



Peter Denies the CHRIST

Series: *7 Last Steps to the CROSS*

Jesus' Path to the Crucifixion in the Gospel of LUKE

by Joshua YJ Su (Soh Guan Chin) (Rev. Dr.)

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Step 2 - Luke 22:55-62 - Peter Denies the Christ

This is the second of a series of eight articles on the theme, *7 Last Steps to the Cross*. After the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, Jesus faced the denial of Peter. Let us learn from this denial to inform and instruct us for our walk with our Lord.

Let us turn to Luke 22:55-62 (ESV) on this event:

⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And 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." ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus faced the Denial of His lead disciple

The 2nd Step that Jesus took to the cross was to face the denial of His leading disciple, the leader of the Twelve, Simon Peter. He insisted that he did not know Him! This leads us to make an immediate comparison between Peter's denial and the betrayal of Judas. Are they two forms of the same thing? Or are there substantial differences between them? But before we can do so, we need to analyse and understand Peter's denial, as we did, in the 1st Message, of Judas' betrayal.

Luke 22:33-34 (ESV) tells us what Peter said prior to his denial:

³³Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." ³⁴Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

We have more details from the Gospel of Mark, which holds Peter's own recollection of the event as he shared it with Mark, that he said to Jesus, "even though they all fall away, I will not." (Mark 14:29). He also said "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." This claim was echoed by the others. (Mark 14:31). Yet, as in Luke's account, Jesus foretold and warned him, he would deny the Christ three times before the rooster crowed twice (Mark 14:30).

So why did Peter deny knowing Jesus after having made such bold assertions? We have, in fact, identified the reason in our 1st Message, from Luke 22:47-54. The disciples were all ready to fight when the arresting party came to capture Jesus. One of them cut off the right ear of the servant of the high priest with a sword. The disciples were all ready to fight for their Messiah so that He will establish His Kingdom on earth and free Israel from all foreign powers. But Jesus healed the servant's ear, commanded them to stop fighting, said that this was the hour of darkness, and

accepted arrest. This put the disciples into total confusion. How can the Messiah bring in His Kingdom by refusing to fight and accept arrest? As we highlighted in the 1st Message, they never understood that Jesus had to die to save us. While all the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested, Peter still followed. Yet, as he was identified again and again by the servants as one of Jesus' disciples, his own fear and confusion overtook him. He was exposed. He dare not admit his association with Jesus. If Jesus had stood and fought, Peter would have believed that He would lead him to victory. But how can a captured and tortured Jesus lead him to victory? So he denied that he knew Jesus again and again.

Quite significantly, John 18:10-11 (ESV) tells us that

¹⁰Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

The disciple who cut off the ear was Simon Peter! Jesus response was, "put your sword into its sheath", "shall I not drink the cup that the Father has for me." It is quite reasonable to surmise that Peter was the most confused of all the disciples because of his very fervour to serve the Messiah to bring in His Kingdom.

Peter's Sin

Here is an interesting perspective: Peter was very honest when he said that he did not know Jesus! For what Jesus did at His arrest totally overturned Peter's idea of who the Messiah was and what He was coming to do. The Jesus who refused to fight, who accepted arrest at the hour of darkness, was utterly different from, totally opposite to, the conquering King that Peter had envisaged. So he was remarkably honest, in his utter bewilderment, to deny that he knew Jesus. But being honest does not mean he was right. It only means that he was truthful in admitting that he no longer understood how Jesus is the Messiah. He especially did not understand that He came to die for our sins. Yet denial means disassociation. It is breaking off one's identification or relationship with the other. Peter had broken his relationship with Christ in denying Him. Honest, or not, this is sin.

How does Peter and Judas compare?

We come now to compare and contrast the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter. First, we need to add a most important factor that is not in the Gospel of Luke, the outcome of Judas' betrayal and the outcome of Peter's denial:

The Outcome of Judas' Betrayal

Luke tells us the outcome of Judas' betrayal, not in his Gospel, but in the Book of Acts, that he wrote after his Gospel: Acts 1:15-20 (ESV)

¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶"Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."

¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰"For it is written in the Book of Psalms, " 'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and " 'Let another take his office.'

This passage tells us, that Peter, with the enabling of the Holy Spirit, specified that the betrayal of Judas was prophesied from of old. Judas was excluded by his betrayal, not only from being an apostle, but from being a disciple. The details of what happened to him does not affect the critical point that Judas' betrayal led to his expulsion from among the faithful in Christ.

