

61. Peter, the Broken Disciple

Luke 22:54-62

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

We have before us a story that is not unlike what many go through in their walk of following Christ. The story of Peter's denial while under pressure and fear should comfort and encourage many who have had the enemy lie to them that they have committed the unforgivable sin. The Holy Spirit directs Luke and the other Gospel writers to focus on a side story away from the main drama of the crucifixion. We are to see that God is full of grace and mercy toward those who have, by their actions, denied Christ.

It was more than likely past midnight when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. John tells us that they bound Christ before leading Him across the Kidron Brook to the Palace of the high priest on the west side of the Temple area. Annas had been high priest for ten years, and the position was supposed to be for life, but he had been deposed by the Roman procurator Gratus. The son-in-law of Annas, Caiaphas, held the title of High Priest, but he was more a puppet of Annas (Acts 4:6). Annas was still seen as the most influential in much of the political and social life of the nation of Israel. Both Annas and Caiaphas lived in the palace compound of the High Priest's residence, with a courtyard separating them. Living lavishly by their various money-making schemes, they were well protected with walls, gates, servants and guards to protect them. Let's first read Luke's account, remembering that, to arrive at a complete picture of all the drama, we will also look at what the other Gospel writers record.

⁵⁴Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them (Luke 22:54-55).

As well as Luke, both Matthew and Mark note that Peter followed the "large crowd" (Matthew 26:47) at a distance. As we have already noted in our last study, there were more than 450 Roman soldiers plus the temple guards that, it is estimated, brought the number to around 600 people. After Jesus was arrested, the eleven disciples had scattered, but we are told that two of them found one another on the way and followed the large crowd. We are not told who the other disciple was, but it was likely the Apostle John. In typical fashion for John, he rarely spoke about himself.

¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in. ¹⁷"You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." ¹⁸It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself (John 18:15-18).

Question 1) As Peter followed at a distance, getting closer and closer to the high priest's palace, what kind of thoughts do you think were on his mind?

It is likely that his thoughts were on his words to Jesus that he would not fall away and that he was ready to go to prison and to death. He was too confident of his own abilities and character. He had to prove the Lord wrong when Christ had said that he would deny Him:

³¹"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift 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).

Simon Peter was still not yet ready for the responsibility that God would put upon his shoulders. He was too overconfident in himself. So, the question that is before us today is how does God bring change to our lives when we fall short of what He is making us to be? Our passage in Luke about Peter will help us to see how God works.

The Holy Spirit's Transformative Work

When we are confident that we have it all together, we are vulnerable to attack by our enemy, Satan. Paul wrote about this when he said, "*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Peter would be a leader and a model to those around him, so God had to deal with his overconfidence by putting him through a trial, i.e. a test that would strengthen him when he was restored to dependence on Christ. After walking with Christ for more than forty years now, I have found that God is at work in our lives (Philippians 2:13) to transform us and make us more like Himself. Paul talks about this process as something that starts slowly and increases with time as we are obedient to the Spirit of God. As this happens, we reflect His glory, and our lives have a transforming effect on those around us as well.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The Greek word *metamorphoō* is the word that is translated with our English word "transformed." It means "a change of place, condition or form. To transform, transmute, to alter fundamentally. Used of spiritual transformation, it is an invisible process in Christians. This change takes place during our lives in this age."¹ This is the ongoing training that Peter was still experiencing even just before the crucifixion. Henry Ward Beecher put it this way: "Happiness is not the end of life; character is." Once we become Christians, God is at work in our lives to make us into people of character, and our character is measured by our responses to life's trials and difficulties. God is determined that Peter will be fruitful, not in his abilities but totally reliant on His Lord. It is the same with all of us who follow Christ.

Question 2) D.L. Moody once said, "Character is what a man is in the dark." What kind of things does God use in our lives to test us and reveal and refine our character?

Peter Disowns Jesus

¹ Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, 3565 Metamorphoō, page 1651.

Peter was likely scared. He had no way of knowing if these were his last hours. He had witnessed the power of Jesus when all the Roman soldiers in Gethsemane had been put on their backs at just a few simple words of Christ. The question surely came to His mind, why would the Lord display such power and yet let them take Him? Why didn't Christ run? Why did Jesus allow Himself to be captured? When the two followed Jesus to the palace of the high priest, Peter summoned up his courage, perhaps, to think that maybe he could be a witness for Christ at any trial that would take place.

