

Luke 22:54-71

"A Denial & A Trial"

As we enter into this section of scripture the Shepherd has been taken, the sheep have been scattered. Peter's temptation has begun & already he's slipping, he's straining in the efforts of his flesh. **But he will discover what we do well to realize & that is this: no matter how willing the spirit is, the flesh is weak. We cannot fulfill in the efforts of the flesh what can only be brought into fruition through the power of the Spirit. I cannot stand fast for Christ in the strength of my flesh.**

Yet I have discovered that it's easy for me to play Monday morning quarterback, it's easy for me to consider a situation or a circumstance after the fact & criticize some *thing* or *someone* regarding what happened, what they did Vs what they should've done. However in 1 Cor 10:11 the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul informs us regarding the sin that we see in the people found in scripture saying, **"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."** **"Well, what does that mean?"** It means that these life stories were given to us not as targets of criticism *for us* but so that we might read *over* them & learn *from* them not to be repeat offenders. They were written for *our* admonition, to warn & reprimand *us*. The point isn't to exploit their weakness but rather through their example add to our strength...

But before we jump into this next section of scripture I want to back up into the previous portion of scripture that we had to sift through fairly quickly for the sake of time last week & make a few more observations.

Perhaps you recall... the religious leaders, the temple guard & a multitude of men (John tells us a "detachment" of troops which was about 600 men) led by Judas came to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane under the covering of night. They had orchestrated a signal, Judas had informed them saying, "The One whom I kiss, He's the One, seize Him."

Of course in that we're reminded of what we might call or consider the "commonality" of Christ. People often wonder what Jesus looked like. The truth of the matter is that He looked like an ordinary average Man. The bible says of Jesus, **"He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him."**¹

¹ The New King James Version, 1982 (Is 53:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Which simply means that He wasn't a stumbling block of beauty over which all the ladies were constantly lusting. It doesn't mean He was by any means ugly, simply that He wasn't obviously Divine. Judas didn't say, "You won't miss Him, He's the 6'4" tall dark & handsome one w/that glow illuminating from Him." They needed Judas to pinpoint their Man, to identify Him out of the lineup (so to speak).

What shocks us is the method in which he chose to betray our Lord. He took what would seem to be the quintessential sign of affection (the kiss) & through that placed the sword of betrayal into the heart of Jesus.

Oh it might be different if Judas were simply a tolerated part of the group that no one really liked anyway. But such was not the case; the worst of wounds are always inflicted through the best of friends, the closest of relationships. Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man w/a kiss?" We won't go there today but you might jot down the note & look it up later, the story of David's closest counselor Ahithophel & how he betrayed David (his lord)(2 Sam 16-17). Jesus took of the psalm that David wrote after that experience & applied to Himself in the Last Supper when He said, *"I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.'"*² What happened to David was a prophetic foreshadowing of the substance that would be fulfilled in Christ (the Son of David, the Greater than David, our Lord) when Judas betrayed Him.

In the 55th Psalm David wrote of Ahithophel in this way: *"For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, And walked to the house of God in the throng* (the assembly of worshipers).³ Here's the point: don't perceive Judas as some hated kind of man, he was not, he was loved dearly...which is what makes the poison of his his betrayal infiltrate the heart our Lord all the more venomously. It was the basest kind of hypocrisy.

Something else we need to see here is the need to *wait upon the Lord* when inquiring of the Lord. The question was asked, "Lord, shall we strike w/the sword?" But did they wait for a reply? No, Peter just unsheathed his sword & started swinging & in so doing someone got hurt. He cut Malchus' right ear clean off.

² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Jn 13:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 55:12-14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Malchus was fortunate that Peter was trained as a fisherman & not as a soldier or he'd have probably cut his head off. The problem wasn't the lack of petition, they *did* ask, the problem is that they didn't wait for the response. *They didn't wait for direction &/or instruction. This is so typical of the way we operate; we ask & then we just get busy doing whatever we think seems best in the moment.* Yet the bible says, *"Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!"*⁴ How much pain, panic & unnecessary confusion could've been avoided here had they simply waited on the Lord's response to their inquiry?

Finally I want to draw attention to our Lord's final miracle. Look at Vs 49

Vs49-51

On a quick side note, notice Who's in control. Over 600 men coming to apprehend 1 & the 1 continues to control the situation. We read in John's gospel that as they approached Jesus said, "Whom are you seeking?" They responded, "Jesus of Nazareth" to which He answered, "I am" & they all drew back & fell to the ground, 600+ dominoes. Christ maintains control, they aren't taking Him, He's surrendering to them.

