

Peter, Judas, and Jesus
Mark 14:66-72

There is no other place in the Passion Narrative, in the record of the final week of Jesus Christ before His death on the cross, where the four gospels agree to such an extent as in the story of Peter's denial of Jesus. It may be that in the years after the Resurrection of Jesus Peter recounted this story often and in detail, so much so that the verbal record was remarkably clear. It may also be possible that while the Holy Spirit inspired each of the gospel writers to focus on a different audience and a different aspect of Jesus to present to that audience, it may be that there is something every audience has in common with Peter that is worth having every audience consider. And therefore worth your careful consideration and response this morning.

It is from that perspective, that every one of us has something in common with Peter and with Peter's experience and performance, that we will come to the text of God's word today. Mark wrote this account of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, this gospel, to an audience of Christians, probably living in the city of Rome. Day after day they lived and loved and shared their faith in a social and political environment that grew increasingly hostile, even deadly. Day after day they faced the challenge of what it meant to be identified as a follower of Jesus. Day after day they faced the same challenge Christ-followers face today. And day after day they had to choose between three life options that are represented by the principals in our text: Peter the Denier, Judas the Betrayer, or Jesus the Stayer.

Mark intended for his readers to see in the interwoven accounts of Peter and Jesus, and the background account of Judas, a comparison to how each reacted to the will of God in their lives. In light of the threat presented by the world that surrounded them and God's will for them in that world, they faced the question, "What will I do with God's will?" And the Holy Spirit intends each believer who comes with an open heart to this passage to ask a question like this, **"When it comes to God's specific plan for me, His unique will for my life, will I be a Denier, a Betrayer, or a Stayer? Will I be more like Peter, more like Judas, or more like Jesus?"**

Be sure of this. Let your faith be grounded and grow in this truth: God gives us His word for a reason. The primary reason is that we may know Him, really know Him as He is and desires to be known. Another reason is that we will know Christ and come to love Him and embrace Him as our Savior. A third reason is so that the knowledge we gain of God will change us, transforming our lives through the Holy Spirit so that as we learn and yield to God's will through His word, we become more and more like Jesus in both character and conduct. God means for His word to be life changing. Peter writes to believers and says,

2 Peter 1:3-8 (ESV) His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control

with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God gives us His word, His precious and very great promises in order that we may become partakers of the divine nature. His invitation to each of us this morning, as we come to the record of Peter's denial of Jesus, is not merely to become acquainted with the sad biography of a moment in someone else's history but to see Christ, and to see ourselves in light of who Christ is, and to fully participate in God's transforming grace.

We ask the personal question, "When it comes to God's specific plan for me, His unique will for my life, will I choose the path of Peter, of Judas, or of Jesus?" We ask that question not to create a burden of guilt and effort, but as an opportunity for grace, as an opportunity to experience for ourselves the real and wonderful and glorious empowerment of the Spirit to supplement faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with steadfastness, steadfastness with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, brotherly affection with love knowing that if these qualities are ours and are increasing, they keep us from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Judas the Betrayer we have already met. He was one of Jesus' twelve chosen apostles. He was also their treasurer, the keeper of the purse. John tells us, in his gospel, that Judas was also known to skim money off the top. He was a thief. And He was a covetous thief. John shows Judas as the one complaining when the woman poured out the expensive perfume on Jesus at the previous dinner. On top of being a covetous thief, Judas was a greedy, covetous, thief, a conclusion we come to when he makes his bargain to betray Jesus for money. Matthew tells us that Judas went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?"

Judas walked with Jesus but Judas didn't know Jesus. Judas accompanied Jesus but Judas didn't love Jesus. In the end, Judas used Jesus to hide his sin. He didn't really trust Jesus to forgive and cleanse his sin. Judas engaged in life with Jesus around but he didn't actually engage and experience Jesus.

Many people like to wear Jesus around their neck like a badge. They hang out in churches. They listen to Christian music. They seem to get involved in Christ-related work and worship, but, while it appears for all practical purposes that their heart is in Christ, Christ is not in their hearts. And a day will come for them, in the providence of God, when they, like Judas, must face the choice to stand with Christ and accompany Him to the cross or betray Him to the world. Since they do not know Him and love Him, they will sacrifice Him to save themselves.

They will turn away and not return. They will betray. They have no hope in Him, they will offer no hope and no allegiance to Him. They have made a show of following Him, but the show will be over, the curtain will come down, the lights will go off, the theater will be empty, and they will be left in cold, awful darkness discovering it is not Christ whom they betrayed but their own

eternal souls.

May God in mercy grant that is not you today. **Open your heart to God. Let Him in. Let His Spirit reveal both your sinfulness and His mercy. Accept Jesus Christ as your God appointed Savior and find forgiveness and new life through faith in Him. This can be your moment. Don't miss it.**

Peter the Denier we meet in this passage, here in **Mark 14:66-72**. We've been introduced to Peter throughout Mark's gospel, but not like this. This is not what we would have expected of the man who proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. But here he is, Peter the Denier.

