, Peter would deny Him three times. Those words in Luke 22,

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” 34 Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31-34)

Jesus was able to know all that dwells within the minds and hearts of men! With these words, and others like them, it is oft confirmed to us that Jesus was who He said He was, that yes, He was a “man”, in many ways not much different than Peter. But then again, He was also, ever and always, the “only begotten Son of God”. And as the Son of God, He knew things that no other man could know.

His was a delicate combination that no other man would ever experience. He was as the Westminster Confession of Faith tells us, both “very God” and “very man”. And while sometimes His words surprise us as He makes statements about “not knowing”

something, such as, not knowing the time or the day when He will return in His “second coming”, He was still ever and always “very God”.

And though many learned bible scholars have diligently searched these scriptures to find and to know both the extent and the limitations of the Lord Jesus, that thin line separating where His humanity ceased and His deity began, such things will forever remain a mystery.

His prophetic warning here to Peter about how Peter would deny Him was, no doubt, coming out from His position within the Deity. Those words again from Luke 22,

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32)

These simple words give us revealing insight into some of the mysteries that take place within the court counsels of the Trinity. They bring to mind a similar circumstance in the Book of Job. Turn there with me and listen!

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." 8 The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." 9 Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face." 12 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:6-12)

Most all that takes place within the courts of the Trinity remain a mystery to the small minds of men, but here God has permitted a brief glimpse into manner with which He governs. Here, we discover that within the mysterious realms of God, there are very special ones, understood to be “governing angels”, who are, in this context called “sons of God”. And satan, though deposed from his righteous position, is still given access, perhaps even required to appear before the courts of God. And here, the man Job is the center of attention between God and satan.

Now, I confess that my understanding of these proceedings is limited, but it is clear that the man Job is representative of all those who regularly call upon the name of the Lord, and especially Peter here in our text for today. Yes, by His grace, God keeps a protective “hedge” around each of His beloved children, preventing satan and his demons from plying the worst of their demonic miseries. But then, on occasion and always for our good, God will remove some of that hedge and permit satan to have access to us.

Here, we find that Peter is one whose name has been brought before the courts of God and there, satan has asked permission to have access to Peter, to “sift” him as wheat. Consider this circumstance for a moment . . . though it be strange to our thinking, even while Jesus lived in human form and walked the earth as a man, He also still sat on his throne at the right hand of God the Father and reigned in the court counsels of the Trinity, just as He always had done. And there He received these petitions and requests from the “sons of God” as they regularly came before the courts. And that is why Jesus would know about satan’s request to “sift Peter as wheat”, and then here reveal it to Peter.

But then thankfully, Jesus also occupied another position there within the Trinity, that of intercessor. He was, and is, ever and always at the right hand of God the Father “making intercession” for all the saints. Those words in Hebrews 7,

25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

(Hebrews 7:25)

Jesus was ever and always making intercession, and here, He would intercede for Peter and pray for him that his faith would not fail.

Did Peter’s faith fail? He probably thought so, because these three times of denial were not the only times that he had done badly. Recall that earlier, while still in the upper room, satan had gotten hold of Peter’s words and Peter had tried to talk Jesus out of being crucified.

Again, did Peter’s faith fail? It really looks as if his faith did not stand very firm. But the reality is, his faith did not fail! It faltered, but it did not fail.

Why didn’t Peter’s faith fail him completely, especially considering that satan, the “master of all tempters” was working hard within his soul? Peter’s faith did not fail because the “Master Intercessor”, the Lord Jesus, was also at work, praying and interceding for Him. And folks, when Jesus intercedes for us, we cannot fail.

But what is our part, what was Peter's part once he was brought to the realization of the depths to which he would stoop in response to the fear that was within him? What is any person to do when the truth of our failure slaps us in the face?

And it did exactly that with Peter. As Peter denied Jesus for that third time, he heard the cock crow and then he looked up to see the face of Jesus. Listen! Verse 59, 59 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." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 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." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:59-62)

Whatever the cause or the circumstances, whether it be fear, as here with Peter, or some other motive, our lies and the intent of our heart will inevitably be revealed to us. Here, it was the face of Jesus that brought conviction to the heart of Peter.

Why is one look from the Lord Jesus so powerful? It is because Jesus is the "light", the true light from which darkness cannot hide. That look on Jesus' face brought Peter's fears and his lies into full view within his soul and it broke his heart. And it caused Peter to weep bitterly, and thankfully so. Why, because it gives us a real understanding of Peter's heart and of his true relationship with Jesus.

The other man, Judas, the one who had betrayed Jesus also no doubt wept as he went out and hanged himself for his betrayal.

But folks, here is the essential difference between the words "remorse" and "repentance". Judas felt remorse, a worldly form of sorrow, but that kind of sorrow only leads to death. But not so with Peter! As we will see in the coming days and years ahead, Peter's grief led him to repentance and to life. Listen to these words in 2 Corinthians 7,

10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

How often have we wept bitterly for something that we have done, but found no relief? May I suggest that our bitter weeping may have been for the wrong reasons, perhaps because we were suddenly brought face to face with our loss and that loss was too much to bear?

That kind of remorse sometimes has its good results, but it falls far short of God's intention for us. Remorse is the result of our having judged ourselves by our own standards and found ourselves guilty. Sometimes our guilt prompts us to inflict severe judgment, as with Judas who went out and hanged himself; but most often, we are far more generous to ourselves and our remorseful guilt is short-lived and without much consequence.

But that is not at all God's intention in matters of our sin. We do not have the privilege of judging ourselves. Sin is ever and always against God. And He and He alone is the judge. And He and He alone has the privilege of pronouncing guilt or innocence. And it is He and He alone who meets out justice and mercy. And it is to Him and Him alone that we must give an account of our sin.

Here Peter's sin was simple fear, combined with a lack of faith. But folks, sin is sin and it grieves the Lord Jesus when we do it, especially when it results in our denying our relationship with Him. And it is a very good thing when Jesus' all-knowing glance brings us to sorrow and to repentance.

Peter's failure is being laid bare before us here so that we might see ourselves, how we do also oft deny our relationship with Christ. We make choices, sometimes for the most foolish of reasons, perhaps for simple convenience or perhaps we are just taking part in something that our friends are doing. But even so, by our behavior, we are still denying Christ. And we must understand that that is wrong, very wrong.

And if we are not careful our denials will become our ordinary response, so much so that someday, on that Day of Judgment, Jesus might look into our eyes and say to us, "depart from me, I never knew you".

May I encourage you, may I implore you, may I plead with you, to not let that take place within your life. While you still have time, won't you please open your heart and let "Godly sorrow" seep into it and lead you to repentance that will give you life, eternal life. Listen, as I close,

10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)