But His final miracle was one of healing a hurt that was inflicted by an over zealous disciple. Peter had noble intentions, but his acting out of step w/the heart of Jesus just got someone hurt. Guess what, it's undoubtedly still one of the most often performed miracles of our Lord today. *Healing the wounds inflicted upon others by overzealous Christians who think they're standing up for the Lord & defending His cause by unsheathing the 2-edged sword of the word & hacking and slashing, cutting off the ears of people around them so that they no longer want to hear it...*

The Lord said, "Hey, stop hacking & slashing w/the sword." Peter was slashing at people w/the sword, Jesus administered a tender touch, demonstrated love for His enemies even in the heat of this arrest & brought healing to a man's life. *We don't know if Malchus got saved but if I had to guess I would say probably so. Jesus doesn't need sword slashers, He needs instruments of His love & His tender touch of healing & compassion upon an otherwise hostile world.*

Well, Jesus rebukes them all for coming out under the covering of night, He doesn't resist the arrest (it needed to happen) but the method that they employ He rebukes. They're demonstrating that they're children of darkness by doing their work under the cover of darkness.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 27:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Shepherd is seized, the sheep scatter, of course the irony is that if He'd never been seized, far from scattering the sheep would be lost forever.

Now the scene shifts momentarily, we go from the garden to the courtyard of the high priest & the focus goes from our Lord & the camera pans to Peter. It's a "meanwhile" kind of scene, a side vignette of sorts, notice.

Vs54-60

Now there are all kinds of angles we could approach this from. Suffice it to say for now that having been in the ministry (concerning the Pastorate) for years & years & years I have never once found anyone who said, "I just woke up one morning & decided I would deny my Lord." **The road to denial is subtle, it starts w/driftng, it ends at denying. Once you open the door to sin in your life it begins to pave the road for more & more, it becomes easier & easier until far from drifting you're flat out denying.** Peter wasn't suddenly confronted & being taken by surprise he failed; there is a trail of "bread crumbs" (so to speak) that lead us back to where it all began.

It started much earlier in the evening when Jesus told Peter that Satan had asked for them that he might sift them as wheat but that He'd prayed for Peter that his faith shouldn't fail & when he returned to Him he should strengthen his brethren. Right then Peter should've locked in place his spiritual defense system, should've began to pray & seek the Lord for an appropriate course of action. Instead he didn't take the word of the Lord seriously, didn't take it to heart & apply to himself personally. **He was all, "Lord, I'll not only go to prison w/You, I'll die w/You!" He welled up w/pride rather than abase himself in humility & seek direction from the Lord desperately.**

Next in further defiance of the Lord's word & increasing in his position of pride, when Jesus said, "Pray, that you may not enter into temptation." Peter (along w/the others) put his head down & went to sleep. So he didn't take the warning of the word of God seriously, didn't think it would happen to him personally & he refused to pray fervently but instead he went to sleep.

When it all started coming down rather than wait on the Lord, he responded & reacted in the flesh, someone got hurt & the Lord had to clean up his mess. Then they apprehend the Lord, he's no doubt feeling vulnerable & nervous because of his violent display in the garden, he's shaken, he's cold & the interrogation begins.

The first denial paved the way for the others, just as surely as one sin follows another. God expects us to be honest and unashamed about Christ. The people knew Peter was a disciple (v. 59), for his accent was Galilean. Mark pointed this out, giving us the fullest account of the denials (Mark 14:66–72). Jesus and the twelve were from Galilee and spoke in that way. Peter felt cornered and even, as Mark records, ‘began to curse and swear’ that he did not know Jesus.

But let’s note the steps. The bible says, *“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;”*

⁵ In this digression from drifting to denying we see Peter fail on every point. He begins by walking (that is following the Lord) at a distance. *It’s isolation, it’s separation, we might consider this to be the Christian on the fringe, wanting to see how far away from the Lord they can walk & still be safe. They begin to replace their priorities, their passion for Christ w/other things, hobbies, work, recreation.* Not really spending time in the word or in fellowship, they’re keeping a comfortable distance; they’re on the fringe. These are the people that want to know how much they can sin & still have salvation. Not really interested in how close to Christ they can get, but how far from Him they can walk & still be considered a Christian.

Now John’s gospel (18:18) tells us that once Peter was granted access to the courtyard that he *stood* w/those who were kindling the fire to warm himself, & of course here we read that he *sat* among them. From walking, to standing, to sitting... warming yourself & finding comfort in the environment of the enemy. Having forsaken the fellowship of the fleeing disciples he falls prey to the powers of darkness in the enemy’s camp. He’s keeping company w/the wrong crowd.

Isn’t interesting that when confronted w/hardship in the garden he had courage (misguided though it may’ve been), but settling down around the fire of the enemies camp, seeking to find comfort in the wrong crowd he faltered...

Kinda sheds new light on the need for difficulties & hardship in our lives doesn’t it? It reminded me of Paul pleading to find comfort from the thorn in his flesh over & over & over again until the Lord spoke to him & said, “No” (in essence), “you need the hardship, the difficulty, the dilemmas working against you. Because my strength is made perfect in your weakness.”

⁵ The New King James Version. 1982 (Ps 1:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It was then that Paul wrote, *"Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*⁶

Ok, Peter denies even knowing Jesus (woman I don't know Him), he denies being a follower of Jesus ("you are of them, 'man I am not'") & ultimately he denies even being from the same area of Jesus ("this guy is a Galilean, 'I don't know what you're talking about'").

