

27. Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

Book of John

John 13:31-38

Warm-Up Question: If you had a choice as to how you would die, what would you choose? Why?

Alternative Question: What's the story behind the longest night of your life?

³¹When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. ³³"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." ³⁶Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." ³⁷Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times! (John 13:31-38).

The Son Glorified the Father

Holman Hunt, the artist, painted the interior of a carpenter's shop, with Joseph and the boy Jesus working. Mary was also present. As Jesus paused in His work and stopped to stretch Himself, the sun made a shadow of the Cross on the wall. Another of his pictures is a popular engraving which depicts the infant Jesus running with outstretched arms to His mother, the shadow of the Cross being cast by His form as He runs. Both pictures are fanciful in form, but their underlying idea is assuredly true. If we read the Gospels just as they stand, it is clear that the death of Jesus Christ was really in view from the outset of His earthly appearance.¹ Now that Judas Iscariot has departed from the Upper Room where Jesus is eating His last Passover Supper with his disciples, the Lord bares His heart with them, teaching them a number of things that stretches across five chapters of the Book of John starting in chapter thirteen and finishing at the end of chapter seventeen. Again and again Jesus had spoken of an hour when He would glorify the Father (John 2:4, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 12:27-28), now the hour was upon Him. The shadow of the Cross was ever before Him, the instrument that God would use. Through the cross, God would be greatly glorified!

"Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once (John 13:31-32).

Let's consider how this works; through the cross, Jesus glorifies God and God, the Father, glorifies the Son. Verse 32 states that God will glorify him at once (referring to his resurrection.)

First of all, we must ask the question, what does the word *glorify* mean? The word *glorify* comes from the Greek word, *doxazō*, which literally means to suppose or to have an opinion of something. It is used in the New Testament to describe the dignity and worth of God to become manifest and acknowledged, to have the opinion that God is illustrious, or that He is clothed with splendor. This was Jesus' chief mission in the world—to glorify God the Father—to cause the dignity and worth of God to become manifest and acknowledged by all His creation. We usually think of Jesus' chief mission exclusively in terms of the cross, that is, to pay the penalty for sin and so redeem (buy back to God with His blood) all that will place their trust in this payment for their sins, to bring them to God:

¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

This indeed was the mission of Christ, but we must not forget that His first and primary mission was always to glorify God on the earth. This is why He prayed, ***"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do"*** (John 17:4). This is also our mission, each of us that are part of the church, the called out ones of God. Our mission is to glorify God on the earth. The Lord Jesus, while He lived on earth, modeled the way we also are to live our lives—to glorify the Father. We each have a responsibility to model to others how Jesus lived His life. You and I have the same mission that was given to Jesus, to glorify God!

A New Commandment

³⁴"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"(John 13:34-35).

¹⁸"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:18).

In what way is the new command different from that given in the Old Testament?

This is the first of two times that Jesus talks to them about loving one another (John 13:34, 15:12), but only on this instance does He call it a 'new' command. In the Old Testament the Israelites were instructed to love their neighbor as themselves, but now Jesus takes it even further. The measure of their love for one another was now the way that Jesus had loved them. How did Jesus love them? He laid down His life for them. It is a love that transcends all other loves, a self-sacrificing love, commonly called "agape"

love. A love that seeks the highest for the one loved, often in sacrificial ways. It was a 'new' kind of love because it demanded that they love one another in the way that Christ had loved them. By this kind of love, Jesus would be seen among them. His love would mark them as belonging to Him.

In 1977, within six months of becoming a Christian, I felt led to go from England, my home country, to visit a friend of mine in Jerusalem, Israel. She had been instrumental in my conversion to Christ. There was no romantic interest in my heart, but I saw something of the presence of God on her life, a purity and innocence that I admired. So just before Christmas of 1977 with my spiritual life waning in my hometown of Harwich, Essex, England, I left to visit with her and to spend Christmas in Jerusalem. When I got there, I found a community of Christians living in several houses with a strong desire to live out the life of Christ by serving one another as well as others, both Jews and Arabs in the land.

