

Sunday, January 12, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 15 | Luke 22:54-62 | "Strength In Weakness"

Last week, we jumped back into our Holy Week series. And we studied Jesus' virtues in the face of difficulties. Though the enemy is **treacherous**, the Lord is still **triumphant**. Though the enemy is **unloving**, the Lord is still **loving**. Though the enemy is **mighty**, the Lord is still the **Almighty**.

READ: Luke 22:54-62 (ESV)

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.

Even though it might've occurred long ago, most people have at least one mistake that haunts them. Such sins are nearly impossible to forget. Although that act might've only lasted a moment, the regret, it seems, lasts a lifetime; it sticks to us like a shadow. It's the sort of failure that can keep us from sleep, the kind that, if given a chance, we'd go back and change the past.

In today's passage, we'll see Peter at the lowest point in his life. No doubt, as long as he lived, he never forgot the day he *thrice*-denied Jesus Christ. In fact, considering that this scene is one of the few recorded *in all four gospels* (cf. Matthew 26:69-75; Mar. 14:66-72; Jn. 18:15-27), this moment became almost as infamous in the early Church as Judas' betrayal. However, unlike Judas, Peter's story does not end in failure; eventually, he gets a second chance (cf. Jn. 21:15-19).

Likewise, we need not be defined by our *failures*. Should we repent, God's *forgiveness* will define us. This is *not* to say that our mistakes will disappear, nor that we won't feel shame anymore (cf. Rom. 6:21). But it is to say that a heart *broken* over its sin is a heart that is fit for the Master's hand. Sorrow is a gift, so long as it leads us to God and not to despair (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10). A healthy awareness of its weaknesses keeps a soul dependent on God's strength and not their own. Such a realization can be the difference between a great *triumph* and a great *defeat*.

I want you to notice **three** things:

i. Vs. 54-55 – Peter sat among Jesus' **enemies**.

Luke tells us that Peter followed "at a distance." Credit where credit is due, Peter is to be praised for following the Lord, *even at a distance*. In fact, according to John's account, he wasn't alone. John was following, too (cf. Jn. 18:15). Nevertheless, it is still concerning that the *lead* apostle was not closer to his *leader*. In fact, Peter's distancing himself from Jesus foreshadowed what was to come. And according to Matt. 26:58, he did not come in *solidarity* but *curiosity*; he wanted to see how all this would "end."¹

And what do we see next? "And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them." When Luke says "they" and "them," who is our author talking about? The very ones mentioned in vs. 52 are "the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him." It was the "they" who seized the Lord; it was the crowd who had arrested Jesus in Gethsemane. Peter was warming himself by a fire surrounded by the very people who took his master in custody! Thus, Peter went from *following* Jesus at a distance to *fraternizing* with the enemy.

So, what's the takeaway? Paul, quoting the Greek poet Menandar, admonished the Corinthians, "Do not be deceived: **Bad company ruins good morals**" (1 Cor. 15:33). **The people you choose to associate with will, without a doubt, influence your decisions.** They'll either be a sharpening stone (Pro. 27:17) or make you rust. They'll encourage your walk with the Lord, or they'll discourage it.

ii. Vs. 56-60a – Peter denied being Jesus' **disciple**.

Unsurprisingly, Peter was recognized not once or twice but *three* times while warming himself by the fire. And each time Peter is questioned about being Jesus' disciple, he denies it. It is bad

¹ Bock (1996), p. 1783.

enough to have a momentary lapse in judgment; it is even worse when that is repeated in quick succession.

The first denial came after “a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was *with him* [emphasis added].” Again, according to John, this was also the same woman who was doorkeeper for the high priest and, surprisingly, ***it was John*** who sent this woman to bring Peter in (cf. Jn. 18:16)! But Peter “denied” it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” Meaning, Peter not only denied knowing Jesus, ***he also denied knowing John. Peter denied his tribe.*** The Greek word translated as “denied” is used to describe apostasy—a renunciation of the faith (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12).² His confidence, which had once been so tenacious (cf. 13:37), crumbled before the query of a simple serving girl.

