

24 Hours – Trial and Peter

24 Hours

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Luke 22:54-61

Preached on: Sunday, February 5, 2012

I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to two places in the New Testament, the book of Luke, chapter 22, and the book of John chapter 18; the book of Luke, the third book of the New Testament, the book of John the fourth book; Luke chapter 22 and John chapter 18.

As you are turning to those two passages of Scripture, if you are one of our first time guests or visitors today, we are continuing in a series, in a sermon series, a walk through the gospel, so to speak, of the most important and the most life changing and world changing 24 hour time period in the history of the world, the 24 hours that led to up to the final breath of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross.

We began with what we know as the Last Supper and we are continuing through the Garden of Gethsemane. And we are going to deal with all kinds of scenarios and all kinds of personalities as we make this journey this spring. We are going to deal with characters such as Pilate. We are going to deal with the statements that Jesus makes from the cross. We are going to deal with the darkness that falls upon the land for three hours. But in the midst of all the things that we are learning as so many of you have come to me and shared with me the insights and just little bits of information that you have noticed for the very first time in the story, what we know as the cross or the Easter story that is so familiar to so many. Today we come to what I believe is the most personal of the messages.

Now I personally believe because they come from the Word of God that they are all powerful. But today is probably the most personal, because today is about one of the characters who I believe every one of us can completely and absolutely identify with. Today we talk about the apostle Peter and his denial of Jesus Christ.

Now the reason that that word "denial" is important, because, as we discussed the last couple of weeks, we addressed a man by the name of Judas and his betrayal. And I would dare say that very few people, if any, ever come to a point in their lives where they betray the Lord, literally turn Him over to the authorities, actually have a time and place where He is, "arrested" because of their actions. But every one of us at some time or some place in our life, maybe even this week, have realized that we weren't where we needed to be with Jesus Christ. We were on the outside when we should have been on the inside. We were left when we should have been right, or whatever word you want to use.

And today as we come to Luke chapter 22 we find a man by the name of apostle Peter, a man who would make the great statement that, "Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of

the living God,” the very man who would preach what we know as the first, “Christian” sermon at the celebration of Pentecost.

And yet today in Luke chapter 22 we will see the other side of Peter. Within those 24 hours Jesus has been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is on His way to the high priest’s judgment hall. Luke 22 beginning in verse 54.

It says, “Then they took him,” that is Jesus.

...and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.¹

If you will turn with me to John chapter 18 the same account gives us insight into a comparison that we are going to make today when Peter is on the outside, but another disciple is on the inside.

Beginning in verse 15 of John chapter 18.

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.²

The reason I went to that passage in the gospel of John chapter 18 is I want to show somewhat of a comparison today of these two characters whom we know as Simon Peter and this other disciple.

¹ Luke 22:54-61.

² John 18:15-18.

Now you will notice that Peter follows afar off, but this other disciple, whom we will discuss in a moment, who is known to the high priest, actually goes into the high priest's palace.

Now the Bible is very clear that this is another disciple. It does not give us a proper name. There is not a word with a capital letter so that we can say this is exactly who it is. And there has been a lot of suspicions of who this character is and let me just share with you the two most popular. I will start with the least of the most popular and then we will go to the most of the most popular.

One of the ideas is that this other disciple, one who follows Jesus is a character whom we know as Nicodemus. You all remember who Nicodemus was in John chapter three. He was the leader, the Jewish leader, the political, the religious leader who Jesus said, "You are a master of Israel," a man who most certainly would have been in the higher echelon of Jewish political and religious life. He comes to Jesus in John chapter three. He says, "Jesus, how do I get eternal life?"

Jesus says, "You must be born both of water and of the Spirit. You must be born again."

Nicodemus asked that very famous question, "How can I, a grown man, return to my mother's womb?" And Jesus begins to explore this all with Nicodemus and he concludes with this very famous verse: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."³

That event in Nicodemus' life was so dramatic that in John chapter seven when those religious authorities are wanting to get rid of Jesus, Nicodemus actually defends Jesus. He stands up and says, "Wait up, guys. We are doing this illegally. We are not even trying him the way that we should." And they asked him, "Have you also become one of his disciples?"

