

The Passion

*And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so."
(Luke 23:3 ESV)*

*Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And
having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46 ESV)*

Weakness and Wickedness

March 26th, 2023

Luke 22:47-62

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 22.

Our passage this morning is really something of a climax to the passages that we have been considering over the past three Sundays. As such, let's take a moment off the top to remind ourselves of what led to this culminating scene. Let me remind you of some of two of the threads of this storyline that we have been following.

At the Last Supper, after Jesus broke bread with his disciples, he concluded by sharing that someone who was at the table was going to go on to betray him. So, we are following a thread of *betrayal*.

Then, later on at that same meal, Jesus warned the disciples that they were engaged in a spiritual battle and that they needed to prepare themselves. So, we're following a thread of looming *trial and temptation*. In particular, Jesus turned to Simon Peter in and explained to him that Satan had requested an opportunity to test him.

Let's pause there for a moment. In case you weren't with us two weeks ago, I want to make sure you understand this piece: The Devil is dangerous! But he is no equal with God. He had to *ask God for permission* to test Peter. As Pastor Paul would often say, the Devil is a dog on a chain. He can go no further than God allows. But there are seasons in which God *lengthens* that chain. Jesus warned Peter that such a season was coming, and he urged his disciples to prepare accordingly.

Last Sunday, Jesus demonstrated for us what preparation for spiritual battles looks like. Twice in our passage last week, Jesus said:

Pray that you may not enter into temptation. (Luke 22:40b ESV)

“Get on your knees! Engage in this spiritual battle! Pray!” But they did not pray. They slept. And now, in our passage this morning, the anticipation that has been building comes to a head. The foretold betrayal, the spiritual test, the lengthened chain of the enemy – it all unfolds right here. In our passage this morning, we will see how the disciples fared as the darkness descended. Look with me now to Luke 22, verses 47-62. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” ⁴⁹ And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” ⁶⁰ But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ 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.” ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:47-62 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Jesus has been preparing his disciples for this moment, and now the test is upon them. In verse 53, as Jesus addresses the enemies who have come to take him captive, he declares:

But **this is your hour**, and the power of darkness. (Luke 22:53b ESV)

This is your hour. He is speaking not only to the opponents in the garden but to the demonic forces that animate them. The Devil's chain has officially been lengthened. The trial has begun.

And, in the *very first second* of the trial the disciples fail the test! Peter pulls out his sword¹ and swings at the head of one of the guards! Mercifully, he misses, but he still manages to sever the man's ear. At which point, Jesus cries:

"No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. (Luke 22:51 ESV)

The disciples still didn't get it. We've discussed this at length over the last two weeks so, suffice it to summarize, the disciples were still trying to wield the weapons of the world to fight a spiritual battle.

We often fall into the same trap. Trials and temptations reveal what we're trusting in. They have a way of *exposing* us. When the going gets tough, we find out who we really are and what we really believe. John Calvin notes:

No, even the holiest of men, however well aware that they stand not in their own strength, but by the grace of God, would feel too secure in their own fortitude and constancy, were they not brought to a more thorough knowledge of themselves by the trial of the cross.²

Peter was a courageous man. Peter truly loved Jesus. Peter had made great sacrifices! But as Peter was confronted with the true cost of discipleship, he came to a more thorough knowledge of himself. My prayer is that, as we worship our way through this passage, we too would obtain a more thorough knowledge of ourselves. To that end, I want to help you to see in this text both a warning and a comfort. Let's begin by considering the warning.

The Warning

¹ Luke does not name the disciple who swung the sword, but John 18:10 informs us that it was Peter.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 458.

Let's pick up those threads in the story that I alluded to earlier and turn our attention to the two prominent disciples in this passage – Judas and Peter. Both of these men serve as warnings for us. First, as we consider Judas, we are warned that:

1. Trials and temptations expose wickedness

I fear that we have grown so familiar with this story that the treachery of Judas is all but lost on us. We rush through the passage unfazed because we *know* the plot twist. We *know* that Judas is the villain.

But remember: This was a devastating shock to the disciples! They *didn't* know this. They would have been heartbroken when they saw Judas leading a company of guards into the garden! They had just broken bread with this brother! Jesus had just washed his feet! Judas had been with them when Jesus walked on the water! He had been in the boat when Jesus calmed the storm! He was there when Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb!

They put Judas in charge of the money bag! They *trusted* this brother! They *loved* this brother!

But, with guards in tow, this “brother” walked straight to Jesus, and betrayed him with a kiss. The kiss in those days was typically a warm, customary greeting. As Paul would later write:

Greet one another with a holy kiss. (Romans 16:16 ESV)

But Judas used this greeting to put a target on Jesus in the dark, crowded garden. When the trials and the temptations fell upon the disciples, Judas abandoned the faith for 30 pieces of silver.

Because *trials expose reality*. And the reality was that Judas was never truly in. Seeing, he never saw. Hearing, he never heard. He was there with the disciples, but spiritually he was disengaged. He looked like a lamb, but he was a wolf.

Now, the New Testament never outright tells us why Judas did what he did, but it certainly provides us with some clues. We are told in John 12:6 that Judas used to steal money from the

money bag. Judas was a man who cared about advancement. He was looking to move up in the world.