The second denial came “a little later.” By this time, Jesus had been transferred from the high priest, Annas, to the other high priest, Caiaphas (cf. Jn. 18:24; Ac. 4:6). Also, we know that Peter hasn't moved; he still by the same fire (vs. 55; cf. Jn. 18:25). So, it is no surprise that he's recognized ***again***. Luke tells us, “Someone else saw him and said, “You also are *one of them* [emphasis added].” Peter wasn't only being accused of being “with him”—i.e., with Jesus, but also being “one of them”—i.e., being one of the apostles. Coincidentally, this “someone” was not only another ***serving girl*** (cf. Matt. 26:71) but the ***same*** serving girl as before (cf. Mar. 14:69). And, for the second time, the lead apostle crumbles before the ***same*** person. He says, “Man, I am not.”³ ***Peter denied his duty.*** Interestingly, according to Matthew, this denial goes even further than one before it, as ***he uses an oath to sell the lie*** (Matt. 26:72). As such, Peter denied Jesus and ***took God's name in vain*** (cf. Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12).

The third and last denial came “after an interval of about an hour.” Since we're not told otherwise, we must assume Peter hasn't moved. And as we'll see, this lingering around will be his undoing. How so? The person says, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a *Galilean* [emphasis added].” Luke adds that this person “insisted” it was so; thus, this was no halfhearted accusation but a ***full-on allegation***. What made this person so sure? Because they recognized that Peter was a “Galilean,” and by this, the person meant the apostle's ***accent*** (cf. Matt. 26:73). ***He had stayed so long around that fire the others picked up on the way Peter talked; his own speech betrayed him.*** According to John's account, this third questioner was not only a part of the crowd that came to Gethsemane, but he was also “a *relative* [emphasis] of the man whose ear Peter had cut off” (Jn. 18:26). And if Peter broke before two serving girls

² Bock (1996), p. 1783, ἀρνέομαι (*arnéomai*)

³ The Greek word “man,” is ἄνθρωπος (*ánthrōpos*), and while it is a masculine noun, the term is often referred to both male and female (e.g., human/person; cf. Mat. 12:35; Lu. 4:4; Jn. 16:21).

who *kinda* thought they knew him, what do you think he'd do when confronted by someone who *definitely* knew him? This time, saying "yes" would have not only associated him with Jesus but also *incriminated* him. Thus, it is no surprise that Luke tells us, "Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Peter *feigns* ignorance! And according to Mark's account, he not only denied Jesus but he also "began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear" (Mar. 14:71). **Peter denied his heritage.**

So, what's the takeaway? Confession of sin inhibits the **multiplication** of sin. To distance himself from Jesus, Peter went from a simple, straightforward denial to lying under oath to cursing and swearing. It has often been said, "Two lefts don't make a right, but three lefts do," while that might be clever, the reality is that multiple wrongs are never made right by more wrongdoings. When you sin, repent immediately; otherwise, things will go from bad to worse. **Remember David's sin with Bathsheba:** negligence turned to lust, then lust turned to adultery, then adultery turned to manipulation, then manipulation turned to premeditated murder. Bad decisions have a way of not only multiplying but getting progressively worse. If you fall, repent where you've fallen before you get back up.

iii. Vs. 60b-62 – Peter remembered Jesus' **words.**

Luke tells us that "immediately, while [Peter] was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 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." We now realize that Peter had completely forgotten what Jesus had told him only a few hours before. But the rooster's crow and the Lord's gaze brought Peter back to his senses. So much so that Luke says Peter "went out and wept bitterly." The Greek word translated as "wept" is most often used in the context of **funerals** (cf. Lu 8:52; Jn 11:31, 33). Adding the adverb "bitterly" **compounds** this sorrow; those tears **stung**. After all, they're shed by a man **ashamed** of what he had done and who he'd become in such a short time.

How humbling this must've been for Peter. To lock eyes with Jesus and be reminded that, though he had meant what he said ("Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."), the Lord saw straight through him.

But I wonder if Peter also remembered what Jesus had said before predicting Peter's denial: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And **when** you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Lu. 22:31-32). **Though the Lord predicted Peter's failure, he also predicted his repentance.** And when Peter repented, Jesus told him, "**Strengthen** [emphasis

added] your brother.” Isn’t that ironic? Peter was supposed to "strengthen" the other apostles? This is the night that his strength failed! He did not have enough strength for himself, let alone enough to spare for others. But Peter wasn't supposed to share his strength; instead, he was supposed to point to God's strength.

READ: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (ESV)

⁷So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So, what’s the takeaway? The **strongest** know they are **weak**, and God is **strong**. As Alistair Begg put it, “If dependence is God’s objective then weakness is actually an advantage.”

ILLUSTRATION: Kintsugi is the Japanese art of mending pottery with gold.

Video Description:

Holy Week | Week 15 | “Strength In Weakness” (Luke 22:54-62)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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