Now, at the high priest's palace, Jesus was taken first to the residence of Annas, who began to question Christ, hoping to get something from Him, i.e. to find some charge with which to accuse Christ at the trial before the Sanhedrin, the ruling seventy elders, as soon as it was light. The law said that there could not be less than twenty-three members of the Sanhedrin to try a capital case, and Annas knew that his son-in-law Caiaphas was rounding up that number to hold the court proceedings. It was also against the law to try a person while it was yet dark.

How did Peter and John get past the guard at the gate to the high priest's grounds? It has been speculated that John, being a fisherman from Galilee, had been the seller of fresh fish to the household of the high priest, and that is how he had come to be known by the servants and household of the high priesthood.

When Peter and John arrived at the palace, it was John who knocked on the outer gate to the courtyard. Because he knew the servants, he gained entrance first and then came back with a servant girl to also let in Peter. The two parted after they gained entrance. We are not told why, but the reason, perhaps, is because Peter would have been afraid to be seen by Malchus, the servant of the high priest whose ear Peter had cut off. John, perhaps, went in to listen to the gathering of leaders over the different court proceedings over the next few hours. Because it was cold that evening, Peter warmed himself by the fire.

⁵⁶A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." ⁵⁷But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. ⁵⁸A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied (Luke 22:56-58).

What had reduced the Apostle Peter to deny being a disciple in front of a servant girl? Could it be that this first denial of Peter was because he was afraid that the young girl would call the soldiers? We cannot tell what fears were in his mind at that moment. Let's give Peter credit that he chose to stay longer. Luke tells us that he sat down with a group of people warming themselves by a fire after the first denial (Luke 22:55). Apparently, the young girl did not believe Peter's first denial and came up close to see his face in the light of the fire. Matthew tells us that the fireside denial was before a number of people:

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. ⁷⁰But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said (Matthew 26:69-70).

Luke tells us that the servant girl looked closely at him seated in front of the fire, and she accused him before the other people sitting around the fire, saying, “**this man was also with him**” (Luke 22:56). His denial to those around the fire constituted his second denial. This is often the way temptation comes to us. We give the enemy an inch, and he takes a foot. We give him a foot, and he takes a yard. We give a yard, and he takes a mile. We must be aware not to compromise an inch of our lives to the enemy of our souls. It seems that Peter was now afraid that his cover was blown, and he needed to get away from the fire in the courtyard. Matthew tells us that he moved to the gateway, trying to find an exit:

⁷¹Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷²He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" (Matthew 26:71-72).

There is nothing to tell us that the household servants would have done anything to Peter. He had been reduced to his denials out of his own fear. Luke tells us that an hour went by between the second denial and the third and last. About the time of the last denial, John gives us a bit more information, perhaps, because he was also in the courtyard and recognized the one challenging Jesus as a relative of Malchus. Those around the fire now had a witness that made Peter completely lose his composure. John tells us:

One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" (John 18:26).

The picture we should get is that of several people suspiciously looking at Peter. The pressure of the witness, together with a few of the servants around him, made him call down curses on himself, wishing himself a violent death at God’s hand if he was lying about knowing Jesus:

⁷³After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." ⁷⁴Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:73-75).

Luke gives us more insight into what finally broke Peter’s heart and causing him to weep bitterly:

⁵⁹About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." ⁶⁰Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.** Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." ⁶²And he went outside and **wept bitterly** (Luke 22:59-62).**

How painful it was to hear the cock crow a second time and be immediately reminded of Jesus’ words that, before the cock crows, Peter would deny his Lord three times. In God’s sovereignty, the very same instant when Jesus was brought out of the house of Annas to be taken across the

courtyard to the house of Caiaphas was the same time that Peter and Jesus heard the cock crowing. As soon as the words of his third denial had left Peter's lips, the Lord looked at Peter and their eyes connected. There was no accusation in Jesus' eyes, only sadness for Peter. The Greek word translated "looked" (v. 61) is *emblepo*. This word describes a fixed look, almost a stare. This look from Jesus broke Peter's heart; he remembered all his protestations that he was capable of standing in the hour of trial, but instead, he failed miserably. He went outside the courtyard and wept bitterly. The verb "wept" describes a weeping, mournful cry like those who are grieving the death of a loved one. He was brokenhearted at his failure.

Question 3) Why is Peter's failure recorded for us in such depth? Why would the Holy Spirit inspire each of the Gospel writers to focus on Peter's denial?

God's Aim—A Broken and Contrite Heart

This is not so much focused on Peter's failure as it is about his brokenness and repentance. How quickly he repented. We may never have denied Jesus with our lips in the way that Peter did, but I am sure that, at one time or another, we have denied Him with our actions. This passage is recorded for us to show us God's mercy and complete forgiveness. God often allows us to experience pain, for it is an excellent teacher. Often, it is only when our pain makes us hit rock bottom and we are broken of our pride and self-adequacy, that we are brought to a place where we look to our Savior.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17).

