

## The First Denial John 18:15-18

We are a few sermons into chapter 18 where we have seen Jesus in the Garden, and then the arrest of Jesus comes. We see the authority of Jesus in the Garden and realize if anyone is going to take Jesus it is because he permits it. It is not because he lacks the power or the authority to terminate it. He is the all-powerful God who came to drink that cup of none other than the wrath of God for sinners like us.

Last time we were together we saw the arrest of Jesus, and a summary statement that he was led to the house of Annas first and then to Caiaphas. And then we have that statement in verse 14, **“It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.”** And the reason for this statement is to remind us not only who Caiaphas is but also the evil intentions that the Jewish leaders had for Jesus. Theirs is a plot to kill Jesus. They will convene a mock trial to give the impression of justice but what they are after is his blood. But God has Caiaphas say these words because it is only through the blood of the Lamb that we have any hope of sins forgiven and an eternity with God.

And that sets the stage for what comes next, and in this paragraph we see the first denial of Peter. And we realize the prophecy of Jesus earlier in this gospel. Listen to John 13:38, **“Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.’”** Jesus already said one of the twelve will betray him, and we have witnessed that act by Judas himself in the Garden. Then Jesus says that they will all be scattered and desert him, and Peter speaks up and says though they all desert you, I will never desert you. I will even die alongside of you. Peter certainly saw the weakness of all the others, but he didn't see his own weakness. Jesus announces this prophecy. Three times before the rooster crows in the morning Peter will do what seems unthinkable to him and probably unthinkable to the others, and that is deny Jesus.

Now think about it, because we are many times so hard on Peter, and might even laugh at him and his pride, but Peter really loved Christ. And other than the other disciple that is not named in this section, he is the only one who dared to follow Jesus. He is the only one who came to see these events. And he is there because he cared about him and truly loved Jesus. And Peter is not the worst of the disciples or the weakest, but in a way really the best and the strongest. And why do I point that out? Because if the best of us, those who are the closest to the Saviour can fall in ways that we could never imagine then any of us could fall. We all have these foolish hearts that can so easily be duped and led into the grossest of sins.

About a year ago another prominent and very gifted preacher fell into immorality and because of who he was and the blessing he had been to the church, it shocked the whole of the Christian world. And it certainly is not the first time it has happened. And it is amazing because all of us are only a few decisions away from wrecking havoc on our Christian testimonies, and bringing great disgrace upon our Lord. Often we forget the sinfulness of our hearts and sin is so close. We often fool ourselves that we can handle life and temptation on our own. It might be that we watch and put things before our eyes that we shouldn't, and we think it is only video. It is not that bad, but our minds are already going to places that they shouldn't. And we are cultivating a

desire for things that we shouldn't desire. We have started down a road that we ought not have gone down. And if we do not quickly turn directions it will end in disaster.

And when we hear of prominent individuals who fall, or even as we look at this passage and see Peter who spent the last three years in the presence of Christ fall, we wonder what hope have I? Isn't it just inevitable that I fall, and even abandon the faith or at the very least wreck havoc on my testimony in Christ? And the answer is no. Not because of the greatness of you, but greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. God's grace and relying on that grace really can constrain the believer. So here is the help we can gain from this passage, we can examine Peter's denial. We can see the warning signs, and through seeing those warning signs and actions we can, through God's grace, steer a different course. And the key in all of this is recognizing your weakness, and realizing the glory and the strength of the one you are connected to. So let's look at the passage, and then draw some conclusions from it that will help us fight the good fight of faith against our own foolish hearts.

#### 1. We need to see the text. Vv. 15-18

It has been often said that pride always precedes a fall. And why? Because we stop looking and watching and examining what is going on in our own hearts. We think we are better than we are. We do not have that attitude of the David in Psalm 139:23-24, "**Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!**" And sometimes like David we get it so right. We realize the weakness of our hearts. But sometimes like David also we stop watching, and we realize he fell into gross immoral sin. There are times in our lives where we can be so impressed with maybe our biblical knowledge or our walk in maturity or that we are basically a good person — better than most. Our pride blinds us to how weak and sinful we truly are. 1 Corinthians 10:12 gives us this warning, "**Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**" Are you impressed with yourself? If you are, you are in a very precarious position. You are like Peter. There is no way that I would ever do that!

