

Lessons from Peter's denial

Reading: **Matthew 26:31-35** “...I will never be made to stumble...”
Luke 22:54-62 “.....So Peter went out and wept bitterly...”

Introduction:

After Jesus and the disciples had completed the Passover meal on the night He was betrayed, they discussed various topics ranging from who would be the greatest in the kingdom, the sending of the Holy Spirit, to the fact that they would soon be scattered from Him (**Luke 22:24-38; John 13:31 – 16:33**). At one point in the conversation, Jesus told Peter that before the night was out, he (Peter) would deny Him (Jesus) three times (**Matthew 26:34**). As far as Peter was concerned, that would never happen - there was no way that he would deny Him. And all of the other disciples said similar things (**Matthew 26:35**).

It is interesting to note that, while each of the four Gospels mention different parts of the events and conversations that took place that night, all four of them mention the prophecy of Peter's denial¹.

However, when it came to the “crunch”, Peter and the other disciples failed to live up to their word - they fled from the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested (**Mark 14:50**), and shortly after, when “put on the spot”, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times (**Mark 14:68, 70, 71**).

While these events took place a long time ago, there are lessons that we can draw from them that are still applicable today;

- The danger of making rash statements.
- When we look at Jesus, we acknowledge His goodness and our failings.
- The Lord forgives the penitent of heart, and restores the downcast.

LESSON

1) The danger of making rash statements

When Jesus chose the twelve to be His disciples, He didn't go to the religious institutions in Jerusalem to select the most theological and highly educated people that He could find. Rather, the people He chose came from different backgrounds and professions, and had different personal characteristics;

- Matthew had been a tax collector (**Matthew 9:9**), an occupation that did not endear him to his countrymen or the religious elite (**Luke 19:1-7; Matthew 9:11**).
- Simon was a political activist - a “zealot”² (**Luke 6:15**).
- Judas had “sticky fingers” when it came to keeping the money box (**John 12:4-6**).
- Nathanael could be a bit of a sceptic (**John 1:46**).
- Thomas was one who wanted proof before believing (**John 20:24-25**).
- Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen (**Matthew 4:18-22**).

Peter was also a bit of a “go getter” – he was not one to “hold back”. He had a tendency to act impulsively at times. For example,

¹ **Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34; John 13:36-38**

² The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 5, Q-Z, pages 1036-1037, “Zealot”.

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- When he saw Jesus walking on the water, he asked Jesus to command him to come to Him on the water (**Matthew 14:22-33**).
- When Jesus told His disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem where He would be killed, Peter rebuked Jesus Him and said "...*this shall not happen to You.*" (**Matthew 16:21-22**).
- When he saw Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, he suggested they make booths for them (**Matthew 17:1-4**).
- When he raced to the empty tomb with another disciple, the other disciple got there first and waited at the entrance. But Peter went right on inside (**John 20:1-8**).

And so, when Jesus said, "*All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night.....*" (**Matthew 26:31**), it was typical of Peter to say, "*I will never be made to stumble..*" (vs.**33**).

I have no doubt that when Peter did or said the things mentioned above that he did so from good motives. However, it seems that he had a tendency to act or speak first, without thinking things through beforehand.

Point:

There are times when we can act or speak impulsively just like Peter. We make statements or promises without thinking things through first. Sometimes we say the things we say because we think that's what people want to hear. Or we may say things as part of a "knee-jerk" reaction. Or we may say things deliberately with the intention of offending or causing embarrassment to someone we don't like.

At other times, we may plan or say things that don't keep God in the picture. None of us can accurately predict everything that will happen in the future (**James 4:13-16**), and this may be one of the reasons why Jesus warned us in **Matthew 5:33-37** about making oaths. We can plan things with the best intentions, but plans do not always work out the way that we would like (**Acts 16:6**) – some things are simply beyond our control.