Peter's denial of Jesus actually begins earlier, after dinner, on the road from Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. Jesus tells His disciples that God's word reveals they will all fall away from Him. Peter makes his first unintentional denial. Jesus, the Christ, the Teacher, the One Whom Peter is committed to following with his life, applies the word of God to their lives and Peter rejects what Jesus says. He essentially denies Jesus' knowledge of the word, Jesus' confidence in the real world application of God's word. He denies Christ's knowledge of human nature, and even knowledge of Peter himself. It's as if Peter says, "Sure, Jesus, God's word is true but that doesn't mean it applies to me."

Peter's series of denials doesn't end there. Look at verse 54:

Mark 14:54 (ESV) *And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.*

Look at what Mark tells us about Peter in this hour. Peter goes further than any of the others. After the soldiers arrest Jesus in Gethsemane ALL the others fled. But not Peter. Peter is still there. Peter goes farther with Jesus than any of the others. He goes all the way to the courtyard of the home of the high priest. Yay, Peter!

But look more closely and you will find Peter denying Jesus already. He follows "at a distance." How far away from Jesus do you have to be, how much distance do you have to put between Jesus and yourself before you "fall away"? How can you be with Jesus and be distant from Jesus at the same time? Putting distance between yourself and someone else is a tactic of cowardice. It is an intentional strategy to not get caught up in their fate. Peter followed Jesus alright, but at a distance, and that is a denial in itself.

Look again. Here is Peter, in the courtyard of the high priest, present but distant. Observing but avoiding observation. Onlooker but not participant. See what he does. He is sitting with the guards. He's hanging out with the men who arrested Jesus. He's fellowshiping with the enemy.

Psalms 1:1 (ESV) *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

Peter is not the blessed man in this moment. He is seated with the scoffers instead of standing with the Savior. Some of you have done this. Some of you do it all the time. You hang out with the world hoping you won't be noticed as having hung out with Jesus. Trying to have what you think is the best of both worlds. This is practical, functional denial. It may be unintentional denial but it is denial nonetheless.

Too many who call themselves Christians today refuse to stand with Jesus. They know they will share His fate of rejection by the world. Like Peter they prefer to hide among the scoffers and sinners than stand with the saints and the Savior. Like Peter who warmed himself at the fire in the courtyard while Jesus was under fire on the battlefield within, they prefer the meager comforts of the world to the grace and power of true commitment to the will of God.

This accommodation to an unintentional attitude of denial led to Peter's intentional denials of Jesus. A servant girl recognizes him and accuses him to the others. "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." Here was Peter's moment to make his stand. Here was Peter's moment to close the distance. Here was Peter's opportunity to rise above rather than fall away. Here was Peter's moment to follow rather than run.

Peter denied knowing Jesus and slid away into the shadows attempting to put even more distance between himself and Jesus. This denial makes Peter a liar. Remember what he said?

Mark 14:29 (ESV) *Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not."*

Mark 14:31 (ESV) *But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."*

That may have been the truth when he said it, but his denial turns his bravado into betrayal. Think about your baptism. You stood there before God, the church, and the world and made your profession. You announced your allegiance. You set a course for "newness of life," as Paul puts it in Romans 6:4. You said, in that moment, "Even though they all fall away, I will not. If I must die with you, I will not deny you." Where are you now?

It would be enough if it ended there. But it doesn't. Twice more Peter is confronted. Twice more, with increasing fervor and vitriol Peter denies Jesus, even to the point, on the third occasion, as it is more likely from the Greek grammar, Peter himself curses Jesus and dismisses Jesus as the ignominious "this man." It is the curse of sin that separates us from God. It is that curse that Christ came to overcome, but in this moment, Peter hurls the curse at Jesus in the full force of sin's rejection of God's Son.

The rooster crows and Peter realizes what he has done, that Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. And he broke down and wept.

Judas never wept. He certainly was filled with regret and remorse but never repentance. It will not be Mark but another gospel writer who answers the question, "What happened to Peter?" We

do not hear again of Peter in Mark's gospel except for the one mention of him by the angel at the tomb on the morning Jesus rose from the dead. The angel sends the women with a message to Jesus' disciples "and Peter."

Mark wants us to focus not on Peter's fall but on Jesus' stand. Jesus stayed. Jesus understood the sovereignty of God over the lives of all He created. He understood the wise providence of God in all He decrees. Jesus sees past the immediate events of personal history to the God-glorifying outcomes of God's will for history. Jesus exhibited perfect faith in God's precious and very great promises. Like Abraham who in faith knew God would raise Isaac, Jesus knew God would provide and He would live. Jesus committed His all to the Father's will, convinced that was the safest place for Him. Jesus embraced the Truth and the cost. While they slept in the Garden, he prayed. While they fled, He stayed.

Jesus stood. Jesus stayed. He stood in the grace of God before the enemies of God as the chosen Son of God, the Savior sent by God to rescue the people of God for the glory of God. He did not run. He did not flee. He put not a nanometer of distance between Himself and God's will for Him. He endured. He suffered. He died. But He did not run from the plan of the grace of God. Jesus stayed. For the glory of God. For the forgiveness of sin. For the salvation of the lost. For the joy of the beloved. Jesus stayed.

Inherent in this inspired, biblical account of Peter the Denier, Judas the Betrayer, and Jesus the Stayer is a question for each of us. What is in your heart? In every moment when God reveals His unique will for your life, what will you do? Deny? Betray? Stay? Peter, Judas, Jesus?

Let's pray.