

When God allowed the darkness its hour of power against the Son of Man, people quickly turned against the Lord Jesus. Even his disciples fell hard into sin, but Jesus powerfully resisted temptation. His love is strong (even for his enemies), so turn to him who is able and willing to forgive and restore the fallen.

Introduction – A “Passion Play” is a dramatic presentation of Jesus’ trial, suffering, and death. The Passion of Christ ought to move you to examine yourself.

I. Grasp the Story

A. Visualize what happened on-stage

1. Scene 1: In the garden (vv. 47-54). Judas arrives at night with a huge crowd. Then he gives the signal, the kiss of death. Peter cuts off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant. But Jesus puts a stop to the violence. He reaches out and heals him. Then Jesus addresses them, “Is all this really necessary? This is the hour of the power of darkness.” Then they lead him away. All the disciples scatter for cover, but Peter turns back to see how it all would end.
2. Scene 2: In the courtyard (vv. 55-62). Peter gains entrance to the inner courtyard of the high priest’s house. A servant girl is staring at Peter in the firelight. “This man also was with Jesus.” Peter denies it. A little later someone else, “You also are one of those Jesus followers.” Peter denies it again. Still another person, “Certainly this man was also with Jesus, for he too is a Galilean.” And while Peter is denying for the third time, the rooster crows. Instantly Peter looks to Jesus, who turns and looks straight at him. So he runs away weeping bitter tears of sorrow.

B. Realize what happened back-stage

1. In hell (vv. 53-54; cf. 4:13; 22:3). The greater conflict resides in the spiritual realm. Now Satan musters all his forces to kill the Son of Man. Paul understood the back-stage events (Eph 6:12). Here is the full-force attempt to thwart God’s plan of salvation (Rev 12:1-4).
2. In heaven (Luke 22:42, 61; cf. Isaiah 53:8, 10; Psalm 41:9). God mysteriously weaved it all into his good, pleasing, and perfect will to accomplish salvation (Acts 4:26-28). The Lord willed to crush the Son of God as a guilt offering for sin.

II. Consider the Characters

A. Judas the Traitor

1. Greed (Luke 16:13; 22:1-6; John 12:4-6; Colossians 3:5). Greed is really a fruit rooted in idolatry. His discontentment led him to reject the kind of kingdom Jesus promised. His prayer was “my kingdom come, my will be done.”
2. Cruelty (v. 47). The traitor’s kiss must have deeply wounded Jesus. Only hours before Jesus shared the Last Supper with Judas. Now this supposedly close friend lifts up his heel against him (Ps 41:9). Judas can only repay his teacher with humiliation, hostility, and hypocritical affection.
3. Despair (Matthew 27:3-5; Acts 1:16-20). Seized with remorse, instead of returning to Jesus for mercy and forgiveness, he returned the blood money and then hanged himself. A life ended as cursed of God, not cursed for others like Jesus, but cursed himself (Dt 21:22-23; Gal 3:13).

B. Peter the Crusader-Coward

1. Pride (v. 50; cf. Lk 22:31-33; Jn 18:10). Jesus warned Peter that he was vulnerable to Satan's attack. But Peter pledged to follow Jesus to prison and death. It seems he pictured himself going down in a blaze of glory. And so he swung his sword like a crusader to wage holy war.
2. Fear (vv. 54-60). This is not the way Peter envisioned the end. So he bravely (foolishly?) followed into enemy territory as a spy. Controlled by his fear, he denied his Lord to save his neck. The prideful crusader showed he was a shameful coward.
3. Sorrow (vv. 61-62). Peter knew he fell hard. His sorrow was bitter because he brought it on himself, and because his denials broke the bond of love he shared with Jesus. With grief and hatred of his sin, Peter turned from it to Jesus, resolving to live with a new obedience (cf. WSC 87) founded on humility and fear of God (1 Peter 5:5-7).

C. Jesus the Son of Man

1. Power (v. 51; cf. Jn 18:4-6). He is the almighty God, touching the servant's severed ear and miraculously healing him. He commands his disciples to stop fighting, and protects them from the crowd's vengeance. His enemies draw back and fall down under the divine power of "I AM".
2. Obedience (vv. 50-54a). His supernatural power is under control and authority. He receives his kingdom through submission to God's will as the Suffering Servant. The one who has legions of angels at his disposal allows his enemies to deliver him over to the cross.
3. Love (Luke 22:46, 51b, 60-61; cf. John 18:8-9). He loved Peter by warning him to pray to resist temptation, and by turning to look at him after the rooster crowed. He loved Malchus by his healing touch. He loved his disciples by arranging for their release in the garden. His love is strong, merciful, and self-giving.

III. Be Changed by the Message

A. Let their great falls into sin reveal your own heart (vv. 47-48, 50, 57-60)

1. Judas and Peter both pretended to be something they weren't. Judas is the kind of person who pretends to follow Jesus—for respect, for the benefits, for the reward.
2. Peter is the kind of person who sometimes pretends to be Jesus' bulldog, and other times to not know Jesus at all—for pride, for fear, for peace. Crusader Peter was blinded by pride in his own strength, zeal, and apostolic position.
3. Coward Peter wasn't suicidal when he walked into the devil's lair. He wasn't wrong to want to escape danger when it closed in. But he fell hard when he pretended he didn't know Jesus.

B. Let Jesus' strong love be your hope of forgiveness and restoration (vv. 51, 61)

The heart is desperately wicked (Jer 17:9-10). We have all been traitors, crusaders, and cowards. Apart from grace, we will fall hard into these sins again and again. Find your strength in Jesus alone, whose strong love can cover your betrayals, tame your soul, and forgive your hard falls into bitter sin.

Conclusion – Remember to *grasp the story*—visualizing what happened on earth and realizing what happened in heaven. Remember to *consider the characters*—so you might truly see where you fit into the story. Remember to ask God that you would *be changed by the message* of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.