But look at the narrative passage in 15, "**Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.**" Now who is the other disciple? Many believe that this is John, the author of this gospel. He never names himself but often identifies himself as the one who loved Jesus. Now there are others who think it cannot be him because John is just a poor fisherman from Galilee and there is no way that he could have known the High Priest. But that is the silence of the text. He could have known him and the text just doesn't say how he knew him. The whole narrative does seem to give the idea of an eyewitness account of all that goes on. And we cannot say for sure if this is John, but I think it is probably him.

We see that this disciple and Peter followed. Now John, if it is John, has access into the court of the High Priest, now look at what follows, "**but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.**" There was a servant girl who watched the door and permitted some to enter and others not

to enter. This disciple who was known to the high priest was able to get Peter through the door and into the court.

Now look at what happens next, **“The servant girl at the door said to Peter, ‘You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?’ He said, ‘I am not.’”** Now think how simple this is. Peter might have been thinking in his mind, that this is just a right of passage question. This is one of those little cloak and dagger lies that are necessary to get into the court where I can support Jesus. And notice the person who asked was none other than a little servant girl. This was not one of the Sanhedrin or chief priests, or an armed guard on the look out for followers of Christ. And notice that it is John or another disciple that gets him in. It seems that this person the servant girl knows is a follower of Jesus. She says, **“You also are not one of this man’s disciples.”** The “also” is just like John are you one of the followers of Jesus? And the way it is even presented here in the text is not accusatory or confrontational of wanting to do harm or not letting him in. It just seems to be a random statement or just small talk. There is nothing sinister in what she says.

And she also says it in the negative — you are not one of them are you? So it expects a negative answer. So the answer expected is the easy answer to give. And it is the negative answer. I am not. Simple enough and now he is in the courtyard. Now he is where he wants to be. But think of the this lie and common statement what Peter is actually confessing. He is saying I am not a follower or believer in Jesus. I do not believe he is the Christ nor he is the great Deliverer. I am not one of his!

And we often downplay sin in our lives, but one sin is never left by itself, but sin has a way of multiplying and taking our hearts further away from Christ. Again, we can argue in our hearts of the necessity of why we sinned. We can even say that we did a bad thing in order to do a good thing, and never think that we have sinned against our great God. is the very sin that Jesus came to die for. And look at what happens next, because you can see that downward trajectory, **“Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.”** Now it was a cold night and a fire was made, and the only place to keep warm was by the fire. And we see there were servants and soldiers there. These are individuals that would have been loyal to the religious leaders, and no doubt around the fire mocked and ridiculed Jesus, and even delighted that he was arrested. And where is Peter? He is right there with them. He is right there blending in with all the Jesus haters.

And this is the thing you have to realize, in order to escape the scorn of the world, that original lie — I am not one of them — and there are so many believers that intentionally give either a false impression that they are not a follower of Christ, or they hide their faith in Christ under a basket. But here is what you have to do, you now have to blend in. You now have to listen to all and even maybe to a certain extent participate in the things of the world. Think of how far Peter has gone already, and remember Peter is the one who boasted that he would never deny or forsake Jesus. And remember, he is the highest, not the lowest of followers among the disciples. And yet sin will take you to places you never thought you would go. We draw a line in the sand and say we will never step over it, but then we step over it, and then step over it again. Sin, Satan, and this world were beginning to dominate his heart, but here is the thing,

because Peter was not watching, he was not alert, he had no idea how much spiritual danger he really was in. Can we see ourselves in Peter? Are we fooling ourselves that we can handle things that we cannot handle? Are we crossing lines that should never be crossed in our lives? Are we placating our minds that it really is not that bad? If you are, this is Peter's world, and you are in a dangerous place and you do not even realize that you are in a dangerous place.

2. What we need to see clearer is the steps of Peter's downfall.

It is so good to examine these passages of Scripture. And when we can see the progression of sin in someone like Peter, we can apply that to our own lives, so that we are aware of that path and the subtlety of sin in our lives to draw us away from Jesus when we do not even realize that we are being drawn away from Christ. So what are those steps that lead to Peter's denial?

And all of these are related, but let me name three. And one is what we already named but I want to park here for a moment, and that is an overconfidence in self. And pride is so debilitating spiritually. When we think we are strong we are at our weakest. Think of it because a proud Christian should be a contradiction in terms. God has come, Jesus has come, and done it all. And think of it, because when left to myself I can never live that life that God has called each one of us to. We could never earn that standing before God. And I do find it amazing that when you look at religious pride, in other words, I am right with God based on what I have accomplished, it has always led to the persecution of God's people, rather than humble delight in God. This gospel — Jesus has done it all is so humbling. And think of it, because a proud Calvinist should also be a contradiction in terms. I am so dense spiritually and so in love with self that without the coming of the Spirit to give new life I would never call on Christ or even see my need of Christ. It is humbling to think that I am so lost and blind and proud that I would never see the obvious — my own personal sin and the the glorious grace of God through Christ.