But here's what I want you to see, these are the tell tale signs of discipleship. How is it that they identified Peter? 3 things that ought to earmark your life if you belong to Jesus, #1 You spend time *with* Jesus (that is sitting at His feet, receiving from His word, communicating in prayer). As the servant girl studied him, looked intently at him she said, "This man also was *with* Him." If your life belongs *to* Jesus you will be noted as spending time *with* Jesus (you can deny it if you want, but people aren't stupid they know what you're about).

#2 You'll spend time w/the other disciples (you'll be in fellowship, you'll go to church, Jesus instituted the church & if it's important to Him it'll be important to you). The man that confronted him said, "You also are *of* them" of who? Of those who follow Jesus, he'd been noted as being in the midst of the other believers.

#3 finally, your own speech will betray you. When the man said, "This guy is a Galilean", it would be the equivalent of you recognizing someone from the deep south, or Minnesota or Jersey because of their accent, they simply speak different than you do. Here's the deal, as a believer your speech will betray you when you try to fit in w/people in the world. You don't cuss & swear, you don't laugh at the dirty jokes, there's a purity, a salt, a speech seasoned w/grace that issues forth from you & there's just no getting around it. They knew who Peter was & trust me when I tell you that if you belong to Jesus they'll know who you are as well.

Peter denied every allegation & on the 3rd denial Peter heard it...the crowing of the rooster. Vs 61-62

This is one of those moments whereby the silence between these 2 spoke louder than words ever could.

⁶ The New King James Version. 1982 (2 Co 12:9-10), Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Somehow & in some way when that rooster crowed Jesus looked & Peter & Peter looked at Jesus & their eyes locked. It was all that was needed as Peter broke & began to weep bitterly. It wasn't a look of "how could you" it wasn't a look of "I told you so" it wasn't a look of fury, but of forgiveness. As the bible says, *"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"*⁷

You know, when someone comes down on you for something you've done & they're all angry you're initial reaction is to lash out & defend yourself. But when they come alongside you, put their arm *around* you & say, "Hey, I'm here for you, I love you & together we'll get through this." Well, that's when you cave in, how can you fight against the love of God? "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken & contrite heart, these, O God, You will not despise." (Ps 51:17)

Listen, Peter's failure was tragic. His denial of the Lord is heart rending, yet his repentance & subsequent service to the Lord throughout the book of Acts should provide a sense of hope for us all. The Lord is slow to anger & rich in mercy; if we will repent He will re-commission us, re-enlist us into His service. He wants to use your life to increase His kingdom. Return to your 1st love; repent of your sin & God will use your life.

Vs 63- 65

This is just one of several times (that the gospels record for us) that Jesus was assaulted. He was assaulted to the extent, so swollen, bloodied & bruised that when they were finished w/Him He was no longer recognizable as a human being. You would cringe & turn away when you looked at Him. The bible says, *"So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;"*⁸

On down in Isaiah Ch 53 & Vs 3 it goes on to say, "& we hid as it were our faces from Him." It was difficult to even look at Him. So delete the file in your memory that perceives a tired & sweaty Jesus w/a crown of thorns on His head & a trickle of blood running down the side of His face, that's not the way it was. It may be a sentimental piece of art; it's not a biblically accurate portrayal in the least.

Vs 66-71

⁷ The New King James Version. 1982 (Ro 2:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ The New King James Version. 1982 (Is 52:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We will survey this a little more closely next time, for now suffice it to say that Jesus knows when people are playing games & He never entertains the person pretending to look for an answer when their mind is already made up.

“If You’re the Christ, tell us.” “Why should I tell you, you won’t believe, neither will you let Me go.”? “Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.” Or another way to understand that? You’re sitting in judgment of Me right now, but very soon I will be sitting in judgment of you.”

Hear me; that’s the word of the Lord to all the world. The world is judging Jesus right now, but very soon Jesus will judge the world...& the truth of the matter is that the way we judge Christ is the way that Christ will judge us. If we reject Him, He will reject us, should we accept Him, then He will accept us. Question: who’s really on trial?

Prayer Points:

Lord our spirits are quickened as we’re brought once again into the awareness of Your love *for* us & Your mercy *toward* us. We’re encouraged by Your grace toward Peter as we consider the countless times we’ve denied You, be it in word, or in deed, in attitude or thought; that Your heart toward us is one of kindness & restoration. Teach us to honor & safeguard our 1st love relationship with You... Thank You for being so willing to clean up the mess we so often make & render healing where we’ve brought hurt. We’re lost w/out You...

If you’re lost being w/out Christ in your heart, then today I want you to consider Jesus. He didn’t have to come to this world, but He did, He didn’t have to suffer & be bruised for our iniquity, but He did, He didn’t have to have the chastisement for iniquity placed upon Him, but He did. Why? Because He loves you, He wants to forgive you, and restore you into a right relationship w/God. You were created to fellowship w/God & when that’s broken it creates a void in the human heart. Try as you may you’ll never fill it; the only thing that can fill an empty heart is the love of God, a right relationship w/God through faith in Christ.