In a couple of weeks we will get to John chapter 19 and Nicodemus will join a man by the name of Joseph of Arimathaea and they will actually take the body of Jesus off the cross and place it in the tomb that would be empty three days later.

One of the thoughts is maybe this was Nicodemus. He would have obviously been known to the high priest. He would have had the connections that would have allowed him to go into this inner sanctum, so to speak.

But the most popular thought is that this was the apostle John, the same apostle John who always was the closest to Jesus. And every time in the gospel of John that he references himself he never uses his name. He never says, "This happened to me or myself, John." At the very end of the gospel of John he says, "The one who leaned next to Jesus at the table," who was that? John. He speaks about the beloved disciple. Who was that? That was John. He never speaks of himself directly in proper name, but always describing

³ John 3:16.

himself. So many have believed that here in this passage in John when he says, “Another disciple entered in” that he was saying, “I was on the inside. Peter was on the outside.”

And one of the testimonies that is so great for this is that everywhere you see Jesus, John never leaves His side. When they are eating the Last Supper, he is the next one to Him. Here in John chapter 18 when He is being ridiculed and mocked and He is being spit upon and He is being beaten he is right beside him. In just a few hours in this 24 hour time period when Jesus goes to this cruel cross on what we know as Mount Golgotha or Calvary, there is only one disciple who remains. His name is John. And so he gives us a great illustration of what happens in our life, what is the difference when we are close to Jesus versus being afar off from Jesus.

And so as we turn back to Luke chapter 22 I want to discuss something very practical: The distance that can lead us to deny Jesus. What can happen in our life? What can create distance in our life so that we are distanced from Jesus so that we ultimately, unfortunately, like Peter, make similar decisions and speak similar words? And there are three things that happen in this testimony of Luke chapter 22. The first one is in verse 54 when it says: “And Peter followed afar off.”⁴

The first distance or the first thing that can happen in your life is that you have frustration in your life that causes you to be behind Jesus. Do you notice the difference here? He says: “Peter followed afar off.”⁵

That is slang for a long ways back. The apostle John... it says he just simply followed Him.

What causes us to get behind Jesus? What causes us to say, “Jesus, that is okay. You go ahead there, but I am going to hang back.” I know what causes it. It is called frustration.

Now let me address something that every one of us realizes, every one of us knows. I cannot tell you how many countless conversations I have had with people this week regarding this subject matter. If you were not aware, if you were not in tune, if you have not been yet amazed, did you know that this thing called life is not going to go according to how you planned it? You can have spreadsheets upon spreadsheets. You can have plans. You can have expectations. It can be with your finances. It can be with your job. It can be with your family. How many times do I have a conversation with someone, even in my own home, where we say, “This wasn’t what we planned”?

I will just... there’s a dramatic there for my third child. This isn’t what we expected. This wasn’t on our calendar. This wasn’t on our agenda. And do you know what happens when life doesn’t work out the way you want it to? You get frustrated. And you say, “Lord, if I could write my life out, I would have written it differently.”

⁴ Luke 22:54.

⁵ Ibid.

We get frustrated. Job was this way in the book of Job and it creates this frustration. And when we get frustrated with how life is going and how God is orchestrating it, what happens is that's the same thing that Peter did. He followed afar off.

Do you realize how disappointed and frustrated Peter must have been? For three and a half years he dedicated his life to Jesus. He left a business that was thriving. He left a family that was flourishing. That is in the book of Acts, by the way. He did have a family. He left security. For three and a half years he walked up and down what we know as Israel. He had gone days without food. He had seen miraculous things. And here he thought what was going to happen, Jesus is about to take over the world. Jesus has ridden on the donkey. He has overturned the tables. He is about to put the throne down in Jerusalem. We are never going to have to deal with the Romans again. I am going to be in charge. This is going to be great. It did not turn out that way. Does that sound like your life some days?

Lord, for the last three and a half years—or whatever time frame you want to put—I have done this. I have gone here. I have been a part of that. I went to school and now I can't find a job. I have been selfless and now my marriage is a mess. And how many times do we say, "I am frustrated and I am upset"?