Over the next few years I made three trips lasting one and a half years living in community with others in Israel. I learned so much of the Christian life by living together with devoted Christian believers. We worshiped three times a week at the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, a church that was built over the ruins of the palace of Caiaphas where Jesus was kept after being captured in the Garden of Gethsemane. God used this time in my life to immerse me into experiencing the love of the body of Christ for one another. Ours was not a perfect life, but I have never experienced joy like that, living in community. We came from many different countries and backgrounds, but our love for Christ was a special bond. Sharing life with a group of people so close to one another and to the Lord was unforgettable. These were some of the best times of my life. We lived in community and shared everything we had with each other. We spent our time in conversation, sharing our love for the Lord with one another as we walked and lived our lives with purpose. Looking back to that time, I think we were experiencing the kind of community life that the twelve enjoyed with their Master while He was among them. It was the close fellowship that marked that time in my life as being so precious. How wonderful it must have been to actually have that type of close fellowship with the Lord Himself, living life with Him, day by day!

But now, for those 11 disciples, things were about to change and they had to be prepared. Jesus was telling them that He must leave, and that unless He left, the Holy Spirit, the one who would come to comfort and counsel them, would not come. From now on, they were to lean on one another and love one another with the kind of love that He had exhibited to them over the last three and a half years while ministering together. There must be no more bickering back and forth with one another, trying to get the seats of honor in front of one another. The test of their discipleship was the kind of love that those around them would see. As we say in England, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." We know the level of discipleship that a person has by their love for their brothers and sisters in the family of God and to their family. If your discipleship is not working at home by the level of service you give to your family and others around you, then it is not working! Again and again, I hear of whole families that come to Christ, by the depth of Christian service that a new believer gives to their family. Those around you,

at work and at home will glorify God when they see the level of change of character in your life. From now on they, the disciples, must put one another before themselves as Jesus had modeled to them. Paul, the apostle, wrote of the kind of love that the early disciples had, not only for one another, but also for those beyond their community of faith:

³We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and **in sincere love**; ⁷in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

When people are going through troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings and imprisonment and yet still exhibit purity, understanding, patience, kindness and sincere love, then that is supernatural in essence. This is the kind of love that breaks down barriers for those outside of Christ to see. To be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, to be poor and yet making others rich stands out before those that are not yet believers. By this kind of love people will know that we are disciples of Christ. It is one thing to be a believer in Christ, but we are called to be disciples—those that are learners of Christ and living out His new commandment.

How can we love one another the way Christ loved us? Can we lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in the family of God? This kind of love is supernatural and is imparted to us as believers from God.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we **ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters** (1 John 3:16).

Do you think that our modern culture hinders us from living the lifestyle that John advocates here?

What challenges do you face, and what changes can you make in your lifestyle to help you actively live out these words today?

Where I am Going, You Cannot Come

Peter completely ignored what Jesus said about the new commandment to love one another. He focused on the alarming words that Jesus was leaving them, “where I am going, you cannot come” (Verse 33). He responded saying, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

Jesus was saying that He was leaving to accomplish something that only He could do—to be crucified as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin. After finishing the work that the Father had given Him to do, He would ascend back to the Father’s side in Heaven. Later, as the disciples would all accomplish their work of preaching the Gospel, each would follow Him through the gates of death to be with Him, but for the time being they didn’t have what it would take to lay down their lives. Peter seems to have understood that Jesus was talking about His death, for he said, “**Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.**”

I believe that Simon Peter was totally sincere when he said those words, but Jesus knew ahead of time what would take place that night and the very next day. Soon the eleven would be with Him at the Garden of Gethsemane, and Peter would not even be able to keep awake to pray. Jesus would have to face His most difficult hours alone, sweating blood as He prayed, with his closest friends nearby, asleep. Jesus would say to Peter, “**the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak**” (Matthew 26:41). Peter once again the impetuous one, was quick to pledge his allegiance, but did not have the strength of faith and resolve yet to walk in the experience of being dead to self and alive for God. Many of us are totally sincere in our desire to follow Christ, but do we have what it takes to live for Christ and to die for Him? Sometimes the greatest challenge we have is to live for Christ. Thank God, we have the Holy Spirit to help us, and we do not need to rely on our own strength. We must rely on Him.

