

May 7, 2023

DENIAL, MOCKERY, AND HELPFUL REMINDERS FOR US

Luke 22:54-65

(11 of 16 in a series through Luke 16-24)

I think we have a tendency to see things more clearly in others than we do in ourselves. We often do this with our children. Perhaps because we're responsible for their behavior, their actions stand out to us quite clearly. But I don't think this tendency shows up solely in regards to evaluating our children. Haven't you found yourself disgusted by someone else's lustful act while excusing your own struggle, or, positively, believing the truth that someone else can and should be forgiven while struggling to believe that in regard to yourself? And yet we want to think accurately about ourselves, our struggles, our hope, and so on. But how do we then overcome what can so often be our blind spots as we consider ourselves? One answer, which makes sense, is to allow yourself to see truths clearly in others and then apply them to yourself. That is, if indeed we do often see things more clearly in others, then look at these realities in others and apply this to yourself. For example, see the disgusting nature of someone else's sin and then allow yourself to see that this is not *unlike* your sin but a clear picture of just how disgusting your sin is as well. And thankfully the Scripture gives us plenty of opportunities to do that, and our text this morning—Luke 22:54-65—is a perfect opportunity to do that.

After showing us Jesus celebrating the last supper with his disciples in the upper room, agonizing in the garden, and being arrested, you would anticipate that the focus of the next scene in Luke's gospel would be on Jesus as well—perhaps focusing on him being questioned before the authorities. And, in fact, Matthew and Mark both move to that very thing as the next scene they focus on. But here in Luke's gospel, Luke takes us immediately after Jesus' arrest to a focus on Peter. Now, of course, Jesus isn't eliminated from the picture. Everything is still revolving around what's going on with the Lord. But Peter does come into the foreground for a good portion of our text, and as he does so, it gives us a good opportunity to look at what is playing out, what truths are coming to the surface as we get to sit on the sidelines and look at everything, and then (hopefully) apply them to ourselves. That's what I want to try to do this morning. So, let's first see what all we can learn as we look at the pride and failure of Peter.

The pride and failure of Peter

One detail that Luke doesn't include that Mark does is that immediately as Jesus is arrested (as we saw last week) all the disciples left Jesus and fled (Mark 14:50). But we do see that Peter didn't flee too far, and in fact shows some courage as he begins following Jesus at a distance as Jesus is led away. Now, perhaps we could say that this isn't all that surprising. After all, when Jesus had told Peter that he would deny him three times, Peter had answered, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). And here we are with Peter following Jesus—though at a distance—as he's been arrested. But things do not go as Peter so boldly declared that night of the last supper.

Luke tells us that as the cool evening air came in, some had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard at the high priest's house where Jesus had been taken, and Peter sat down with them around the fire. But if he was hoping to go unnoticed, this was a mistake because the light from the fire lit up Peter's face clearly enough that a servant girl sitting near him recognized him. And she said, "This man also was with him" (v. 56).

Now, if there was a time where Peter was going to prove his courage as he had predicted earlier, this was it. He could have said, "That's right. He is my Lord, and I've already said that I'd follow him to prison or death, so do to me what you will." But he didn't. Instead, Luke tells us that he denied his connection with Jesus, saying, "Woman, I do not know him" (v. 57). But if he thought that would be an end to his discomfort around the fire, he was wrong.

Luke adds that a little later someone else saw him and recognized him, saying, "You also are one of them," and once again, Peter denied it, saying, "Man, I am not" (v. 58). Now, here we may want to say that we should give Peter a break. The night's been crazy. The arrest was unexpected. He's now had to think and act quickly two times. But if you gave him a bit of time to process everything, he'd certainly not deny his association with Jesus. But, we'd be wrong. Luke tells us that "after an interval of about an hour"—that is, plenty of time for Peter to process everything—another pointed to Peter, insisting that he was one of Jesus' disciples, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean" (v. 59). That is, Peter's accent betrayed him. But instead of now owning up to his association with Jesus, once more Peter responds, saying, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about" (v. 60). And Luke tells us that the rooster crowed, just as Jesus had predicted.

So, Peter had done not only what Jesus said he would do, but he did precisely what Peter said he *wouldn't* do. He denied Jesus so that he would not have to follow him to prison or death, contrary to his bold assertion he'd made in the upper room. You and I should let this be a reminder that we may not be as ready for times of temptation as we think we are. One of the things that can happen in our lives that leads us down a road of enslaving sin is that we convince ourselves that we're stronger than we think we are. We may not have our guard up against certain sins or be certain that we're strong enough to get close to them or feel no need to pray for God's strength to help us fight temptation only to find ourselves doing the very things we were confident we would never do. We mentioned this last week, but we don't go from not sinning to committing gross sins. We go from not sinning to being willing to compromise in areas of sin that we feel are more acceptable, and that's the road that leads us toward those sins we thought we'd never commit. Therefore, let's not look at ourselves as if we're immune to temptation but as those who know our need for the Lord's grace and strength and who do not let down our guard but realize we're at war.

