

The Gospel of John

The Denial of Peter

John 18:15-18, 25-27

INTRODUCTION:

In this text we have Jesus' trial and Peter's denial. I believe John placed them side by side to permit comparison and contrast. They are two significant events happening at exactly the same time. And so he turns the lens for a while on the trial and then for a while on the denial. Here we see Jesus in His glory and Peter in His sin. Christ's glory is going to shine against the utter failure of his most noble and self-confident follower Peter. In fact, it shows us the very kind of sin for which our Lord is headed to the cross.

Peter is intentionally sinning in an almost rapid fire at the same time that Jesus is preparing to go to the cross to pay the price for Peter's iniquity. Peter's denials are terrible on every level. They are acts of disloyalty, and cowardice, and pride, and fear. And as ugly as they are, the punishment for all of these denials is about to be taken on by Jesus within a matter of a few hours. So in the darkness grace shines, because this is just the kind of sin among those who belong to the Lord, whose penalty our Lord Himself paid.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 18:15-18, 25-27 (NASB)

15 Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, 16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. 17 Then the slave woman who was the doorkeeper *said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He *said, "I am not." 18 Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

...²⁵ Now Simon Peter was *still* standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not *one* of His disciples as well, are you?" He denied *it*, and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, who was related to the one whose ear Peter cut off, *said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Prayer

BODY:

I. THE POWER OF SATAN.

There is no biblical proof that Satan *always* needs God's specific permission in order to act against Christians every time he wishes to attack them. We know that Satan needs

permission at least sometimes. Job 1 shows that Satan was not able to afflict Job without God's permission. However, consider Satan's argument before God:

Job 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ Have You not made a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

Satan was obviously familiar with who Job is and is aware of Job's special protection and blessing by God. How could Satan have known of Job's protection, unless he and/or his demonic minions had not already tried to work their will against Job? What Satan is really asking is for God to remove Job's protection. Of course, in asking that the protection be removed, Satan is essentially seeking permission to attack Job. Does Satan have to seek such permission *every* time he attacks us? The Bible does not say.

Another example of Satan asking permission is revealed in Luke.

Luke 22:31-34 (NASB)

³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift you *men* like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You both to prison and to death!" ³⁴ But He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

Satan had been going after Peter at least as far back as his foolish attempt to talk Jesus out of going to the cross. Unfazed by Jesus' warning, Peter brashly declared "**Lord, I am ready to go with You both to prison and to death!**". He truly loved Jesus. But his overconfidence was based on the assumption that Jesus would be present. That confidence was revealed a few hours later in the Garden of Gethsemane when he fearlessly took on the force sent to arrest Jesus. Confident in his Lord's power to rescue him, Peter evidently intended to hack his way through the entire detachment, if necessary, beginning with the high priest's slave.

Shortly afterward, however, away from Christ's presence in the high priest's courtyard, Peter would cringe in cowardly fear and deny his Lord just as Jesus had warned.

God says that He limits the waves of the sea:

Job 38:11 (NASB)

¹¹ And I said, 'As far as this point you shall come, but no farther; And here your proud waves shall stop?'

In the same way, it seems that there are boundaries and rules that Satan must abide by. He can go so far but no farther.

1 Peter 5:8-9 (NASB)

⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ So resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brothers and sisters who are in the world.

As the devil “**prowls around like a roaring lion**” must he stop and ask God’s permission for every step? There is no real biblical proof either way. Job and Peter were protected by the Lord—Satan couldn’t get to them without the Lord’s first removing a measure of His protection. We know that God cares for all of His children, so it is reasonable to assume that God has a measure of protection surrounding each of us. And we know that, ultimately, God controls everything in the universe, including Satan.

Romans 8:28 (NASB)

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Satan is called the ruler of this world. He has already been given authority to operate in this world, tempting people to sin. He even tempted Jesus in the wilderness without success. Satan was able to work through Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus without any mention of obtaining specific permission from God.

We are to expect Satan to attack and are called to be prepared and resist him. James promises:

James 4:7 (NASB)

7 Submit therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

For those who believe in Christ, we can rest in His promise that...

1 John 4:4 (NASB)

4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

Nothing, including Satan, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In the end, Satan will be defeated and his power will end.

Revelation 20:10 (NASB)

10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are* also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

II. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN PETER AND JESUS.

As the passage unfolds, we see four scenes pulling together these two different dramas – the drama of the trial and the drama of the denial.

Why does John do it this way?

Well, for an obvious reason, this is how it happened. They were going on simultaneously. It made sense to make sure we understood both of them. John is showing us, at the very point of our Lord going to His death, the very reasons that He was doing that was to pay in full for the sins that are will occur that very hour by the one who would be considered to be the best follower He had. It paints a dark background to display the light and glory of God’s grace. Here is grace: Jesus on the way to the cross to die for the sins of Peter that he is committing at the same time our Lord is heading to His death on the cross.

Here is the contrast between the divine unchanging faithfulness of Christ and the changing faithlessness of Peter and the other disciples. Christ is exalted here, but Peter is disgraced, and rightly so. Even in the arraignment and the trial, as always with John, Christ is exalted. But behind the scene is this ugly black backdrop of Peter's denials so that we see the glory of Christ against that background. And I am reminded that this is why it must be His hour, and why He must die to pay for these sins and all sins like them.