We can add to what Luke wrote, from the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John:

Matthew 27:3-5 (ESV)

³Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, 'saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

This passage tells us that Judas' betrayal had put him beyond redemption in Christ. He may have regretted his betrayal but he cannot undo it, nor avoid its consequence.

John, the apostle, adds in his Gospel that Jesus prayed to the Father before His arrest and crucifixion that the "son of destruction" is the only one "lost" among all that came to Him. Jesus said, in John 17:12 (ESV)

¹²While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

The Outcome of Peter's Denial

When it comes to Peter, there is absolutely no doubt that not only was Peter restored to faith and walk with Christ, he was His chosen leader to lead the Church when the Holy Spirit fell on all the disciples at the Upper Room on the Pentecost after Jesus' ascension. Acts chapters 1 to 12 shares many instances of Peter's leadership. Of course, Peter was not the only leader, but he was the leading one from when the Spirit came. As the Church grew, more and more were raised up by the Spirit to lead. But there can be no doubt that Peter was the main leader at its outset. If you recall Acts 1:15-20, quoted earlier, it indicated that Judas had lost his place and was to be replaced. The man whom the Spirit chose to declare this was Peter!

Peter's restoration as a disciple and as the leading apostle is further underlined by what the angel told the women at Jesus' tomb in Luke 24:6-9 (ESV) - ***bold italic mine*** -

⁶He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." ⁸And they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb they told all these things to ***the eleven*** and to all the rest.

Although Luke did not refer to Peter by name in this passage, he was definitely among the "eleven" that the angel sent the women to tell that Jesus had resurrected. The one excluded from the Twelve was Judas Iscariot.

The Gospel of John reveals to us how Jesus personally restored Peter to fellowship with Him and to be His chosen leaders in John 21:15-19 (ESV) - ***bold italic mine*** -

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "***Feed my lambs.***" ¹⁶He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "***Tend my***

sheep.” ¹⁷He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “**Feed my sheep.**” ¹⁸Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” ¹⁹(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “**Follow me.**”

Even as Peter denied Jesus three times, so Jesus led him to affirm his love for Him three times. To each of Peter's affirmation, He called him to feed or tend His lambs and His sheep. After which, He called him to follow Him.

Why is the Outcome of Judas' Betrayal and Peter's Denial So Different?

Let me point to 2 Critical Differences:

1. Peter's denial was UNINTENTIONAL. He was so shocked and confused that he lost his way and his judgement.

Judas' betrayal was INTENTIONAL. He decided, he planned, he executed. He was not among those who were confused by Jesus' very unexpected response to the arresting party. He was the one who decided to identify Jesus to those who sought His arrest and death. He brought them to where Jesus was and showed them who He was so that He could be captured.

2. Peter's denial went Against his Explicit Desire to follow Jesus to the end. He failed in spite of his desire and intention. It is the weakness of his flesh. A weakness we all have because of our sinful flesh.

Judas' betrayal was by his Explicit Decision to bring Jesus and His ministry to an end. He did exactly what he intended and planned to do. The fact that he may have regretted after doing so does not excuse or pardon him from having already done so.

The Crucial Lesson for us is the difference between failing like Peter did or betraying Christ like Judas did: If we fail like Peter did, in succumbing to the many weaknesses of our flesh, including being confused as to what is the truth, or who Jesus is, if we repent, we will be saved. Our God, our Christ & Saviour, will not abandon us. He has come to save us from our sins. If we betray Him as Judas did, to knowingly and willfully reject Him for who He is, and seek His end by joining with His enemies, there is no way back! This is not an impulsive or momentary reflex or response. It is the path of action of one who knows Jesus but deliberately chooses to reject Him and act against Him. It is no accident. It is an act of conscious will.

Indeed, it is not an accident that throughout the Bible, whether Old Testament or New, we are repeatedly called to keep faith to the end. The great assurance we have is that the Holy Spirit now lives in us to enable us. This is the difference between the stumbling Peter in the Gospels, and the Peter of faith and leadership, in Acts. The Holy Spirit made the difference. He will do likewise in us. But the choice to uphold Christ or reject Him remains ours. The Holy Spirit does not force our obedience or surrender. He calls us to voluntarily submit to the Father and the Son. So the very serious danger for us is if we choose, like Judas did, to knowingly, consciously, and deliberately, betray, or reject, Him for who He is.