Guess what? Peter did, too. And what we see is when we get frustrated with God, we end up creating distance with God. And what happens is when we allow distance to happen, saying, "But, God, I would have done it differently," then denial is right around the corner.

But there is another thing that happens. It is called fickleness. And fickleness will lead us not to be behind, but between. That is literally the definition of fickleness, being between two items. That is why the book of James tells us: "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."⁶

The reason I wanted you, really, to read John 18 was not just because of the other disciple, but do you notice that Peter follows afar off? He is brought into the inner chamber and then at his final declaration...

By the way, Matthew chapter 26 makes this more clear. He is outside on the porch over a period that lasted at least an hour because it says an hour transpired. He is outside. Then he is inside. Then he is back outside again.

When we are fickle with the Lord, when we are excited about what he is doing on Sunday and could care less on Monday, when we are excited when things are going well and frustrated when they are not, it creates a fickleness in us that allows distance to be created between us and the Lord.

Let me give you a very brash, blunt example. As many of you are aware, when I was in college I was a part of an organization of men. Technically we called it fraternity and I

⁶ James 1:8.

had pledged this organization and I was a freshman in college and I went to our annual retreat. Let me tell you what an annual retreat is. You get 75, 80 guys on the lake somewhere up to no good, to be honest with you.

I will tell you what. It is tough to be a designated driver when there is... when you drive a two seater. That is all I have got to tell you. In other words, you have got to make a bunch of trips.

But the very last night of our retreat they did this event, for lack of better terms, where they gathered all the guys together in one big, open, kind-of family room. They had what we would call a, “cooler” in the middle of the room. Everybody was surrounding it. It was very late at night. They went in alphabetical order and every young man got up and sat on that cooler. Some of the men would say statements, you know, regarding you and how grateful they were you were part of the group, blah, blah, blah. And then you had 60 seconds to respond, 60 seconds.

Some guys said, “Thank you for what you have helped me through the last year. I couldn’t have made it through this if it hadn’t been for you all.” Some of them criticized the group openly and said, “We need to get our act together.”

Some of them complained. Some of them whined. Some of them griped. But there was one man whom I will never forget. He didn’t take 60 seconds. He didn’t take 30 seconds. He sat down on that cooler and he said, “Friends,” he said, “I have got a Bible in one hand and a beer in the other and I do not know which one I am going to pick.”

Outside one day, inside the next.

Maybe that is not your exact situation, but when you are excited about Jesus on Sunday and all about the world on Monday, you are in the exact same spot. And it creates a fickleness of going back and forth. What does it ultimately do? Just like falling afar off and being frustrated, it creates this incredible distance between you and the Lord. And when there is distance, denial is looming around the corner.

Oh, but there is a third one. He had frustration because Jesus wasn’t what he expected him to be. He had a fickleness about am I on the outside or the inside. And then he experienced a thing that creeps up in every one of our lives. It is called fear. When he experienced fear it caused him not to be behind, not to be between, but to be beside.

Now this is why this word is very important. If I could take you to this actual place—and when you take a tour of the Middle East, in particular what we know as the nation of Israel, the city of Jerusalem—when you take these tours, you know, most of the time that you are on the tour your guide says, “I think it happened here, or our best guess is it happened here.”

But when you get to Caiaphas’ house, we know his address. We know where he was. I have actually gone down in what most likely was the dungeon that they brought Jesus out

of. You see the judgment hall where most likely Jesus was actually scourged and beaten and where the two false witnesses came in.

And as you are there and you see the dungeon and you see the pit, as you see all the things, the thing that is so resonating, at least it was in my life, is that when you stand most likely where Jesus would have been and you look to the right, there is a porch, a porch where a fire would have been started, a porch where the servants would have warmed themselves in the dark of the night waiting for all these events of an illegal trial that we will get to later, taking place. And when you look to the side you see maybe 20 feet away where Jesus was denied. And when we have fear in our life, what happens is we find ourselves in the outside.

Let me share with you what that fear is. The fear is: What could happen to me if? What could happen to me if?

