



“Jesus Denied by Peter”

Luke 22:54-62

February 7, 2021

It is good to be gathered in Jesus name together. We are going to be in Luke Chapter 22 once again. The title of this morning’s message is *Jesus Denied by Peter*. This morning we are going to observe a profoundly painful moment in the relationship of Jesus Christ with one of His foremost disciples. This foreshadows the painful moments we too as His disciples can expect to experience as our weaknesses are revealed to us in the process of growing in the Lord.

But, hallelujah, praise be to Him, brothers and sisters, even as our miserable, sinful shortcomings are made known and come to the surface, there is growth, grace, mercy, strength, renewal, and newness of life that is found in the power of Jesus Christ as we are vitally connected to Him by His grace through faith.

We need to abide in Jesus and this story makes this painfully clear to us. The disciple’s given name was Simon Barjona, but when calling him into discipleship, Jesus gave him the name Petros. Petros means rock. We might call him Rocky.

Jesus did not give Peter this name based on what his character was like when he called him. Jesus gave him this name based on the Lord’s vision for what he would become as he was humbled, then strengthened and made new by the power of the Spirit of the Living God. The name Petros was a vision for what Peter would become over time with growth and intimacy with Jesus Christ.

How should we describe Peter when he was called? What was he like? Peter was rough. He was brash. He was boisterous. One of my favorite descriptions of Peter that I have read is that he was a man who was always pressing the accelerator of his mouth, while his brain remained in neutral. Reaving it up but not giving careful thought to what was coming out of his mouth.

But, alas, out of the overflow of the mouth, the heart speaks. A lot of self-confidence came out of Peter when he spoke. Here was a man who saw himself superior to others. Peter was right there in the thick of that ongoing debate that happened among the disciples, even happening in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion of Jesus, where they were arguing about who was the greatest—each one in relation to the others.

As Jesus was seeking to humble His disciples, letting them know before the night was over that they would all scatter from Him. Peter, with his bold proclamations, said, Even if all the rest of them run away, I will not fall away. I will not scatter. Peter even went on to crown it by saying, Even if I must go to imprisonment and death, I am with you all the way. Simon Peter. Behold him. Those were his declarations.

Now we continue and pick up the story. The time of the arrest has come in the Garden of Gethsemane. As we saw last week, the betrayer arrived. Jesus had some pretty bold warnings for him. The disciples tried to intervene, and Jesus had some pretty bold words for them also, some correction. For the mob, Jesus also had some prophetic warning.

Now we go forward understanding that Peter made some promises—even if I must follow You to imprisonment and death, I will proceed with You. Now we will see how Peter did making good on such a proclamation. Luke Chapter 22, starting in Verse 54:

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

So we have this account of Peter's public denial of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the sad story of Peter's failure to do what Peter said Peter was going to do. It was the display of the inability of Peter's walk to measure up with his talk.

Here we have the story of the denial of Simon Peter. It is not so much a matter of this piece of granite breaking in two. Rather, it is a picture instead of one who we thought might have been granite, who thought himself to be granite, actually being revealed as sandstone and just crumbling in that public place that night. Brothers and sisters, as we read what is here let us praise the Lord that Scripture is so honest.

The Lord gives us such depictions not to embarrass a man like Simon Peter. Rather, the Lord provides us with such depictions because Scripture must be true to life. It gives us this depiction so that we may look at this story of Peter and not stand in judgment of him, but instead that we might look at Peter and see what we too are capable of apart from the power of the Holy Spirit filling our lives.

Paul said it this way in I Corinthians 10:11-12. Paul was speaking back about some Old Testament stories of the various failures of Israel, but I think it is just as applicable to the things that we see in the New Testament. Verse 11:

¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹²Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Wow! If that last sentence is not made visible in the life of Simon Peter, I don't know here it is made visible because Peter had such confidence about what he would do in his stand for the Lord. There is an adage that is true—pride goes before a fall. We must humbly recognize that that is what happened with Peter.

