

27. Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

John 13:31-38

The Gospel According to John

In this passage before us in the Gospel of John, the scene is of Jesus and the disciples reclining around a low table and eating the Passover meal. It was the day before the crucifixion of Christ. That very night, Jesus would be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Verse thirty-one opens with Judas, the traitor, having just left the gathering in the upper room. He had already been paid his thirty pieces of silver, and he had departed to tell the leaders where to find Christ that night. With Judas gone, the Lord bared His heart and taught many things that would prepare His disciples for the dark time ahead of them all. □

³¹When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. ³³“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ³⁶Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” ³⁷Peter asked, “Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:31-38).

The Son Glorifies the Father

The artist, Holman Hunt, known for his famous paintings of Jesus, once painted the interior of a carpenter's shop with Joseph and the boy Jesus working. As Jesus paused in His work and stopped to yawn and stretch Himself, the sun made the shadow of a cross on the wall. Another of his pictures is a famous engraving which depicts the infant Jesus running with outstretched arms to His mother, the shadow of the Cross being cast by His form as He ran. Both pictures are fanciful in form, but their underlying idea is assuredly true. If we read the Gospels just as they stand, it is clear that the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ was expected from the outset of His earthly appearance.¹

Now that Judas Iscariot had departed from the Upper Room where Jesus and the disciples were eating His last Passover Supper, the Lord began teaching important topics that stretch across five chapters of the Book of John, starting in chapter thirteen and finishing at the end of chapter seventeen. Again and again, Jesus had spoken of an hour when He would glorify the Father (John 2:4, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 12:27-28), and now the hour was upon Him. The shadow of the cross was ever before Him, the instrument of torture and death that God would use to glorify His Son and for the Father also to be greatly glorified.

¹ Charles R. Swindoll. *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart and 1,501 Other Stories*. Published by Word Publishing, Nashville. Page 126.

Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once (John 13:31-32).

Let's consider how this works; through the cross, Jesus glorified God, and God, the Father, glorified the Son. Verse 32 states that God will glorify him *at once*. There are two possible things the Spirit may be revealing to us with Jesus' words, *at once*. First of all, Christ could have been referring to what took place on the third day after His crucifixion, i.e. the words *at once* meaning to His resurrection. Secondly, He could have been referring to the moment of His death when His Spirit was released from His physical body on the cross. Jesus said that His Spirit would descend into the Underworld, known as *Sheol* in the Old Testament, or Hades in the New Testament. He said, "The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). The words, *at once*, could be referring to the glory of Christ being unveiled as He descended and seized the keys of death and hell from Satan (Revelation 1:18). I imagine it was a shock for those confined in Hell to see the glorified Jesus in the Underworld.

What does the word *glorify* mean? The word *glorify* comes from the Greek word, *doxazō*, which means to suppose or to have an opinion of something. It is used in the New Testament to describe the dignity and worth of God to become manifest and acknowledged, to have the opinion that God is illustrious, or that He is clothed with splendor. This was Jesus' chief mission in the world—to glorify God the Father—to cause the dignity and worth of God to become manifest and acknowledged by all His creation. We usually think of Jesus' chief mission exclusively in terms of the cross, that is, to pay the penalty for sin and so redeem (buy back to God with Jesus' blood) all who will place their trust in Christ's payment for their sins, to bring them to God. Here's what Peter the Apostle wrote about Christ's purpose in coming: □

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, **to bring you to God**. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

To show forth God's glory through His death was the mission of Christ, but we must not forget that His first and primary mission was to glorify God on the earth. This is why Jesus prayed, "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). To glorify God is also our mission, each of us that are part of the church, the called-out ones of God. The Lord Jesus, while He lived on earth, modeled the way we also are to live our lives, i.e. to glorify the Father. We each have the responsibility to model or represent to others how Jesus lived His life. You and I have the same mission that was given to Jesus: to glorify God!

After talking about His desire to glorify the Father, He spoke to His disciples about how they, too, are to glorify the Lord. They glorify the Lord by their *agapé* love for one another.

Jesus Gives a New Commandment

³⁴A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34-35).

This command was different from what God commanded in the Old Testament.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:18).

In what way is the new command different from that given in the Old Testament?

This command to love is the first of two times that Jesus talked to them about loving one another (John 13:34, 15:12), but only on this instance does He call it a “new” command. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were instructed to love their neighbor as themselves, but Jesus now defines it even further. The measure of their love for one another was exemplified and modeled to them in the way Jesus had loved them. How did Jesus love them? He laid down His life for them. **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).** Love must be demonstrated; otherwise, it is not biblical love. God's kind of love is a love that transcends all other loves, i.e. a self-sacrificial love, commonly called “*agapé*” love, i.e. a love that seeks the highest for the one loved, often in sacrificial ways. It was a “new” kind of love because it demanded that they love one another in the way Christ had loved them. By this kind of love, Jesus would be seen among them. His love would mark them as belonging to Him.