III. THE DENIALS OF PETER.

Matthew tells us that at the arrest in the garden "All the disciples fled." But Peter and another disciple found their way back. They could not take the separation. They could not take the wondering of what was going on. And we see Peter here following Jesus.

Mark 14:54 (NASB)

⁵⁴ And Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire.

Peter is not anywhere near Jesus. He is following Jesus, but he does not want anybody to know it. He is following in a cowardly way. He loves Jesus too much to just leave Him, but he is too much of a coward to come up and stand where He is. So he distances himself where he can watch and follow.

Now, remember, in his mind are words that Jesus gave him that night in the upper room around the table when He talked about His death.

John 13:37-38 (NASB)

³⁷ Peter *said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." ³⁸ Jesus *replied, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.

All that bravado and all that self-confidence is now called into question as he sneaks around in the darkness, trying to keep his eye on what is going on – following Jesus, but not giving the appearance that he is a disciple of Jesus.

He is not alone. Verse 15 says there was another disciple with him.

John 18:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,

The other disciple was not as far back as Peter.

Who is the other "disciple"?

I think the other disciple here has to be John, and that is consistent with John. Although he appears throughout his gospel, he never mentions his own name. He calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved, that other disciple, another disciple – but never John.

John seems to be bolder. John seems to have gone right on in. And by the way, John is known to the high priest and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. He goes right in with Jesus, and John is known by the high priest.

You say, “How in the world did that happen? How did the high priest know John?” John’s mother was Salome. Salome was related to Mary. Mary was related to Elizabeth. Elizabeth was married to Zechariah, and Zechariah was a priest. So there was a family connection with John’s family. Before he became a disciple of Christ, that connection could have been an important connection. Uncle Zechariah, or whatever he would have called him, was a significant priest who did his priestly duties in the temple at the altar. Every Passover, they would probably, in going to Jerusalem and into all those events, reconnect with some people they knew in that priestly family. Because he was known to the high priest, he just walked in right with Jesus; but Peter was standing at the door outside.

Despite Peter’s love for Jesus and his desire to serve Him, this situation caused him to fear for his life and to be a coward. John just boldly walks in with Jesus. Peter is outside.

John 18:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.

Now get this; there is a slave girl who is keeping a door. This is not someone to fear.

John 18:17(NASB)

¹⁷ Then the slave woman who was the doorkeeper *said to Peter, “You are not also *one* of this Man’s disciples, are you?” He *said, “I am not.”

His three denials all started with a lie to a slave girl.

Why did he fear her? I don’t believe he actually feared her. She is a doorkeeper; she is a slave. The question caught him off guard and his mindset was self preservation. The moment most likely seemed casual and insignificant, but he was already prepared to lie to save his own hide. The very one who, just hours before, said he would die with Christ.

This is a common way in which Satan will tempt us. He tempts us when we are not planning on it. He catches us off guard before we have an opportunity to build up our courage.

Do you suppose Peter had all ready forgotten what Jesus had just done in the garden. He had just saved them from being arrested and allowed them to go free. He had saved Peter by replacing the ear of Malchus that Peter had just whacked off with his sword. Then he ran away and now he is back. Now he is a denier and a liar!

He is following Jesus, but he is following too far away, and Jesus does not recue him this time.

John 18:18,25 (NASB)

¹⁸ Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

...²⁵ Now Simon Peter was *still* standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You are not *one* of His disciples as well, are you?” He denied *it*, and said, “I am not.”

This was his second denial.

So Peter is standing with the slaves and the officers in the dark by the fire trying to keep warm. He's trapped between his fear and his love. He doesn't want to leave because he loves the Lord. He doesn't want to be exposed because he fears for his own safety. But he hangs around trying to blend in with the crowd. All his self-confidence is gone. He is afraid, but he can't remove himself. So there he stands warming himself in a very dangerous place.

John 18:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, who was related to the one whose ear Peter cut off, *said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

The relative of Malchus was there when Peter cut off Malchus' ear. I am sure he knew it was Peter. But Peter denied it again. Mark tells us that Peter even swore and cursed.

Mark 14:69-72 (NASB)

⁶⁹ The slave woman saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This man is *one* of them!" ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "You really are *one* of them, for you are a Galilean as well." ⁷¹ But he began to curse *himself* and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak!" ⁷² **And immediately a rooster crowed a second time.** And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he hurried on and *began to weep*.

CONCLUSION:

Peter loved Jesus but he, like all of us, was weak. Because of Peter's love for Jesus the Lord restored Peter. At the end of the gospel of John He will ask him three times "Do you love Me?" one for every incident of denial.

John 21:15-17 (NASB)

¹⁵ Now when 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, "Tend My lambs." ¹⁶ He *said to him again, 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, "Shepherd My sheep." ¹⁷ He *said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" Peter was hurt because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus *said to him, "Tend My sheep."

What could we learn from Peter? We are weak. Do not be self-confident. Do not go to sleep at prayer meeting. Do not hang around dangerous people. Do not give into fear. And if you have, ask for forgiveness. Tell the Lord you love Him, and He will lift you up and use you.

He is Lord!