However, looking at what went on in this text, we have to have the Scripture being held up as a mirror so that we are looking upon ourselves. We must take to heart and consider how easy it would be for any of us to deny knowing the Lord Jesus Christ in public when we ought to be declaring that we follow Him. It is beyond possible for any of us to be silent when we should be speaking words of faithfulness about our Savior.

Looking in this text, I think that the lesson is two-fold. One, we must be warned against trying to follow Christ in the flesh and in our own strength, and with mighty thoughts about what we are capable of. Oh how we must walk in humble dependency in Him.

Second, looking at the story of Simon Peter, let us also be reminded of the grace and the mercy and the kindness of Jesus Christ; His wisdom and providence that He even uses our failures to form our character and shape our hearts, so that they are that wonderful blend of strength and boldness, as well as tenderness and kindness. These are things that Simon Peter needed to learn. These are also ongoing lessons for each and every single one of us following the Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking into this portion of Scripture, let me give you the outline that we will walk through this morning. For our instruction we will first consider the place of the denial. Second, we will look at the particulars of the denial. Third, we will see the pain of the denial. Finally, we will see the forgiveness of the denial.

Let's begin by looking at:

1. The Place of Denial (54-55)

We will consider what we can learn from this. Verse 54 and 55:

⁵⁴Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them.

The scene was set. Peter found himself in the courtyard of the high priest of Israel. The high priest would have been living in a spacious villa-style home, kind of built in a u-shape. There in the middle would be a spacious enclosed patio.

And there was Peter among the household servants who definitely noticed the great stirring that was going on in the middle of the night. We can understand that members of the Temple Guard were there, making sure that there no funny stuff would happen. They were keeping the location and situation secure.

Peter was there and let's behold him. We assume Peter was among mostly unbelievers, and Peter was there in a place of considerable risk. Brothers and sisters, is it not true that that is where we too will be tempted to deny the Lord; to deny our relationship with Him; to deny publicly knowing His saving grace upon our lives.

When we are in the midst of unbelievers or people who think differently about Jesus than we do, who knows what may happen in our hearts that still has remnants of sin and fallenness; how we might fail to speak up about our Lord, or even say things that are untrue about our relationship Him.

We are capable of this. Obviously this is not going to happen when we are hanging out with a whole bunch of people who are in the faith. Rather, it will happen when we are among people who may be are critical or dismissive or they just don't have faith in Christ.

It could be around the fire ring in a neighbor's yard and conversation gets struck up about the Christian faith. It could be in a staff party at work. It could be at the dinner table with family members. It could be running into a friend at Trader Joe's.

It could be an interaction with the checker at Trader Joe's—so, it's Saturday night. What are you doing tomorrow? You are a Christian and you say I don't know rather than saying, I'm going to church to worship Jesus. But we keep it all clammed up, and we don't tell them what we are going to do the next day.

It could be in the lecture hall of the university. You just never know, day by day, where we might find ourselves with opportunity to be bold for Jesus, where we may very well just wither away in weakness.

Let's give some element of credit where credit is due. Peter was there, wasn't he? To a certain extent, that was pretty bold. The disciples scattered. Initially so did Peter, but then his heart began pounding with something and he circled back. He was first following at a distance.

That high priest's house, isn't that a hive of hornets? Yet, in Peter slipped and there he sat down and so let's just recognize that that was something! What drew him in there? What was it that brought him there?

Was there a level of loyalty that took Peter there? Was there a measure of bravery that brought him there? I would say so; love and affection for Jesus that he did in fact have?. Yes, I would say so. This was brave.

However, we also must wonder if there might have been a little bit of bravado mixed in with the bravery. They are similar words, but with different meanings. Bravery can be moving forward when your heart is shaking to do something that requires strength. However, bravado is very much mixed with self. And Simon Peter fitted the profile of a man with much bravado.