Yet think of it, because we can be so active in all the spiritual disciplines like Bible Study, prayer, church and fellowship, and those things are necessary to help us see self with accuracy and help us see the stunning mercy of Christ. But in and of themselves, they can produce the opposite of humility and love for Christ, and that is pride and love for self. We might be so impressed with ourselves, and our knowledge. We might even look down on others who do not have the insight we do. And what that pride does is cause two things — one is looking down on others. And the other is looking up at self. What we call overconfidence. And you can really see this in Peter's response that all of them will forsake Jesus over in the gospel of Mark. Listen to what Peter says in Mark 14:29, "**Peter said to him, 'Even though they all fall away, I will not.'**" Peter says in essence, "I can see these ones fall away, but I will never. I am different, more committed, better character." Peter looks down on others but looks up on self.

And be honest, with all the talk and gossip and so-called sharing about others and their weaknesses, does this describe you? Do you listen to a sermon, and the application comes challenging you to change, and do you say to yourself, "I hope so and so is listening"? Now think of why these things are written in the Scriptures, why these instances are written. Listen to 1 Corinthians 10:11-12, "**Now these things**

**happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**" We can let conversations slide, forgiveness slide, and even where our eyes go, because we can handle it. Take heed. Watch, be distrustful of your heart. It wants to convince you that you can handle it. Why? Because you want that sin or relationship or whatever, and in order to get it you have to convince yourself that you are not in danger. Overconfidence always, always, always leads to sin in the life of the believer. We need meek hearts that are relying on Christ and heeding the admonitions and warning in the Scripture. My greatest danger is always in me.

The second step that Peter makes is that when we have so much confidence in self we do not pray. If I can handle this, if there really is no danger then why pray? Remember in the Garden, Jesus goes a little distance from them and comes back and finds them sleeping, and Matthew 26:40-41 records, **"And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** Peter did not realize how weak his flesh was. He didn't realize his need for the grace and spiritual sustenance that only our Lord can provide. That is what prayer is. It is the language of the needy and the helpless. And let me ask you, with all the trials and pitfalls of your life, how is your prayer life? I know that we can pray and be proud. The Pharisees took great pride in their prayers. But prayer is absolutely essential for the weak. The most mature among us, will conclude based on the teaching of Scripture that they are the weakest and the most needy. They will be petitioning the throne room of grace.

Remember what Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15, **"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."** Think of the pride and arrogance of Paul before his conversion, and think of his great maturity after conversion. And yet right here he says Jesus came to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. Not I was the foremost. He saw his heart with accuracy. He knew his need of God's daily and sustaining grace. How about you? Prayer truly is the language of the needy and weak. And we are all needy and weak. What keeps us away from prayer is our delusions of strength.

And that leads me to the last step, and that is he kept his distance from Jesus. Distance from Jesus is never a good thing. Think about how Peter is just close enough to Jesus and at the same time far enough away from him. We think can think that distance from him as a good thing rather than a bad thing. Again, we make excuses in our brains. We want to be a witness of Jesus, and therefore we do not want to be "those individuals" who are in church every time the doors are opened. We do not want to be those fanatics for Jesus, or known as Fundamentalists who actually believe the Bible is written by God and Jesus is the only hope. And therefore individuals will keep their distance. The only problem as we see with Peter that professing Christians end up more influenced by the world then they do by Jesus. And you see that in the passage, Peter in a way is more at home by the fire than he is next to Jesus. And as you look at your life, do you desire that distance? Do you feel at home by the fire of this world rather than next to Jesus? Do you know that much in your life would have to change if you came close to Jesus? There is always that sense of protection that exists inside of

us, yes we might have more problems and adversities if we come close to Christ, but it truly is the most substantial and useful life that we could ever live.

So there are the steps — too much confidence in self, lack of prayer, and distance from Jesus. And we can see that all those steps feed off one another and all are related to one another. Again, think of why these texts are given. They are given not that we would feel bad about ourselves but that we would see ourselves and trust in the One who can give us the necessary grace to go through whatever he has called us to go through. So here is the challenge. Don't be fooled by your delusion of strength. See yourself with accuracy through the Scripture. The outcome will be that blessed dependent life on Christ. Weak Christians, which we all are, will seek and cleave to Christ. Let's see who we are and cleave to Author and sustainer of our faith.