Peter was brought to a place of brokenness. The place of our brokenness is the place where God can step in and save and heal us. For me, my trial and test was to seek to bring my family back to their home country. I had tried so many ways to bring them home. After nineteen years of church planting in England, my American wife wanted to see more of her family. Marijuana convictions, which had occurred before my conversion to Christ, barred me from residency in the USA. God used this situation as a refining tool to drive me to persevere with my visa problem. I just knew inside that it was not God's will for us to be forever barred from Sandy's home country. I had to wait for God's timing. The Lord used this whole issue in my life to break me and bring deeper trust and dependence on God in my life.

God's school of training is more than bible college and more than head knowledge. His training often includes brokenness and contriteness of heart. Over the last forty years that I have been following Jesus, I have learned that God uses our life experiences as a school to teach us and prepare us for eternity. He molds and shapes our character through everyday situations. Some of the situations can be very trying, e.g. the death of a family member, a financial need, an impatient child. The list is endless.

The LORD will judge [for and on behalf of] his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free (Deuteronomy 32:36).

While we have adequate resources to fight our own battles, the Lord lets us carry on until we come to the place of brokenness and an end to self. The Spirit will bring us to a place where we find ourselves devoid of help, having no strength left to accomplish what needs to be done, having no back-up plan, and no one but God to call to for help. That is the point at which God steps in to fight our battles for us. When we are weak, then we are strong in Him (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

For me it was the need of a visa to take my loved one's home. When the right time had come and the work of God is done, then He has compassion on His servants, i.e. when he sees that *their* strength is gone and they have no reserves, no hidden back up plan...Just God.

Question 4) What do you think God is teaching you through your own life experiences at this present time? Do you know what the lessons are yet?

In Chapter 18 of the book of Jeremiah, the prophet was taken down to the Potter's house and saw the potter making a jar of clay. It was all bent out of shape and had no beauty or correct shape to be used. The potter took it off the wheel and started again with the pliable clay to form it into what he wanted to create. The lesson that God was teaching Jeremiah and Peter (and us, too) is that through the brokenness, God will reshape every one of us. All He needs is a broken and contrite heart.

A.W. Tozer once said, "God never uses a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply."

Brokenness? What is it?

Brokenness is the working of God in a person's life leading to a point of abandonment of one's self to a place of complete dependence and trust in the Father's care. John Collinson, an English Vicar, puts it this way:

When to do the will of God means that even my Christian brothers will not understand and I remember that even His brothers did not understand or believe in Him, and I bow my head to obey and accept the misunderstanding, this is brokenness. When I am misrepresented, or deliberately misinterpreted, and I remember that Jesus was falsely accused but He held his peace, and I accept the accusation without trying to justify myself, that is brokenness. When another is preferred before me and I am deliberately passed over, and I remember that they cried "away with this man and release unto us Barabbas" and I bow my head and accept rejection, that is brokenness.

When my plans are brushed aside and I see the work of years brought to ruins by the ambitions of others and I remember that Jesus allowed them to lead Him away to crucify Him, and He accepted that place of failure, and I bow my head and accept the injustice without bitterness, that is brokenness. When to be right with my God it is necessary to take the humbling path of confession and restitution, and I remember that Jesus made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross, and I bow my head and I'm ready to take the shame of exposure, that is brokenness. When others take unfair advantage of me because I'm a Christian and treat my belongings as

public property and I remember that they stripped Him, and parted His garments casting lots, and I bow my head and accept joyfully the spoiling of my goods for His sake, this is brokenness.

When one acts toward me in an unforgivable way and I remember when He was crucified, He prayed “Father forgive them for they know not what they do,” and I bow my head and accept any behavior towards me as permitted by my heavenly Father, this is brokenness. When people expect the impossible of me, and more than time and human strength can give, and I remember that Jesus said, “this is my body which is broken for you” and I repent of my self-indulgence and lack of self-giving for others, this is brokenness.

The Restoring of Peter

After the resurrection, the Lord told the disciples that He would see them in Galilee (Matthew 28:10). So, after the second Sunday when the Passover Feast was over, they began the eighty-mile walk north to the Galilee area of Israel. Imagine Peter’s feelings as he anticipated this meeting with Christ. Surely, he must have been struggling with his denial of Christ. He may not have even felt worthy to be in the company of the other disciples. The Lord knew Peter’s heart. He made sure that Peter got the invitation! When the angels at the empty tomb appeared to the women after the resurrection, they singled out Peter, saying,

But go, tell his disciples *and Peter*, He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you (Mark 16:7; emphasis mine).