Bravado is a show of boldness to show one's self superior to others. Weren't the disciples just debating who was the greatest, Peter blurting out, Even if it is imprisonment and death, I am there. When he said it, he had to follow through with it. So even pride can drive a person forward to make them do foolish things that they have said.

It was whole mix of things that brought Peter to that place, but what we find is that whatever it was, it began to fall through. Something took Peter that far, but whatever took Peter that far, it only took him so far because we see what happened next.

We continue and we see:

2. The Particulars of Denial (56-60)

The scene was set. Peter was beside the fire. I would imagine him contemplating his next move—okay, here I am. Now what do I do? You can just imagine his second rush of adrenalin. He had one earlier with the sword and the ear.

Now here came Peter's second rush of adrenalin. He was wondering what was going on when I think attention was drawn to him unexpectedly. It's kind of like when we are in church and there is some distraction. It so funny. I will be up here preaching and somebody's phone rings and all eyes go in that direction.

Somebody drew attention to Peter and all the eyes focused on him. Can you picture it? That is what went on. Peter did not see that coming, but there it was. Verses 56 and 57:

⁵⁶Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."

Peter had just denied even knowing Jesus. I don't know Jesus. I'm just here because I saw the commotion and I just had to see what happens. I don't know Him! Just take that in.

It was approximately three years prior to this moment when Jesus filled Peter's boat with a miraculous catch of fish, and said, You, come with Me. You are a fisher of men now.

It was approximately two years prior to that moment when Jesus and Peter were sharing a meal together in Peter's house, a meal prepared by the hands of the mother-in-law that Jesus had just healed.

Approximately one year prior to that moment, Peter was up with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. The glory of the deity of Christ was shining forth and Peter was so caught in the heart-pounding thrill of it, saying, I'm going to pitch three tents; one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. This is good. We need to stay here.

Those are just three moments in the midst of so many experiences. John said that there is not even a book that is thick enough to contain them all. And Peter said, I don't know Him. And it continued. There is a second denial that we see unfold before us. Verse 58:

⁵⁸And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.”

There is a little bit of a difference there. The man was saying, You are also one of the disciples of Jesus. You are part of that community of discipleship. You are one of His learners and Peter responded, Man, I am not! I am not part of that little community.

So the first time, Peter denied his knowledge of the Christ. Now here he denied being a part of the church. I don't know those Jesus people, Peter said. You will notice throughout the account the word *also* repeated three times.

You also are one of His followers. You also were among them. Why is that word *also* there? If you look in the Gospel of John Chapter 19, you will get the harmonized details of the story. Peter was not the only disciple there.

In John Chapter 19 we find that there was another unnamed disciple present. The high priests knew this unnamed disciple. So by virtue of this unnamed disciple, they were granted access into the locked courtyard of the high priest where they were checking people in.

We are not told who that disciple was but we do know throughout the Gospel of John, that John never named himself when he was speaking of himself. One of the disciples, the disciple that Jesus loved. So it is likely that it was John that was also there in that courtyard.

John was there so unassuming and quiet, while Peter was the one who had made his bold claims about what he would do and how he would not falter. And there he was, the sandstone was crumbling.

Now we continue and as we move into the third denial, we must pay attention to the chronological details. Between the first and the second, there was just a few minutes that had passed by. The initial interrogations may have been something of a surprise to Peter, so maybe he blurted his responses out and he, himself, could not believe what he had just said.

However, an hour had passed; an hour for Peter to be thinking about what had just come out of his mouth. An hour later, here came another opportunity. What happened next? We read it in Verses 59 and 60:

⁵⁹And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” ⁶⁰But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

And the details given by the other Gospels is that Peter was just so riled up that he started calling curses upon himself. Mark 14:71

⁷¹But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear...