We need to be careful about making rash statements. **James 1:19** says that we need to be "...*swift to hear, slow to speak...*". In other words, we need to be more ready to hear than we are to speak. In fact, there are times when saying nothing is appropriate (**Ecclesiastes 3:7b**).

When we do say things, we need to remember that our words are important - they will be accountable on the Day of Judgement. **Matthew 12:36-37** says;

"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgement. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

2) When we look at Jesus, we acknowledge His goodness and our failings

When Jesus was led away from the Garden, all of the disciples left Him and fled (**Mark 14:50**), just like Jesus said that they would. However, Peter followed them at a distance as they went to the high priest's residence (**Luke 22:54**). When they arrived, Peter initially stayed at the door outside, but was then brought into the courtyard (**John 18:16**) where he sat with the servants beside a

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fire warming himself – he wanted to see what would happen (**Matthew 26:58; Luke 22:55; John 18:18**).

Gathered in the high priest's house were all of the chief priests, the elders and the scribes (**Mark 14:53**). Jesus was facing a “stacked” audience. This group had already decided to get rid of Him (**Mark 14:55; John 11:47-53**). In the courtyard, Peter could probably hear in the background some of the proceedings going on inside – the false witnesses, the false accusations, and the beatings (**Matthew 26:57-68**). He was certainly within eyesight of Jesus (**Luke 22:61**). Overall, this would have been a very intimidating situation for any of Jesus' followers.

And then Peter was put on the spot. A servant girl came to him and said that he was with Jesus – that he was one of His followers (**Luke 22:56**). Peter's response was to deny knowing Jesus (**Luke 22:57**), most likely fearing that if he admitted the truth, then he would get the same treatment that Jesus was getting. After this first denial, it seems that Peter moves from where he was;

- **Matthew 26:71** states that he went out to the gateway.
- **Mark 14:68** says that he went out to the porch.
 - presumably, the gateway was in the porch.

And the rooster crowed – **Mark 14: 68b**.

A little while later, he was again accused of being with Jesus, but again, Peter denied it (**Luke 22:58**). Finally, his speech revealed him to be a Galilean, tying him to Jesus. But again, for the third time, he denied knowing Jesus – this time with swearing and oaths (**Mark 14:70-71**). And “...*a second time the rooster crowed...*” (**Mark 14:72**)³.

It was at this point that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the words that Jesus had said, “...*you will deny Me three times...*” (**Luke 22:61**).

Peter wanted to be close to Jesus, but physical fear led him to deny Him. Rather than stand beside Jesus, he sat some distance away. When “push came to shove”, his fear of the world⁴ caused him to deny his Lord with swearing and oaths. But when Jesus looked at Peter, Peter could see that Jesus was right all along. When Peter came face to face with truth, he could not help but see and acknowledge his own failings and weakness.

Note: **Luke 22:31-32** tells us that Satan was involved in using this event to test Peter. The Lord knew that Peter would deny Him (vs. **34**) but He had prayed that his faith would not fail because of it, and that when he had returned to Him, that he would strengthen his brethren.

Point:

There are many people in the world who expect to receive a heavenly home because of their own “goodness”. They do not see the need to study the Word of God (**Psalms 1:1-3; 1 Peter 2:2**), or to respond to the gospel (**Acts 2:38-41**), or

³ The overall timeframe for the three denials was at least an hour – **Luke 22:59**

⁴ **Matthew 10:28**

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to let the Word mould their lives (**Romans 12:2**). They feel that they can make it on their own (**Ephesians 2:8**).

But when we look into the “mirror” of the Word, we start to see all of our imperfections - not just our deeds or words, but also our very thoughts and the intents of our hearts (**Hebrews 4:12**). When we look at Jesus, we see perfection – though tempted, yet He was without sin (**Hebrews 4:15**) – though in the flesh, yet still in the image of God (**Colossians 1:15**), because He is God (**John 1:1, 14**).