We all fear confrontation. There has to be something wrong with a person if he or she enjoys being confronted on a sin or mistake. Confrontation, though, can be one of the most loving things that a person can do or have done to them. Peter was told that the Lord would see him in Galilee, which I am sure made him a bit nervous as to the confrontation. We have all had times when we have had to face our failures. The enemy of our souls would have us believe that we are out for the count and not worthy, thereby halting our growth and effectiveness.

Satan knows what will happen when we get up. We will arise having learned something more of God's grace and something more of our need to lean on Christ. Our thankfulness deepens. This is how failure can make us stronger. We have more humility in our souls and more dependence on the Lord. It is how we respond to our failure that will make the difference in where we go from that point. We are *to fail* forward and continue to walk. While they waited for Jesus, Peter went back to what he had done in his younger days:

“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing (John 21:3).

John tells us that it was early in the morning when Jesus came and called to them from the shore, asking them in the negative, almost as if He knew that they had no fish. “He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’ ‘No,’ they answered” (John 21:5). Some people say that you can never trust a fisherman to tell the truth. I hope that I have broken that mold! If a fisherman is

catching fish, he will never tell you because he doesn't want you to see where he is fishing, fearing that you will be at that spot the next day! If they aren't catching any fish, they won't tell you that, either, because it is a shame for a fisherman not to catch fish. Fishermen normally will stretch the truth about the one that got away, but the disciples were honest with Jesus that morning and said that they had no fish. Life can be unfruitful unless the Lord is in the boat.

Even though they did not yet recognize that it was the Lord, when He said to try the right side of the boat, they did so. Immediately, they caught a huge amount of fish, so many that they had difficulty hauling in the net. Instantly, their minds went back to a time some three years earlier when Jesus had instructed them to push out their boat into the deep water and recast their nets for a catch. Now, again, He was demonstrating His authority over nature and giving them a catch that was supernatural. When they saw this miracle repeated in front of their eyes, they knew it was the Lord on the shoreline.

At the words of John, Peter wrapped himself with his outer garment, and swam to Jesus. Peter had denied Jesus publically, and now he is restored before the others.

¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).

He lovingly asked Peter a question, "*Do you love me more than these?*"

Most Bible scholars give two distinct possibilities as to what the word "these" refers. The Lord could have been referring to the other disciples with whom he enjoyed such close fellowship, but He also could have been referring to the nets, boat and fish where Peter had spent most of his life making his living. It is possible that Peter was wondering if he was done with ministry and, perhaps, thought that he had disqualified himself from service in the kingdom of God. With the Lord, though, brokenness is part of the training. The Lord has no sharp rebuke for him, but asks Peter the only question that matters, "Do you love me?"

There are many things that Peter may have been expecting Jesus to say to him, but I don't think he was expecting to be asked about his love for Christ. When Jesus asks Peter the first time, He asked him if he loved Christ with an *agape* love. Peter responds saying that he loves Christ with an affectionate love, avoiding using the Greek word *agape* to describe his love. He is no longer self-confident and admits that alongside the tender *agape* love of the Lord, his love is insufficient to be described as *agape* love. Each time, Jesus restores Peter back to feeding the Lord's lambs, taking care of His sheep, and feeding the sheep. For each of the three denials, the Lord asks him three times as to his love for Him. Do you love Me? This is the heart of all ministry that God's people do in His Name—is it done out of a personal and abiding love for Christ?

Peter's restoration was complete. The rest of the disciples had witnessed it. This was important because Peter was called to feed and care for the flock of God, and he needed the respect,

fellowship, and support of the other disciples. They must have all realized by now that the Lord had planned the whole thing, for instance, the charcoal fire was similar to the one around which he had denied his Lord. It was as if the Lord Himself set the stage. There had been three confessions of love to answer for the three denials of Peter and then three commissions from the Lord.

It is important for us to grasp that Christ's love for Peter was just as strong and just the same as it was before his denial. We are not loved any less for our failures. The important thing is that we make love our focus and return to the Lord every time. Rebound back into the grace of the Lord Jesus and the calling of God for your life. Peter did return to God's calling for his life, and he eventually was martyred for his faith.

Prayer: Father, we remember the great man of God that Peter became through his trials and how You used him greatly, despite his shortcomings. Would You continue to work in each of us and mold us like clay so that we may be more like You and accomplish the things You have prepared for us?

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