May God strike me dead if I know Him! Wow! Stunning! So we have these three denials of Peter. Let's understand that this was a man who had affection for Jesus. Do you agree with me on that? Here was a man who had affection for Jesus and he was crumbling to pieces. What was at the heart of this?

Why would Peter declare such stunning, bald-faced lies? Even as a man who was devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, who genuinely had affection for Jesus, what caused him to do this? Brothers and sisters, look upon this and behold how powerful the impulse of self-preservation is.

Peter's sense of self-preservation was outweighing his devotion to Jesus at that moment. Peter was holding on to his own life and driving that self-preservation is this: Peter was finding out that as much as he loved the Lord Jesus, he loved himself and his own life more. That is what Peter was finding out.

Self-love was at the heart of this. When you think about all the things that were taking place throughout that evening even going into previous occurrences, Peter's self-love had come out in so many different ways.

Earlier when we saw Peter with such an inflated view of his own strength and resolve and his arrogance in the company of the other disciples, this was self-love. I'm the best! Look at me. I'm the best. And don't we have a society these days where self-love is being fed into people. We don't it fed to us. It is natural. It is within us in our fallenness. In our sin.

Peter was prayerless when Jesus called him to pray. Then he went forth with an adrenaline rush of aggression and then Peter ran away. Now he was going through not one denial, but a second denial and a third denial, deceiving people, losing his temper, publicly cursing, and all of this was rooted in self-love, a preserved self, rather than proclaims of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Instead of loving the Lord with all of his heart and with all of his mind and with all of his strength and with all of his soul, Peter was loving his own life. We are all built like this and how we need Jesus to make us new and to totally transform our thinking and impulses by the power of His grace so that love for God and love for others is paramount.

Here we have Peter going over the falls and he was a man who was not resembling a Christian at all—I don't know him. I don't know him. I don't know them. May God strike me dead if I 'm lying—what was going on here?

Brothers and sisters, I wonder if you have notice that I brought some rocks this morning. Do you see the rocks that are up here on the altar? I didn't bring those rocks for a time of show and tell. Let any of you who is without sin, come and take the first stone and cast it at Peter's memory.

I'm not taking up any stones, I can tell you that! Any of you who is without sin and who has not fallen short of the glory of God, you can take one of these stones. I think that window back there at the corner is a depiction of Jesus at the seaside with Simon Peter that would be a good window to pluck your rock through.

You better not because you are no better than Peter! I wonder how many of you have been in an antagonistic environment, whether it was at work, or the classroom, or the family room, you were there among people who were being flat out antagonistic speaking falsehood about Christ and about His people, and you just sit there not saying a single thing.

Maybe it was a situation where it was more of a setting of horrible lampooning blasphemy that was taking place. Maybe in a living room where there was some foul form of sinful entertainment, where people are blaspheming the name of God and laughing at it.

Maybe it was in a comedy club where the Name of Jesus Christ was being disgraced and you sit there and take it all in and don't step up and walk out in gracious protest, saying, He loves me and I love Him and I will not listen to this. Instead, just sitting there and maybe laughing too.

Maybe it was one of those front yard environment opportunities and Jesus brought somebody to you and you were striking up a little chat. The Spirit was yearning within you to talk to them and ask them if they go to church, to ask them if they pray. Just do something to spread the Kingdom and to be the fragrance of Jesus.

Yet you clammed up because you didn't want to be thought foolish for the Gospel. You didn't want to be thought loco for Jesus so you just stayed quiet when you knew the Holy Spirit was prompting you to speak. We can't be casting stones at Peter. I think probably day by day and week by week by week, we find ourselves shrinking back because we love ourselves more than we love the Lord.

Oh how we need to cast ourselves upon the mercy and the grace of Jesus Christ that He would transform us; that He would fill us with His power. How we need to pray, saying, Lord, help me to walk forth with expectancy so that I can represent You when You are clearly calling me to do so and that I can be the fragrance of Jesus.

