

November 15, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to study John 18:15-18, 25-27.

1. Contrast the circumstances in which Peter denied Christ with your circumstances?
2. Can you think of a time you denied Christ? How did you feel?
3. What are some ways we can deny association with Christ?
4. Is friendship with the world tantamount to denying Christ? If so, how?

ARE YOU ONE OF THIS MAN'S DISCIPLES?

John 18:15-18; 25-27

Isn't everyone a follower of Jesus? No. The evidence is in and according to the latest surveys many people in our culture are rejecting religion. But then rejecting religion is not the same as rejecting Jesus. In fact, embracing religion is often tantamount to rejecting Jesus. At the same time, the newest surveys seem to indicate that the younger generation is pursuing yoga, meditation, eastern mysticism, and ecstatic dancing as venues for finding inner peace and tranquility.

We can probably conclude that facts are facts, and that is what such surveys are supposed to derive and convey. However, in our special little subculture in the Bible Belt, it might be hard for us to believe that there are masses of people who reject Jesus and the Bible. Almost everyone we know or rub shoulders with claims to believe

that Jesus is God the Son the only Savior from sin. Just look around the next time you are in a restaurant and chances are pretty good that you will notice that the majority of people in the place bow their heads and offer thanks for their meal. Is that not clear proof that all those people are born again and love Jesus?

Pat and I have lived in Greenville, S.C. for almost forty-one years. We can testify that things are changing here also. When we moved here, the city was under an ordinance called "blue laws." Much of the Southeast operated under these laws that prohibited businesses from opening on Sunday because it was the Lord's Day. Fortunately for businesses who love money, the Lord doesn't have a day anymore. Now a few towns are grappling with the last gasping law that resembles those blue laws—whether people should be allowed to buy beverages on Sunday that can make them drunk.

While much as changed in the moral fiber in our culture and subculture, we are still glad to report that new churches are beginning almost weekly, many of the existing churches are growing, and even the old dying churches refuse to shut their doors. In this kind of culture, it is not likely that professing Christians are in any danger of denying Christ. How can we deny association with Christ in a culture that is religious to the core?

That is a question that Peter dealt with and about which he failed miserably. He lived in one of the most religious environments known to man. His Jewish peers and authorities claimed to love God zealously. They just weren't too keen on Jesus. They didn't like Jesus because He always taught things that made them look bad. He pointed out that their religious zeal was misguided. He was so bold as to say publicly that the religious leaders really didn't love God regardless of what they boldly claimed.

Finally the time came when those religious authorities struck out at Jesus, arrested Him, tortured Him, and crucified Him. What did that aggression against Jesus mean for anyone who was associated with Him? Common sense dictates that the people who were closest to the Object of persecution might well find themselves persecuted—or worse. Therefore, when given the opportunity to stand fast in his fellowship with Christ, Peter bailed. He denied that he knew Christ.

That is a sad story but what does it have to do with us? As we have already concluded, we too live in a very religious setting. In this

setting, in spite of all the talk about Jesus, it is amazingly easy for us to pretend at times that we are not all that close to Him. For example, Jesus taught and lived pure honesty. If you could profit from being dishonest, would you do it? That would be to deny that the teaching of Jesus impacts your life. If you are of the opinion that it is not fair to make that connection, stop to consider what would happen if you were caught being dishonest. Would someone not bring up the fact that you claim to be Christ's follower and Christ's followers are not supposed to be dishonest?

There is much in this story for us to learn. We will consider Peter's story, and then spend a few minutes thinking about how easy it is for us to follow his example if we are not careful.

Peter's Story.

A difficult test had overtaken Peter. Oh, that's too bad. Why do bad things happen to good people? That is a question asked by people who do not understand how God draws our weaknesses to the surface so we can correct them. God allowed this test for Peter in order to help Peter learn how much he needed to depend on Him. Peter was very confident about his love for and loyalty to Jesus. He was sure that he was willing to die with and for Jesus. When Jesus foretold that He would go where the disciples could not follow (to heaven), Peter said to him, "*Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you*" (John 13:37). For the past three years Peter had manifested a deep love for Jesus. But love for Jesus is not the same as dependance on Jesus.

Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew Peter. Jesus warned him that he was going to be tested "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat*" (Luke 22:31). Jesus warned that Peter would fail. When Peter promised to lay down his life for Jesus, *Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times"* (John 13:38). In that warning, Jesus specifically stated that Peter would deny association three times. He specifically stated that the rooster's crowing would be the verification of failure.

But while Jesus offered stern warning of failure, He also promised that Peter would repent and that He would restore him. Peter would deny Christ, but Christ promised, "*I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*" (Luke 22:32). Oh, but Peter did fail. Must be God didn't answer even His Son's prayer. Actually, God the Father interceded and answered Jesus' prayer for Peter. Peter denied Jesus, but he did not utterly fail. Part of the test from God was for Peter to know conviction of sin, to know the humility of repentance, and to know the joy of forgiveness and restoration.