Let me tell you what Peter must have been feeling that night. If I stand beside Him the whole time, if I am there with John the whole time, they are going to do to me what they did to Him. If I really get serious about God, He is going to make me move to a hut in Africa and I will never get to come home and see my grandkids again. If I start giving to the Lord He is going to take all my money and I am going to be broke. Fear grips us.

But here is the thing that is amazing about fear. Nothing that Peter would have feared ever actually happened to him. Peter was never tried that day. Peter was never scourged. Peter was never spit upon and they never put him on a cross. And neither was John.

See, what he was so fearful of happening to him didn't even happen to the one who was on the inside. John was not put on trial. John was not scourged. John was not beaten. In fact, when Jesus gets to and on the cross he is there able to communicate and respond to him. And that is what fear does. It creates such a distance between us and the Lord that we are completely on the outside when we are supposed to be on the inside.

And so whether we are falling afar off, whether we are fickle going back and forth or whether we are completely on the outskirts, what ultimately happens is we deny the Lord.

What did he do to deny the Lord? He said, "I am not associated with him. I have nothing to do with him." And do you notice a kind of a progression in Peter's life? You know, the first time he begins to deny he says, "I don't know who he is." You know, I is kind of personal. I don't know him.

The second time he goes, "It is not me."

And the third time, if you go to the book of Matthew chapter 26, it says he began to cuss and swear.

The same man who a couple of hours earlier had said, "Jesus, no matter where you go, I will always be there." That is Sunday morning, isn't it?

Jesus, no matter what happens this week, I believe you and I love you and I am going to worship you.

And then this thing called Monday shows up. That is exactly what happened in his life. And you begin to say, “No, I don’t need Jesus for this.” He began to say, “No, no, this isn’t something I need to be a part of.” He began to say, “No. In fact, I am going to remove myself so far that nobody will even know my life resembles him.”

See, in his third denial he exhibited such behavior and such language that you would not have associated him with Jesus, because of what he did. And he runs off, which leads to the decision that Peter had to come to.

And I put on the screen “decisions” in parentheses that lead to deliverance. How do we get delivered from it? And we defined this a couple of weeks ago, from one place to another? How do we get delivered from denial? How do we go to a place where we are not on the outside, we are not behind, we are not going back and forth, but we are actually right next to the Lord, not with an opportunity to deny him? And I think the first thing that we need to understand to be delivered from denial is to actually experience what we need to experience today in our relationship to Jesus Christ. And we need to respond appropriately.

Notice what happens in Peter here in verse 62 or verse 61. It says:

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.”⁷

We have no idea how long Jesus Christ had been looking at that porch. Ten minutes, 15, 30? We are not told. But I guarantee you, Peter was doing something on that porch after he had denied Him that we do on a regular basis. I get a good perspective of this and you may not even realize it. When the Holy Spirit of God is moving in our lives, when we know we are not where we need to be, do you know what happens to us? We begin to look away.

Let me tell you what I see when people are under conviction. This is it right here. Watch. This is what happens. You look down. You look to the side. You look up. Not that you are bored. It is you are doing the same thing that kids do when their parents catch them where they are not supposed to be, looking away. How many times have you said to your own children, “Look me in the eye when I am talking to you”?

Why? Because as soon as a six-year old looks you in the eye, assuming they have any semblance of a soul at all, they break down. They break down. The problem is as adults we get real good at looking like we are looking at the eyes. But we are not.

See, the first response that we have got to do to remove denial in our lives is we have actually got to look the Lord in the eye. Because when you look Him in the eye it reveals

⁷ Luke 22:61.

everything that should not be that is and everything that is that should not be. The first response is exactly what happened to Peter. At some point on the porch he made eye contact with him. And then there was a second thing, the reaction that you need to have.

Notice the last statement in verse 62. “And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”⁸

Peter was not casual about these sins. He didn’t say, “Well, you know, I have always kind of gotten in trouble. I have had a bad temper. This is kind of the way it goes. I guess I will just see what happens in a couple of days.” He wept bitterly.