In you and in me and in our fallenness, we will shrink back. Or on the other side, when you are in the midst of people who are sinful and in the grip of Satan, you tell them that they disgust you, asking them what is the matter with them. That is not representing Jesus either.

Rather it is a bold and gracious witness that the Spirit is going to bring forth from us when instead of being dominated by our lingering sin, we are in the power of the Spirit. Do you see how the Gospel is needed not just at the opening of the Christian life, but we need Jesus to fill our hearts and lives day by day to forgive us and to help us to be strong.

Peter was here in the midst of a nose-dive. I was thinking of surfing lingo in relation to Peter. He had gone over the falls. This was not just a wipeout, friends. There is a particular kind of wipeout in surfing. It's not like you are surfing some gentle little wave and you just fall down into the water.

When you are surfing on a big wave and there is a curl and you nose-dive, not only do you fall into the water, but you get taken up over the curl and smashed down below. Surfers might say that Peter got pounded here.

Here Peter was in the midst of his rant calling down curses. Then something happened to make him break. As we continue, we see:

3. The Pain of Denial (61-62)

Verses 60 through 62:

⁶⁰...And immediately while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And 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." ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.

Here was Peter, his chest was heaving. Here was a man sobbing deeply about everything that he had just discovered about himself. This was a profound life-altering, character-transforming, moment of brokenness and pain.

Peter was realizing that he was not as strong as he thought he was. Peter was realizing that he did not love the Lord and have as much devotion as he thought he had. Peter was realizing that he was not as superior to the others as he thought he was.

Here we have Peter being broken and emptied and being drained of the pride that was in him during this very profoundly healing and cathartic moment of humility. All throughout the pages of Scripture what we find is that when people are used mightily of the Lord, they are people that have been broken in the Lord.

All Peter's brokenness was initiated by a gaze. How were Peter and Jesus able to see each other? It could have been that there was a window and Peter was able to look into the gallery, with just enough distance so that they were able to see one another and just at that moment, Jesus was able to look out at Peter just at the moment the rooster crowed.

I think it is more likely that the initial interrogation of Jesus had come to its conclusion. Then the members of the Sanhedrin needed to take counsel with one another and determine what their next move was going to be. They did that without Jesus present, so they sent Him off to another place to wait.

Then Jesus walked through the courtyard, by the fire where people were gathered. Just as Peter was calling curses upon himself about not knowing Christ, the roster crowded and Jesus looked to Peter and Peter looked to Jesus. Question: what did Peter see in the eyes of Jesus at that moment?

What do you think Peter saw the eyes of Jesus? Did he see daggers? Was Jesus starring daggers—after all I have done for you?! This is it, Peter? Did Peter see contempt? Anger? Condemnation? Was Jesus shocked and appalled by what had just happened in a way that was visible from His eyes?

I think not.

4. The Forgiveness of Denial (John 21)

Did Peter see mercy? Did Peter see love? Did he see the compassion of the One who saw it coming all along and allowed it to happen, because Jesus had a stubborn stallion on His hands that needed to be broken? Did Peter see the eyes of sympathy and understanding from the Master Physician who knew what was necessary to break the bravado of an over confident man?

Jesus is the Master Physician and Satan had to get permission to sift Peter like wheat. And Jesus, the Lord, granted it and Jesus also prayed that his faith would stand and when he had persevered through that trial, he would be one able to turn and truly strengthen his brothers.

As painful as it was, the hands of the Lord were all over that man right then, forming him, upholding him, shaping him into the steadfast rock of divinely empowered strength and understanding and sympathy that Peter was to become.

There are some in our church, you will not be truly effective in the hands of the Lord until you understand how pathetic and pitiful your weakness and sinfulness is in the sight of God, and that you are no better than any of the others that you look down upon with your idealistic view. Jesus is going to allow crushing moments in your life that the beauty of grace and kindness can rise up from the wreckage.