I have often marvelled in disbelief that Judas could have done what he did on the *same night* that Jesus washed his feet – but perhaps that moment served to help put him over the edge. It appears that Judas was following Jesus because he wanted to be great. Yet it was becoming clearer by the day that Jesus was after a different kind of greatness.

In fact, I have heard it argued that this betrayal in the garden was an attempt by Judas to force Jesus' hand³. Perhaps he thought that – when pushed into a corner – Jesus would finally bring about the revolution that Judas was after! He didn't seem to expect that Jesus would actually allow himself to be killed. He returned the 30 pieces of silver and referred to it as “blood money”! Then he hanged himself!

Because Judas didn't want to *kill* Jesus – he wanted to *conform* him. He thought that Jesus was his ticket to power, and prestige, and control. He was following a Jesus of his own imagination, but the trial revealed the wickedness of his heart.

Let's make sure that we learn this lesson: We don't conform Jesus to our image. He conforms us.

Let me ask you a probing question: When you are confronted by his word, do *you* change? Or do you try to find a way to make *him* change? When his word confronts those areas of your life that need to be confronted – when he speaks to your money, and your sexuality, and your pride, and your freedom, and your submission, and your worship, and your marriage, and your grudges, and your ambitions – when you read his word and he says something that feels so *backwards* to what you believe to be the best way forward – who wins that fight?

We are reminded here that proximity to Jesus does not equal saving faith. *Obedience and submission* to Jesus does! The New Testament consistently teaches that there are wolves in the church dressed up as sheep. There are many who do mighty works in Jesus' name who don't

³ This paragraph flows out of a conversation I had with Pastor Paul Carter in the preaching workshop.

actually know him at all! They call themselves followers of Jesus – but the Jesus they follow is simply a dressed up version of themselves! He is not the Jesus of the Bible!

If this is you then you need to know that you are in DANGER! You are following in the footsteps of JUDAS. When trials and temptations come – and they *will* come – they will expose the wickedness. Because that’s what idolatry is – that’s what trying to conform Jesus into our own image is – wickedness.

That is the first warning of this passage. Next, let’s turn our attention to Peter where we learn that:

2. Trials and temptations expose weakness

Weak was not an adjective that anyone would have used to describe Peter before this.

Brash? Yes. Hard-headed? Oftentimes. Courageous? Certainly. As one commentator observes:

If your first reaction in a scrape is to cut a man's ear off, then chances are you've done that before!⁴

Peter was a strong, forceful man. It’s easy to understand why he declared with such confidence:

Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death. (Luke 22:33 ESV)

He believed that! He was sure of it. But the trial and the temptation revealed that there was a weakness in Peter that he didn’t yet see.

When Jesus was led away, Peter followed at a distance. To his credit, he seems to have been the only disciple that dared to follow. But we have been called to be near to Christ, not following at a distance. We forfeit spiritual strength when we follow at a distance⁵ – and Peter was soon exposed.

⁴ Leonce Crump as quoted by Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus In Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 333.

⁵ “We cannot safely follow Jesus from a distance. We are meant to be close to him.” Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus In Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 335.

His first encounter was with a servant girl. Look with me at verse 56:

Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.”⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” (Luke 22:56-57 ESV)

Then, one of the men near the fire accused Peter again:

And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” (Luke 22:58 ESV)

Finally, after sitting in his fear and his nerves for what must have felt like an eternity, a third accusation was made:

And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.”⁶⁰ But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” (Luke 22:59-60 ESV)

And with that, the strongest of the Apostles – the man who was known as “the rock” – crumbled. Peter had faced the trial and had failed. As one commentator notes:

The story of Peter’s denial could not have been invented. It presents a sober and utterly real picture of the prominent apostle⁶

Trials and temptations *expose* us for who we really are. Peter thought that he was strong. But he was weak. He thought that he was brave. But he was afraid. And many of us in this room – while facing a different trial than that of Peter – have experienced similar failures.

You laughed along at a dirty joke at work because you wanted to fit in with the team. You put the flag up on your desk because you didn’t want to lose your job. You had an opportunity to share the gospel, but you didn’t take it because you were afraid of what they would think of you. Those trials – those temptations – are like progress reports that reveal how we’re *really* doing.

⁶ Walter L. Liefeld, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Matthew - Luke)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 8, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 1035.

Because it's one thing to be courageous in the upper room at the table with Jesus or in the Sunday morning worship gathering. But it's another thing entirely to be courageous at the campfire surrounded by people who hate Jesus.

Three times Peter failed the test. And, following the third failure, we read:

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ 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." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:60b-62 ESV)

Here, we move from the warning in this passage to the comfort.

The Comfort

This is a scene that we need to try and picture in our minds eye if we would do it justice. As Peter angrily shouted, "Man, I do not know what you're talking about!" he looked up and, in that moment, Jesus turned and looked at him.

What was in that look? Can you picture it? We won't know for certain until we can ask Peter in heaven, but I am reminded that just a few verses earlier, Jesus said to Peter:

I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. **And when you have turned again**, strengthen your brothers. (Luke 22:32 ESV)

Meaning what? Jesus *knew* that Peter would fail.

