

The Bitterness of Denial

Luke 22:54-62

Introduction

I remember the year the movie *The Passion of the Christ* came out. I was pastoring at Indiana Harbor Baptist Church in East Chicago, IN. The second or third week, we took a group of about 6 or 7 to see it. The movie was solid, and I was really enjoying it. When we got to this scene, something happened. When the rooster crowed and Jesus looked at Peter, I felt like He was looking at me. From that moment on, I don't remember reading the subtitles (if you remember, it was in the original languages, Aramaic for the Jews, and Latin for the Romans). I felt like I was there. Jesus was looking at me. I had denied Him.

We All Deny Him

The truth is, we all deny Jesus. Every time we sin, whether it's in thought, word, or deed, we deny Christ. We deny Him when we try to serve two masters. Why do we do it? Let's take a closer look at Peter's denial and see if we can find some answers.

Process of Denial

Jesus had predicted that Peter would deny Him three times (**Luke 22:34**). But Peter found this ludicrous, as he had told Jesus that he would go to prison and die for Him (**Luke 22:33**). But what really happened? When Jesus was being arrested, Peter did try to defend Him by striking with the sword (the results showed he wasn't a swordsman). Jesus rebuked him for that. They take Jesus away and the denial process begins.

Social Distancing

Notice how Peter follows at a distance (**v. 54**). You might call this social distancing since the purpose is to stay safe. That's the foundation of denial, the desire to stay safe. To keep out of danger, we distance ourselves from friends and loved ones if there is a big enough risk involved. So, in certain circumstances, around certain people, we may be tempted to keep our faith quiet, just to stay safe.

Recognition

Then a servant girl sees Peter in the firelight, and he looks familiar (**v. 56**). She's quite sure she's seen him with Jesus. Even if we keep quiet, try to distance ourselves, someone calls us out.

Startled Denial

Still trying to distance himself, Peter blurts out a startled denial (**v. 57**). It's a knee-jerk reaction. The safety instinct kicks in and takes over. Peter was known for speaking without thinking. The same thing can happen to us. We speak without thinking and begin to slide down the denial trap.

Affirmation

A little later someone else recognizes Peter, affirming the servant girl's accusation (**v. 58**). For some reason, people just don't let it drop. If only they'd leave it alone, leave me alone.

Discredit Accuser

Peter's denial here is like saying, "I am not a follower and you don't know what you're talking about" (**v. 58**). As the pressure mounts, the next step is to go on the attack ourselves. If we can discredit our accusers, maybe others won't put any stock in what they say.

Mounting Evidence

The first two have only thought Peter looked familiar. But the evidence mounts. Peter's down home Galilean accent betrays him. Jesus is from Galilee and is well-known there. Since this man is from Galilee, he must know Jesus (**v. 59**). The pressure builds as the evidence mounts.

Oath Taking

Now Peter has no choice. He must maintain his alleged innocence. Matthew tells us that he began to invoke curses on himself and to swear (**Matthew 26:74**). "I swear on my mother's grave!" Peter has denied as strongly and as vehemently as anyone could.

Realization

Then it happened, just as Jesus said it would. The rooster crowed and Jesus looked at Peter (**v. 60-61**). The rooster reminded Peter of what Jesus had said; the look from Jesus drove home the point. The Holy Spirit works in some way to point out to us what we have done. We suddenly realize the magnitude of our sin.

Contrition

That's when the healing begins. Contrition sets in and Peter begins to weep bitterly (**v. 62**). This contrition is what it's all about. That's how we **RETURN FROM DENIAL**, through the bitterness of denial. When we feel the weight of our sins and see the hurt it causes our Savior, our hearts are broken, and we are ready for the soothing balm of the Gospel. May we all experience that bitterness and **RETURN TO THE LORD** this Lenten season.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
