

SERIES: “A Journey into Forgiveness”
Lessons in Betrayal – Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75

Today we look at Peter in the courtyard and his denial. But, just WHO was this brash fisherman and what was his relationship with Christ? There is so much more to Peter than his betrayal! In fact, Peter is a fine example of friendship. Friends can hurt each other, (they shouldn't but they do!) and friends forgive and reunite. This is the story of Peter and Jesus and Peter and his own faith.

A. John 13: 20-21 - Acceptance is a part of an intimate friendship. Imagine Christ as your intimate friend! Imagine Christ's heartache--"troubled in spirit" in realizing a friend (Judas) was going to betray that intimacy. Verses 36-38 - Brash and bold Peter jumps up proudly to declare his readiness to die for Christ and Jesus corrects Him with words that cut to the heart - "tonight, Simon, you shall betray me 3 times...." In our enthusiasm to help a friend, how often do we make promises we can't keep or commitments we have no intention of carrying out? Paul tells us in Romans 3 not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought--and that applies to our friendships as well.

Before we look at the story from Matthew 26: 69-75 about Peter's denial, let's get a glimpse of the man called Peter to better understand him. Peter was originally called Simon, a very common Jewish name in the New Testament. He had a younger brother called Andrew, who first brought him to Jesus. His native town was Bethsaida, on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee, to which also Philip belonged. Here he was brought up by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and was trained as a fisherman. It would seem that Simon was married before he became an apostle. His wife's mother is referred to in 3 of 4 Gospels. He appears to have been settled at Capernaum when Christ entered into his public ministry, and may have been in his thirties. His house was large enough to give a home to his brother Andrew, his wife's mother, and also to Christ, who seems to have lived with him (Mark 1:29, 36; 2:1), as well as to his own family.

Matthew 26: 69-75 and see the 3 steps here in Peter's denial: a) Confusion--he tried to divert attention to something other than the situation; b) our anger surfaces as a "protectionism shield" -- Peter gets angry and loudly objects, trying to find some solid basis for the objection; 3) we resort to oaths, using God or someone of importance in our life who isn't there to verify the story, to back us up -- Peter began to curse--not swear words, as we would think, but more like, "may God strike me dead if I am lying" - and he probably hoped God wasn't listening as he did it!

That is what really makes a denial and betrayal. Not the drama of having other people question you about Jesus but the simple nature of your relationship to Him. Whenever we rely on our own strength instead of Jesus, we've entered into a place of denial. Think about our places of denial. They are not as dramatic as Peter's. But they are places of denial, nonetheless. It could be a place of honor in the church. We are founding members of the congregation. It could be a place of great leadership, as we've done much to further the kingdom of God. It could be the frequency and fervor of our devotional life. We look at these things: our years of membership, our leadership, our attendance in a congregation, our time spent in Bible study and prayer, and we slowly begin to think that we are strong in the faith because of our own doing. We become a bit bolder in our witness. We speak out at work, sharing our disgust with our culture's sinful lifestyle. We speak up at church meetings. After all, people should listen to us; we've been

members around here for years. And, as we think we are growing stronger and stronger in the faith, we actually are neglecting the crack in the foundation.

There are many ways of denial, you see. You can deny Jesus by saying you never knew Him—clearly, emphatically, right in the middle of a courtyard—or you can deny Jesus by saying you know Him, loudly, emphatically, self-righteously, but all the while forgetting His work in your life. You look like a Christian. You act like a Christian. You do all of the things that a Christian does. But there is a crack in the foundation. You're relying on your own power, your own achievements, and there is a crack between you and Jesus. And soon, the whole structure will fall.

There will come a time when we have not been able to do as we had hoped, when we tell our child that "Christians don't do that," and he says, "But, Dad, you do it all the time." When we sign the divorce papers and our spouse says, "But I thought you said, 'I do.'" When we see that we cannot follow into prison or give our lives unto death, that we are weak, and we are sinful, and there is no health in us, and, for a despairing moment, all we can say is "We are lost in sin and cannot set ourselves free."

To such people, Scripture offers another word today. The word of Jesus. The story of His Passion. In the midst of our failure, Jesus is and remains the one who takes away our sin. Our salvation does not depend on how much we can bear for Jesus. Instead, it depends on what Jesus bears for us. Our forgiveness does not depend on what we do or say for Jesus. It rests securely on what Jesus does and says for us. In the face of Peter's denial as His disciple, Jesus continues to be his Lord. While Peter goes out to weep bitterly, Jesus goes on to suffer for this man that is weeping. It is His work, His love, His mercy that overcomes our sin. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. And Jesus knows you better than you know yourself. He sees this denial and our sin, and yet He continues to go to the cross. We are not saved by giving our lives up for Jesus; Jesus saves us by giving up His life for the forgiveness of our sin. That's what Scripture reveals to us right now. When Peter is caught in the act of denial, Jesus continues in His act of love.

Jesus comes to you today with a love that never changes. Time passes and our life is filled with change. We move from a dorm to an apartment, from an apartment to a house, from a house to a condo, from a condo to a retirement center, from a retirement center to a skilled care facility, from the skilled care facility to our grave, and from our grave we will be raised to live in our Savior's kingdom. In each place, however, Jesus remains the same. He is the one who forgives our sins and saves our souls. Even at the end, after death and the grave, we will be raised to find Him as we have always known Him to be. The one who went to the cross to die for our sin and rose from the grave for our salvation. Jesus brings us a picture of His love. In those times when you are faced with a painful self-revelation like Peter, Scripture wants you to see your Savior. Trust in His love, live in His kingdom, pray in His name, and know that as you now know Him, He will always be. Jesus enters our places of denial and makes them places of renewal in His love. In Him we are redeemed. In Him we are set free. Amen.