To learn those truths, God allowed Peter to fail temporarily. He was in the garden with Jesus, full of confidence and zeal, when an innumerable band of soldiers showed up to arrest Jesus. He was no doubt confused, shocked, and dismayed when Jesus told him to put away his sword and when Jesus healed the ear of Malchus (Luke 22:51). How could Jesus become the king if He would not even allow a fight? This man would never be able to wrest the government from the Romans, Peter must have surmised.

In the heat of the moment, in the face of threat, Peter ran for cover. Eventually he regained his composure and followed the crowd to Caiaphas's house. John wrote that *Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest (v.15)*. The unnamed disciple is again "John" according to long-standing traditional interpretation. There is also the possibility that it was an unnamed disciple of Christ who lived in Jerusalem who had rather close connections with the religious hierarchy, maybe someone like Nicodemus. However, John would have been an intimate friend with Peter, but probably Nicodemus-kind-of-guys were not.

In that setting, a series of events through a period of over an hour proved Peter's weakness. All four of the Gospel writers record this failure. How humbling was that for Peter? His failure is recorded for eternity. But so is his forgiveness and restoration. We need to remember that it is likely that Mark received an eyewitness accounting of Jesus' ministry from Peter—including this story. Great failure makes for great repentance and restoration.

Also it is good to take into account that Mark was the earliest writing (50's), Matthew and Luke came about 10 years later (60's),

and then John wrote this account about thirty years later (90's). John would have had more information. He was the only one of the four who was an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry and especially this testing of Peter. But his account of Peter's denial is the least specific.

By connecting all the dots in all the accounts, we conclude that there were three different times of testing for Peter. A servant girl met Peter when she allowed him to enter the courtyard. John went inside the courtyard, *but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in (v.16)*. No doubt this was the servant of the high priest in Mark's account, and the servant outside the courtyard in Matthew's account. She recognized Peter as a follower of Christ. Peter denied association with Jesus.

Then we read *The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not" (v.17)*. It appears that various other people and servants accused Peter of being Jesus' follower while he warmed himself at their fire. For example, *Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself (v.18)*. . . . *Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not" (v.25)*. The term "*thtey*" implies more than one. Mark and Matthew mention other servant girls. Luke spoke specifically of a servant girl and someone Peter called a man accusing him while he was at the fire.

Finally, the accusers began to pile up. John remembered the servant of high priest who was related to the guy whose ear Peter cut off. *One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" (v.26)*. That incident would be pretty hard to forget or mistake. Also it seems it was about this time that the people began to accuse Peter of association with Jesus because of his Galilean accent (Mat. 26:73; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59).

It doesn't take a detective to realize that Peter has been fully outed at this point. How will the intimate follower, the member of the inner circle of three disciples respond?

Peter missed opportunities to affirm his relationship with Jesus. He could have acknowledged his love for Christ. His misguided swinging of the sword in the garden was a pretty clear expression of his concern for Christ. But that was an emotional reaction fueled by adrenalin. Now he was in an environment that was obviously stacked against followers of Christ. In that hostile environment, Peter experienced multiple opportunities to acknowledge his association with Jesus. He could have simply answered the first accusation, "Yes, I am a follower of Christ." He could have used any of those accusations to defend Christ's innocence, to explain Christ's teaching, to turn the tables and ask why the people wanted to torture the man who did so many good works. Instead, Peter chose to deny Christ because it seemed obvious that being connected to Jesus would surely mean persecution.

Peter could have died for Christ, but instead he denied he ever knew Him. Peter did not just deny association with Christ, but vigorously disavowed any connection. *Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed (John 18:27)*. In similar fashion Mark recorded, *But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak" (Mark 14:71)*. Matthew wrote, *Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man."* *And immediately the rooster crowed (Matthew 26:74)*. Luke remembered hearing that *Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about."* *And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed (Luke 22:60)*.

The good news is that the moment Jesus' warning was fulfilled in detail, Peter died to himself. Matthew said that *Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."* *And he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75)*. Mark wrote, *And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."* *And he broke down and wept (Mark 14:72)*. Luke recorded the same good news, *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."* *And he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62)*. Ouch! Try to imagine that look from Jesus. Try to sympathize with Peter's broken heart. It should not be too difficult for us to sympathize because we have stories of our own.

Our Story.

We too have opportunities to affirm our relationship with Jesus just like Peter did. Though we belong to Christ, He left us in the world (John 17:11,15). We have full evidence that we belong to Christ. We understand that we were born sinners and have offended God. We have confessed that sin and by faith embraced the finished redemption Jesus Christ provided in His death, burial, and resurrection. We have been identified with Christ through baptism. We experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He dwells within us. We thrive on fellowship with our Lord through prayer and reading of His Word. As a result, the way we live, talk, and react indicates that we are associated with Christ.