The story is told of the communist takeover in Vietnam. Four soldiers broke into a church meeting and told the people inside that all those who were not Christians were allowed to leave, only the Christians left inside were to be killed. When the majority of people had left, and only a few were remaining, the soldiers laid down their arms and hugged their brothers in Christ. Now the soldiers could be with real Christians and enjoy true intimate fellowship with fellow believers! Some of us might be confronted with having to live a sacrificial life for Christ, laying down our lives in service to our brothers. Those who threaten to kill us because we are Christians cannot threaten us with glory! To die for Christ is gain! (Philippians 1:21). Peter thought he was strong enough to go all the way with Christ—his spirit was willing but his flesh was weak. There was still one more lesson on life that Peter would have to go through before he could be the leader that the Lord was making him to be. To see the test that he would have to undergo, we have to turn to Luke’s account of the same conversation. John does not mention that Satan had asked to sift him as wheat.

³¹“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³²But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” ³³But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” ³⁴Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me” (Luke 22:31-34).

Twice for emphasis, the Lord calls him by the name that he had when Jesus met him—Simon. It was as if the Lord was telling him that at times Peter was relying on his own physical resources, the kind of person he was before he came to Christ. Peter

occasionally reverted to his old self and a familiar weakness came out when he was under stress.

Peter was too self-reliant. This is a weakness to the child of God. We are to be dependent on the Holy Spirit working in us and through us. Whenever we are tempted to rely on our own resources, we should remember this lesson that Peter had to go through. It is important to realize that if you are a Christian, Satan has to ask permission of God before he can do anything against you. When a man is walking with God, then he is under covenant to a covenant keeping God. Jesus uses a very descriptive term to explain what the enemy wanted to do in Simon Peter's life. Christ calls it a sifting process. Satan wanted to shake up the disciple's life and separate the wheat from the chaff, and sift him out of being a disciple at all. Basically, the enemy wanted to take him out and destroy his life and testimony. There are times in our lives as believers that God allows the enemy to shake us up in our faith. You may feel at times that you have been shaken to your roots. It is common for us to try to go around the situation or the "mountain" that is in our way, but God wants us to trust in Him and go through the situation, or trial. The Lord tells Peter that before the night is out, he will deny three times that he ever knew his Lord. Peter had the commitment to fight the soldiers that came for His Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. In fact, he drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant (John 18:10), but as the darkness descended that night, perhaps he saw that it was futile to lose his life by admitting that he knew Jesus.

What was Satan's intent in this trial given to Peter?

Why do you think God allowed this test of his character and commitment?

No one would have predicted Peter's plunge. The great apostle had failed precisely at the point of his greatest human strength. This extrovert and naturally brave man could not bear the ridicule of the crowd. The shock and strain of seeing evil in apparent triumph over good had shaken his faith, and the censure and estrangement of those around the fire were too much. Our greatest human strengths (no matter what they are) will never be adequate for following Christ. What is your greatest natural strength? Perhaps it is a winning personality, or maybe charm, discipline, speaking ability, intelligence, wealth, or attractive appearance? Christ can use all these things, but if we suppose we will be able to follow and serve him because of our natural gifts, we had better prepare ourselves for a plunge like Peter's. Natural devotion and natural strength will always deny Jesus somewhere or sometime. No one will ever know the terrible anguish of soul that Peter went through then—the nauseous darkness and confusion of those hours that Christ's body lay in the tomb. Something died inside Peter that night! Simon the natural man with all his self-assured presumption was about to die. Peter was beginning to know himself. He was defeated and disconsolate that night, but God was not through with him!

Have you ever felt like you were being sifted? If so, what were the results of what you went through?

Optional: Share with others in the room one area of your life that is a weakness that you

would like prayer about.

Prayer: Father, I am not all that I want to be, but I am thankful that your Son, the Lord Jesus, has made the way for me to be brought to You. Help me to love those around me the way Jesus loved the disciples. Thank you also for using Peter to show us that we are still loved by You even when we fail. You are truly wonderful!

Keith Thomas

Email Address: keiththomas7@gmail.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com