Within six months of becoming a Christian in 1977, I was led by the Lord to visit friends living in Jerusalem, Israel. These friends were living in a Christian community in and around Jerusalem in several houses. They desired to show Jews and Arabs the life of Christ lived out by serving the people of the land and one another.

Over the next few years, I made three trips to Israel lasting one and a half years. I learned so much of the Christian life by living together with devoted Christian believers. We worshiped three times a week at the church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, a church built over the ruins of the palace of Caiaphas where Jesus was taken after being captured in the Garden of Gethsemane. God used this time in my life to immerse me into experiencing the love of the body of Christ for one another. Ours was not a perfect life, but since then I have not experienced the same joy that I had by living in community with other disciples.

We came from many different countries and backgrounds, but our love for Christ was a special bond. We lived in a community and shared everything we had with each other. We spent our time in conversation, sharing our love for the Lord as we walked and lived our lives with purpose. Looking back at that time, I think we were experiencing the kind of community life that the twelve enjoyed with their Master while He was among them. It was the close fellowship that marked that time in my life as being so precious. How wonderful it must have been to have that type of intimate fellowship with the Lord Himself, living life with Him, day by day! However, imagine the shock and sadness of the disciples to hear that Christ was leaving.

For the eleven disciples, things were about to change, and they needed to be prepared for the dark hours ahead. The Lord was telling them that He must leave and that, unless He went, the Holy Spirit, the One who would come to comfort and counsel them, would not come (John 16:7). From then onward, they were to lean on one another and love one another with the kind of love Christ had demonstrated to them over the last three and a half years while they had ministered together. There must be no more bickering back and forth with one another, trying to get the

seats of honor in front of one another. The validity of their discipleship was to demonstrate to one another the self-sacrificial love of Christ. As we say in England, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." We know the level of discipleship that people have by their love for their brothers and sisters in the family of God and to their family.

If your discipleship is not working at home by the level of service you give to your family and others around you, then it is not working! Again and again, I hear of whole families that come to Christ by the depth of Christian love and service that a new believer gives to his family. Those around you, at work and home, will glorify God when they see the level of change of character in your life. The disciples had to put one another before themselves as Jesus had modeled to them. Paul, the Apostle, wrote of the kind of love that the early disciples had, not only for one another but also for those beyond their community of faith:

³We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

When people are going through troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, and imprisonment, yet they still exhibit purity, understanding, patience, kindness and sincere love, then that is supernatural. To see this kind of love breaks down barriers to those outside of the Christian community. To be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, to be poor yet making others rich stands out to those who have not experienced Christ's love and power. By this kind of love, people will know that we are disciples of Christ. It is one thing to be a believer in Christ, but we are called to be disciples, i.e. those who are learning of Christ and living out His new commandment.

How can we love one another the way Christ loved us? Love is an action verb, not a feeling of the emotions. For the church to truly love one another, we need to know and be committed one to another. How can we lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in the family of God if we have no relationship with them? This speaks of developing community and sharing our lives with one another. This kind of love is supernatural and is given to us believers from God when we become believers. John, the Apostle, wrote:□

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters (1 John 3:16).

When it comes to our culture, what makes it difficult to getting to know and practically loving one another in Christ?

Where I am Going, You Cannot Come.□

Completely ignoring what Jesus said about the new commandment to love one another, Peter focused on the alarming words that Jesus was leaving them, “Where I am going, you cannot come” (v. 33). Peter responded, saying, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, ‘Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later’” (v. 36). The Lord was saying that He was leaving to accomplish something that only He could do, i.e. be crucified as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin. After finishing the work that the Father had given Him to do, He would ascend back to the Father’s side in Heaven. Later, as the disciples would all accomplish their work of preaching the Gospel, each would follow Him through the gates of death to be with Him. However, for the time being, they each had work in front of them. Peter seems to have understood that Jesus was talking about His death, for he said, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” (v. 37).

It is possible that Simon Peter was sincere when he said those words, but Jesus knew ahead of time what would take place that night and the very next day. Soon, the eleven would be with Him at the Garden of Gethsemane, and Peter would not be able to keep awake to pray. The Lord had to face His most difficult hours alone, sweating blood as He prayed with his closest friends asleep nearby. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to Peter, “The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Peter, once again the impetuous one, was quick to pledge his allegiance, but he did not have the strength of faith and resolve to walk in the experience of being dead to self and alive for God. Many of us are sincere in our desire to follow Christ, but do we have what it takes to live for Christ and to die daily to our self-wants for Him? Sometimes, the most significant challenge we have is to live for Christ. Thank God that we have the Holy Spirit to help us and that we do not need to rely on our strength. We must depend on Him. □

The story is told of the communist takeover in Vietnam. Four Vietcong soldiers broke into a church meeting and announced to the people inside that only the Christians were to be killed, all others were allowed to leave. When the majority of people had left, and only a few were remaining, the soldiers laid down their arms and hugged their brothers in Christ. Now, the soldiers could be with real Christians and enjoy true intimate fellowship with fellow believers!