For all the good works that we do, we cannot make it on our own, for we all stumble – so many times (**1 John 1:8, 10**). We need the Father's grace and mercy (**Ephesians 2:4, 8**) – we need His forgiveness (**1 John 1:9**).

3) The Lord forgives the penitent of heart, and restores the downcast

When faced with the reality of what he had done, Peter wept, and wept bitterly (**Luke 22:62**). **Mark 14:72b** says that, “...*when he thought about it, he wept.*” Peter spent a few moments thinking about what he had just done, and what Jesus had said would happen. He (Peter) had proudly boasted that, even if everyone else abandoned Jesus, he would not deny Him – even if he had to die with Him. But now, he too had abandoned his Lord. And Jesus knew all along that this would happen. The bold (**Matthew 16:22**), brash (**John 18:10**), impulsive (**Matthew 17:4**) self-confident (**Matthew 26:33**) Peter was now reduced to tears - in the depths of despair.

- True repentance involves a godly sorrow (**2 Corinthians 7:10**), and Peter was indeed sorrowful for what he had done.

But God still loved Peter. When the Lord rose on the third day, the angel at the empty tomb specifically said to the women to tell Peter about the risen Lord (**Mark 16:7**). God was obviously concerned for him, and wanted him to know that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

At some point in time between His resurrection and ascension into Heaven, Jesus met with the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias⁵. In **John 21:15-17**, we see a conversation between Peter and Jesus, and although the words “repentance” and “forgiveness” are not specifically mentioned in the text, we can see that that is what has taken place.

- Peter re-affirmed his love for Jesus, and Jesus exhorted him to “*feed My sheep*”⁶. From His comments in verses **18-19**, we can see that Jesus knew that Peter would remain faithful to the end.

A few days later, Peter was given “*the keys to the kingdom*” (**Matthew 16:19**). He preached that first gospel sermon to those gathered in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**). He also introduced the gospel to the Gentiles (**Acts 10**). Peter had been forgiven and was fulfilling the command of Jesus to “...*feed My sheep.*”

⁵ The Sea of Galilee – **John 6:1**

⁶ This is in keeping with what Jesus prayed for in **Luke 22:32**.

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Point:

When we have sinned and acknowledge that fact, we have a choice in what to do next. There are various directions in which our life can go;

- One choice that we can make is this. We can continue in the sin, such as Cain did in **Genesis 4:5-8**. We can allow our consciences to become desensitised to sin and “...seared (as) with a hot iron..” (**1 Timothy 4:2**). We can alienate ourselves from the life of God (**Hebrews 10:26-31**), and end up in a worse spiritual condition that we were before we came to know the Truth (**2 Peter 2:20-21**).
- Another path that we can take is to become so discouraged, and feel so helpless about our failings, that we lose our faith and fall away (**2 Corinthians 2:6-11**). We can feel that we are so sinful and worthless that God would no longer be interested in saving us anymore. But such is not the case. Read **Luke 15:4-7** (the lost sheep) and **1 Timothy 1:12-16** (Paul - “foremost of sinners”).
- Or, having a godly sorrow, a contrite heart (**Psalms 51:17**), we can repent of our sins, and seek the Lord's forgiveness (**Acts 8:22**).

Our God is a vengeful God and a wrathful God (**Romans 2:8; 12:19**) to the disobedient (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**) – a God to be feared and respected (**Hebrews 10:30-31; 12:28**). But He is also a just God (**Revelation 15:3**), a compassionate God (**Psalms 111:4**), a caring God (**1 Peter 5:7**), a merciful God (**Ephesians 2:4**), and a forgiving God (**1 John 1:9**). Our God gives grace to the humble (**James 4:6**) and restores their souls (**Psalms 23:3a**) to the joy of salvation (**Psalms 51:12**).

From the account of Peter's denial and contrition, we can see that God forgives and restores those who have a godly sorrow for their sins, those who are of contrite heart, and seek His grace and His mercy.