And that suggests to me that the look was not a look of anger, or shaming, or disowning, but was more likely a look of compassion, tenderness and mercy.

It was a look that simultaneously broke Peter and rendered him useful for the future.

In my study this week, I was really helped by G. Campbell Morgan's reflection on this text. I've mentioned previously that he was the pastor at Westminster Chapel in London who preceded Martyn Lloyd-Jones. At the time when he wrote this commentary, he was an old, seasoned

preacher, and he made an observation that was very helpful for a young, inexperienced pastor like me. He wrote:

There was a time in the younger years of my ministry when I should have enjoyed fifteen minutes, scoring Simon. But not now. I am not exonerating him from blame; but if I investigate my own heart, I am not surprised. Moreover, I have ceased criticizing him because there has dawned on me the fact that Jesus did not do so. He understood. He never gave him up.⁷

We like to take shots at Peter, don't we? We can be demanding and demeaning. We often treat ourselves with the same cruelty. We need to learn how to better reflect the heart of Jesus.

Are there any cowards in this room? Are there any failures? Is there anyone who has succumbed to temptation once again? Has the latest trial exposed your weakness?

Receive this comfort:

1. Jesus knows the difference between weakness and wickedness

We need to learn to recognize the difference too. Consider the two examples we have considered this morning: Both Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus. And yet, there was a *significant difference* between the two. Judas did not love Jesus. He rejected Jesus as his Lord. His betrayal exposed his wickedness.

But Peter *did* love Jesus. He *wanted* to obey. He certainly *felt* wicked after betraying Jesus, but what was actually exposed was his weakness. Pastor Thabiti Anywabwile explains this well:

There's a tremendous difference between wickedness and weakness. Wickedness receives condemnation. Weakness receives help and comfort.⁸

Can I speak candidly to you this morning? I know that there are many in this room who have a very hard time discerning the difference between these two. You walk around feeling like a Judas, but you're actually a Simon. You see your failures and your shortcomings, and you take them as

⁷ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According To Luke* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 253.

⁸ Thabiti Anywabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus In Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 337.

evidence exposing you as an imposter and a hypocrite, but what they are actually revealing is that you are still weak. You are still a work in progress. Welcome to the club!

Now, let me be crystal clear: That is not to *excuse* our sin. Peter wept, and so too should we. You *should* weep when you backslide into that addiction, and when you return to that same old argument, and when you spiral into that same old pattern of thinking. Weep. Repent.

But then get up, and by the grace of God and the power of Christ in you, move forward! The fact that you are weeping over your sin is a wonderful indication that yours is not the sin of Judas!

Listen: We are going to strive for holiness in this place, because that is what we have been called to and that is what Jesus deserves. But, until we reach glory, not a *single one of us* will ever be perfect! And that means that this congregation is *filled to the brim* with weak people. We are – each and every one of us – bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. We are frail, and needy, and we feel like we’re on the verge of being snuffed out. But Jesus knows how to tend to people like us:

a bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,
until he brings justice to victory; (Matthew 12:20 ESV)

The enemy would use your weakness to render you useless. He would have you surrender in the fight against temptation, or he would have you wallow in self-loathing for a lifetime.

But that would be a waste of your weakness! What did Jesus pray for Peter?

I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, **strengthen your brothers.** (Luke 22:32 ESV)

Confess your weakness to Jesus and watch him turn it into strength! Watch him use it to build up his church! We would not have the Peter we find in the Book of Acts if we didn’t first have the Peter of Luke 22! He needed to be broken. He needed to be humbled. He needed to understand his weakness so that he would recognize that he is nothing without Jesus. As the puritan Richard Sibbes explains:

Weakness with watchfulness will stand, when strength with too much confidence fails. Weakness, with acknowledgement of it, is the fittest seat and subject for God to perfect his strength in; for consciousness of our infirmities drives us out of ourselves to him in whom our strength lies.⁹

The Devil would have you believe that you have been disqualified. But, if you repent and bring that weakness to the Lord, you will find that your usefulness is only just beginning. Paul writes:

We have this treasure in jars of clay, **to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.** (2 Corinthians 4:7 ESV)

So, are you feeling broken? Are you feeling like the worst version of you? One look from Jesus will break you down and build you right back up stronger than ever. But you're going to miss that if you keep wallowing and staring at the floor. And you're going to miss that if you keep lingering and staring at your failure. As one old pastor cautioned:

Don't ever forget that the look of Jesus, however wonderful, would have been no good, if at the moment Simon had not been looking His way.¹⁰

Where are you looking?

Jesus ready stands to save you – full of pity, love and power. The enemy would have you look anywhere but here. Look to Jesus! Are you a Judas? Look, and be saved! Are you a Simon? Look, and be restored! He's not done with you yet.

Bring him your failures and weaknesses – bring him your loaves and fish – offer yourself to him, even though you feel like a fragile jar of clay – and watch what He will do. Let's pray together.

⁹ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1630, 1998), 108.

¹⁰ Father Stanton as quoted by G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According To Luke* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 254.