Guys, this is why I say often times at moments like this, real men do cry, because when we understand that we are sinful, when we understand that Jesus Christ went to the cross that we should have gone to, it creates within us an overwhelming weeping sensation of that should be me. Why was it not me? Why was it Him?

We, listen, bitterly. There is an adverb there. He didn’t just weep. He didn’t just cry. It says it was bitterly. So he responded. He reacted.

But I am going to close with what I think is the most important thing about not becoming Peter. He ran. And you need to run. You say, “Well, time out.”

Here in Luke chapter 22 he goes out and he runs away. Are you saying, Jeff, I need to run away? No, no, no, no. Turn one page to the right or maybe in your Bibles two pages to Luke chapter 24. By the way, this is Easter morning. This is Resurrection Day. Jesus is beginning the process of making His appearances known to various folks. There is a young lady who comes and finds John and Peter, incidentally the same two guys that we have here. And he shares with them that the tomb is empty, the stone has been rolled away and Jesus has risen from the dead just as He said.

I want you to notice what happens in verse 12: Then arose Peter and he casually strolled to the tomb.

Then arose Peter and said, “Well, after lunch, I will make it there if I have time.”

What happens? He runs.

Now one of the things and one of the reasons that we draw pictures of Peter as kind of being a little portly guy is as you read this story we find out that John outran Peter and we just assume that he must have been a bigger guy. That is why it took him longer to get there.

I want to share with you one of the greatest theological insights that I have ever received in my life and I am proud to say it came from my wife. She made this statement to me once.

⁸ Luke 22:62.

She said, "Nobody needed the tomb to be empty more than Peter."

I want you to think about that for a moment. Nobody needed it to be empty more than Peter, because what was the last thing that happened with Peter and Jesus? The look of denial. Nobody needed to see Jesus risen more than Peter. Nobody needed to see him face to face.

And when he realized, listen, when he realized he was going to get his chance, he didn't wait until next week. He didn't wait until it was a convenient time. He didn't wait until he was done with lunch. He got up and he took off and he ran.

Guys, let me be honest with you we have an invitation every week at this church at every service. We stand. We sing. We have people down here at the front. And we talk about making decisions. And it doesn't last long because I am a firm believer that if I can talk you into it, I can talk you out of it. I am a firm believer that if you are not excited about it on Sunday, you are surely not going to be excited about it on Monday.

Let me take you back to 30 years ago when I got saved. I realize I was young. I realize I was dumb, but I knew Jesus and I knew I was a sinner and I knew I needed to be saved. My dad sat with me out in the worship center. My mom was in the choir. When the invitation began, my dad had to hold me back from running down that aisle.

You say, "Well, you are just a little kid. You are excited about things."

No, no. I wasn't a little kid. I was saved. I was forgiven. I knew the day before I was headed to hell. Now I knew I was headed to heaven. I knew the day before I was a messed up sinner. Now I knew I was saved and I wasn't going to let anybody get in the way including my dad.

And I said, "Dad..." I took off. And I walked and ran and whatever I did down to the front. The pastor looked at me and he said, "Son, I guess you are ready." I said, "Yes, sir, I am ready." We had spoken a couple of hours before, just to fill in the gaps there.

Folks, in just a moment we are going to have an invitation. We are going to stand and sing and maybe it is not a public decision like it was when I was that age. Maybe it is a would be decision that realized once you leave our campus eventually. But I want to be absolutely honest with you. If you want to change the distance between you and Jesus, whether it is a far off, between, or beside, you have got to start running, because I have got good news for you. It may not be the month that what we know as Easter is celebrated in, but the tomb is still empty. You can still run to it today and so I suggest you all put on some Nikes, some Reeboks or whatever you like and say, "Lord, I am not to wait until next week. I am not going to wait until it is more convenient. I am not going to wait until my kids are grown. I am not going to wait until I have more money. I am not going to wait until this happens. I am just going to get with it and start running. And when I get there I am going to find out that the napkin is laid to the side, the tomb has been emptied."

Folks, the question is this. Have you looked in His eyes? Have you reacted and are you ready to start running? Because the tomb is empty.