When those moments of failure come, know that Jesus has not abandoned you. He is close to you. He is with you. He is forming you, that you can minister on His behalf and stand up for Him in the church and outside of the church with that beautiful, lovely blend of strength and kindness that is to characterize every servant of the Lord.

God does those things in times of brokenness in ways that He does not do in times of apparent success. This is what was happening in the life of Simon Peter. Praise God, this is not the end for Peter. Was that it for him? No! No it was not. It was a very painful moment for him, but it was not the end for him.

We can go by the shoreside at the Sea of Galilee where we see Jesus reinstating Simon Peter and making him a shepherd of God's flock. When you read through the rest of the story, reading through the book of Acts, you see that Peter was bold in Jesus.

Here he was faltering in Jerusalem, but in Acts Chapter 2 Peter went back to his place of previous failure in the Spirit and he was boldly, joyfully, powerfully proclaiming the excellencies of his Messiah, in the gracious working of the Holy Spirit.

Then if you read through First and Second Peter, you wonder who this guy was. On the one hand, he was telling the church to prepare themselves for action. Don't deny the Lord. Stand up in the power of the Lord for the Lord, for His glory. And you see Peter with such words of tender affection all throughout the letters that he wrote. It is a beautiful thing.

How we need the hand of the Physician on us that we will not be those who deny Jesus but we will be those who stand up in Jesus, and we will do so with understanding that is going to help people who need sympathetic strength to help them through the things that they are facing.

As we close, let me offer a few applications. First:

1. Be fervent in prayer.

Prayer is relational, where we are in the presence of the Lord being changed by Him. As I study Luke Chapter 22, it becomes more and more evident to me that the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was absolutely pivotal.

Jesus was praying. The disciples were sleeping. Jesus was pouring His heart out to the Father, submitting Himself to the will of the Father, and Jesus proceeded in the strength of God. Peter and the disciples, as represented by Peter, were asleep and they came to pieces.

We need to pray. Be in the presence of the Lord. What is your routine? When are you praying? When are you praying with the people of God? When are just you praying to God? When are you praying?

If we are not praying we should not be surprised when those opportunities pop up and we miss them. Be fervent in prayer. Next,

2. Have a kind, humble heart.

Peter's bravado needed to be transformed into something that was gracious. By God's grace, it was. Pray, God give me a kind heart to really see people and to be able to strengthen them, even as one who needs to be seen and strengthened.

Cloth yourself with kindness. Be kind. Act with kindness. When your flesh does not want to be kind, be kind anyway, asking the Lord to transform the inside so that it is consistent with the outside. Just be kind, and what you will find is that the Lord will empower your faith as you do what you know He has called you to do.

3. Tell someone about Jesus this week.

Share the Gospel with someone. Have eyes that are open. Be attune. Let all of us pray, Lord, here, this week. Today. Tomorrow. Who do you want me to spread the fragrance of Christ to?

Finally,

4. Repent and turn to Jesus.

If you have been prayerless, repent and turn to Jesus for the strength that is needed to pray like you ought. If you have been unkind to people, repent. Don't be unkind. Stop being such a sourpuss, and be kind to people. Well, they are not kind to me., you say. Love your enemies. Be kind. That is something that Peter was so emphatic about in his letters.

If you have not been telling people about Jesus, repent and say, Lord, get me back on mission where I belong. If you have never come to faith in Jesus Christ, if you have never to a place where you have declared before the Lord, I have sinned and fallen short of Your glory. I am accountable to You and I have nothing upon which to stand.

You turn to Jesus who died on the cross for sinners like us. You trust Him and you walk in Him and You talk to Him and you read His Word and You get baptized as a public picture of your faith in Christ. That is what He called you to do as He leads you forth into salvation.

If you want to talk about following Christ as a Christian, please let me know and I would love to talk and pray with you about that, because the Christian faith is not something that is private. It is very, very public. So you let it be known that you have come to faith in Jesus.

Let's close in a word of prayer.