We love Christ, we long to be with Christ, and He longs for us to be with Him (17:24). But we are in this world so that other people can see what God is like by watching the way we live and speak. And they do. They know we are different.

Christ left us in the world having given us God's Word from heaven (John 17:6-7, 17). Jesus prayed, *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you"* (John 17:6-7). He prayed that God would *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth"* (John 17:17). Therefore, we are different because of the work of God's Word in us. Because we are born again and because we are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, the Bible makes sense to us. Because we read the Bible its truths shape the way we think and act. Because the truths of the Bible reveal the character of God, the Bible makes us like God.

When we live out the Bible, we will reflect God's glory and the world will notice that. It is not so much that we will be odd, anti-social, or even antagonistic. Living for Christ's glory is not an arrogance that looks down on all the sinners of the world. Not denying Christ is simply a matter of knowing His commands and doing His commands moment by moment and day by day. Living in recognition of Christ does not intend or purposely try to attract attention to ourselves. But when someone takes notice, we do not try to act like Christ has not impacted us.

At this point, a word of caution is fitting. Reflecting God's glory will make you noticeably different. A couple of weeks ago, I went to the local building supply to pick up some sheet rock to cover the inside of our garage. I told the cashier how much I needed, paid the bill, and, after the men loaded the truck, I took it home. After I arrived home, I began to review the purchase in my mind and felt like something was amiss. I checked over the receipt and discovered that the cashier had charged me for half as much material as I got. The next day I returned to the store, went to customer service, and told the girl behind the counter that I was only charged half what I should have been charged, and, therefore, I wanted to pay the \$110 I owed for the materials. The girl just kind of stood there for a moment as if she was trying to process what I had just said. Then she fumbled around a bit, obviously not knowing what to do. Finally she got on the phone, called management and said, "Some guy is up here trying to give us some money because he was undercharged yesterday." They explained what she should do, and eventually I was able to give them some money.

As I walked away from that incident with a nice, clear conscience, I thought to myself (and it may not have been true), those girls in customer service probably think I am the oddest person they have ever met. Then I began to wonder why I did what I did. At the time, I was not motivated by any particular Bible verse; but in review, I realized that I had to do what I did because the Word of God clearly teaches that I should deal honestly. Then I thought about Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, *"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 7:12). He also taught, *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14-16). I had put those truths in my heart and mind repeatedly for many years. Therefore, when it came time to live them, they determined how I would respond. Weird? Yes, by normal standards. But people who affirm their association with Christ will appear to be a bit weird in Satan's world.

We, like Peter, also have opportunities to deny our relationship with Jesus. The world is no friend of Christ. Jesus has warned us, *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you”* (John 15:18). There are times when the hatred of the people who live in Satan’s world under Satan’s influence is applied to Christ’s followers. The extreme examples of this are found throughout history. Thousands of people who associate with Christ have been persecuted and executed since Jesus returned to the Father. Still our brothers and sisters face hostile cultures around the world. They are threatened with firing, excommunication from their families, being thrown out of town, removed from their homes and having their churches burned.

Under that kind of pressure, it is easy to pretend for awhile that we don’t know Christ. It would be easy to conclude that a Christian living in secret is better than a dead Christian. And yet, if we have died to self, we have already died.

But, maybe the more difficult test is not harsh persecution but simple shunning because of our testimony. In our culture, people are generally not imprisoned or persecuted for living for Christ’s glory. But pressure to be “not so Christlike” is immense. In our culture, people associated with Christ are identified by their traditions, their practices. Christians can drop their traditions, change their lifestyle, and never stick out to the world as an odd follower of Christ. If that process is not curtailed, at some point professing Christian will be exactly like an unsaved world and will never be asked why they are different. In that setting, there is obviously no light shining and there is no work that reflects God’s character.

God established the very important principle that acceptance with the world is denial of Christ. Jesus taught, *“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels”* (Luke 9:25-26).

What kind of person would want to gain the world? Unsaved people are certainly acceptable to the world. James wrote the warning, *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* (James 4:4). People who forsake their relationship with Christ for a relationship

with the world are spiritual adulterers. But James wrote those words to Christians. Believers can respond like Peter by denying association with Christ so that their world will not be unkind to them.

Denial of Christ in order to be accepted by the world in which Christ left us still comes down to this principle: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). If we don’t keep Christ’s commands, what does that say about us? Did we keep Christ’s commands in our thinking, our habits, our practices this past week, in our reactions yesterday? If all these things were caught on video and posted on social media, would you be guilty of denying Christ?

Because of his close association with Christ and privileged position with Christ, Peter’s denial was especially grievous. But if we are truly born again, we have an even closer association with Christ because we have far greater knowledge and understanding than Peter had at the time of his failure. We are all guilty at one time or another. Let us rejoice that we, like Peter, can confess our failure, be restored by Christ, and go out and live like we love Him.