Some of us may be required by God to lay down our lives in service to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Those who threaten to kill us because we are Christians cannot threaten us with glory! To die for Christ is gain! (Philippians 1:21). Peter thought he was strong enough to go all the way with Christ, i.e. to lay down his life. His spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak. There was still one more lesson in life that Peter would have to experience before he could be the leader the Lord was making him be. To see the test that he had to undergo, we have to turn to Luke’s account of the same conversation in the upper room. John does not mention Satan’s request to sift Peter and the disciples like wheat. □

³¹“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³²But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” ³³But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” ³⁴Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me” (Luke 22:31-34).

Twice for emphasis, the Lord called him by the name he had when Jesus met him—Simon. It was as if the Lord was reminding him that, at times, Peter relied on his own physical resources, i.e. the kind of person he was before he came to Christ. Peter occasionally reverted to his old self, and a common weakness came out when he was under stress. □

This common weakness was that Peter was too self-reliant. This self-reliance is the weakness of an immature child of God. As we grow to maturity as believers, we learn dependence on the Holy Spirit working in us and through us. Whenever we are tempted to rely on our resources, we should remember this lesson Peter had to experience. It is important to realize that, if you are a Christian, just as in the case of Job, the Lord's servant (Job 1:10), Satan has to ask permission of God before he can do anything against you. Is it always the case that Satan must ask God before attacking a believer? The Bible does not say, but it is evident that Satan had already tried to destroy Job's testimony; otherwise, how would he have known that there was a hedge of protection around Job?

When Christians are walking with God, they are under covenant to a covenant-keeping God. Jesus used a very descriptive term to explain what the enemy wanted to do in Simon Peter's life. He spoke of Peter's test as a sifting process. Satan wanted to shake up the disciple's life and separate the wheat from the chaff and sift him out of being a disciple at all. The enemy desired to destroy his life and testimony. It is so for all of us. We must choose the right ways of God to limit our vulnerability.

There are times in our lives as believers that God allows the enemy to shake us in our faith. You may feel at times that situations come to your life when you are shaken with questions, such as "Why is this happening to me?" It is common for us to want to go around difficult situations or the "mountain" that is in our way, but God wants us to trust Him and go through the trial. The Lord told Peter that, before the night was out, he would deny three times that he ever knew his Lord.

[What challenges do you face, and what changes can you make in your lifestyle to help you actively live out these words today?](#)

[Why do you think God allowed this test of Peter's character and commitment?](#)

No one would have predicted Peter's downfall. The great apostle failed precisely at the point of his greatest human strength. This extrovert and naturally brave man could not bear the ridicule of the crowd. The shock and strain of seeing evil in apparent triumph over good shook his faith. There was his fear of Malchus, the high priest's servant, whose ear he had cut off in the garden of Gethsemane, as well as those around the fire asking him if he belonged to Christ. Our greatest human strengths (no matter what they are) will never be adequate for following Christ. What is your greatest natural strength? Perhaps, it is a winning personality, or maybe charm, discipline, speaking ability, intelligence, wealth, or attractive appearance? Christ can use all these things, but if we suppose we will be able to follow and serve God because of our natural gifts, we had better prepare ourselves for a fall like Peter's. Natural devotion and physical strength will always deny Jesus somewhere or sometime. No one will ever know the terrible anguish of soul that Peter experienced those next three days, e.g. the nauseous darkness and confusion of those hours

when Christ's body lay in the tomb. Something died inside Peter during that time. Simon, the natural man with all his self-assured presumption, was about to die to himself. Peter was beginning to know himself. He was defeated and disconsolate after warming his hands around the fire in the courtyard of the high priest, but God was not through with him! □ With every time of darkness a believer goes through, there's a morning of joy that follows.

Have you ever felt like you were being sifted and shaken? If so, what were the results of the testing? □

Optional: Split up into twos or threes and share one area of weakness in your life for which you would like prayer. □

Prayer: Father, I am not all that I want to be, but I am thankful that Your Son, the Lord Jesus, has made a way for me to be brought to You. Help me to love those around me the way Jesus loved the disciples. Thank You also for using Peter to show us that we are still loved by You even when we fail. You are truly wonderful!

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