And let's also take this opportunity to let ourselves see sin for what it is—a denial of Christ's Lordship. We see it explicitly with Peter as he denies that Jesus is his Lord—or that he has any connection with Jesus—three times. But when we sin we're walking the same path. We're saying that though Jesus forbids what we're doing or commands something we refuse to do, we see ourselves in this moment as a better judge of knowing what we need. We think ourselves to

be a better lord of our lives than he is. We think stoking our anxiety that stems from our desire for control somehow is a better path than praying and trusting our Lord. We think that tearing down our brother or sister with gossip and backbiting is better than saying nothing or speaking words to build them up as Jesus commands. I mean, imagine that instead of reading about Peter's denial, we were reading a detailed story of our last sinful pursuit. Would we somehow feel better about what we would read about ourselves than about what we read of Peter doing here? We shouldn't. All sinful acts are equivalent to a denial of Christ's lordship in our lives. So, let's make sure we do not allow sins in our lives to become acceptable. Let us pray for strength, keep our guard up, and fight against sin as if it's trying to lead us to hell. Let's realize we may not be as ready for temptation as we think we are and renew our minds to what holiness looks like.

But, next, I want to show you a very encouraging note in the text. I want us to consider the forgiveness of Jesus.

The forgiveness of Jesus

Right at the moment Peter denies Jesus for the third time and the rooster crows, two things happen. First, we're told of a detail that only is mentioned in Luke's gospel. We read in verse 61, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter." Now, this could go one of two ways. I suppose you could see this as Jesus looking at Peter and saying, "See, I told you that you'd deny me." And perhaps that's the case, but I doubt it. The main reason I doubt it is because of Jesus' posture toward Peter when they were in the upper room and Jesus had predicted Peter's upcoming denial. At that time, Jesus didn't add to his prediction a note of condemnation, saying, "So realize you're not all that, Peter." Rather, in an amazingly gracious way, Jesus had encouraged Peter, telling him that he'd prayed for him and exhorting him to strengthen his brothers after he'd turned (i.e. repented). Therefore, it would be not in fitting with that incident for Jesus to look at Peter in a, "See, I told you so," kind of way. Instead, I think Jesus is looking at him to say, "Remember all that I told you." That is, I think Jesus is reminding Peter with that look that he'd prayed for him, that he'd turn after this, that he wouldn't be written off by the Lord, and that the Lord would utilize him to strengthen his brothers. This look, I believe, is a note of grace.

And the other thing we're told that happened at that moment is that "Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly" (vv. 61-62). I think this is the beginning of Peter's repentance—the "turning" that Jesus had also predicted Peter would do so that he would be able to strengthen his brothers.

So, bringing these together, we see the beginning of Peter's repentance, but even more powerfully, the forgiveness of Jesus. It's a reminder to us that our Lord doesn't heap condemnation on us but exhorts us to repent and provides the certain hope of forgiveness. Isn't this what the Scripture elsewhere affirms as well? In 1 John, the apostle makes clear the devastating and unacceptable nature of sin, comparing it to walking in darkness and unrighteousness when we've been declared righteous and brought into the light. And then he tells us straightforwardly, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may

not sin” (1 Jn 2:1a). And we say to that, “Of course, it’s terrible.” But then note what John says next, “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2:1b).

That is what we see here. We’ve seen the devastating and terrible picture that sin is. We’ve seen Peter fall in a disgusting way. And yet, with a look, we’re reminded of Jesus’ intercession. We’re reminded that if anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Therefore, yes, fight sin as if it’s trying to pull you into hell. But, at the same time, if you’ve sinned, don’t wallow in it, thinking you’re condemned and no longer useful. Repent—as Peter begins to do here with his tears—and remember the forgiveness that is yours in Christ. Remember that he not only interceded for Peter but intercedes for us as well as our great high priest. And then get on to obeying him.

The enemy’s strategy is not only to see you sin but then to convince you that you’re sidelined, condemned, and useless. If you sin, don’t give into the enemy further by believing his lies. Remember Christ—our advocate—repent, know that forgiveness is real and certain, and then get right back to obeying Jesus, even as we’ll see Peter do through the rest of the Scripture. Don’t forget the forgiveness of Jesus, which we see here. Next, we see the trustworthiness of Jesus.

The trustworthiness of Jesus

I say this because in addition to what we see unfolding from Peter’s perspective, we also read this text knowing that everything happening here has been predicted by Jesus. When Jesus told Peter he’d deny him three times before the rooster crowed, there was no chance that would fail to happen. His word is trustworthy. But it’s not just Peter’s denial that Jesus foretold would happen. He also foretold the events we read about in verses 63-65.

In verses 63-65 we see Jesus’ suffering. Those who were holding Jesus in custody mocked him as they beat him. They blindfolded him, and then as they hit him they would say, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” And, Luke tells us, they said many other things to mock him and blaspheme him. But the specific note that they mocked him by assuming he was unable to prophesy and tell the details of what was happening is ironic because Jesus had actually prophesied about the very events taking place that the soldiers were carrying out. Jesus had said to his disciples in Luke 18:32-33 about himself, “For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”

Now, Jesus had not yet been handed over to the Gentiles at this point, but he is being mocked and shamefully treated by those who hold him captive. Therefore, ironically, the one thing they’re mocking him to suggest he obviously can’t do—prophecy—he’s already done, concerning their very actions! There is nothing that Jesus says that is untrue. There is nothing Jesus has said will happen or that he will do that won’t come about. Therefore, you and I are reminded once more that we can rest in his promises, for he is trustworthy.

This truth is at one and the same time an easily assumed and dismissed truth and an utterly crucial truth. It's easily assumed and dismissed because you know it to be true. I know and you know on a true/false test, if the statement is, "Jesus is trustworthy," that's true. That's why you can be tempted to dismiss the weight of it, perhaps even now. But it's also utterly crucial. The whole of the Christian life is founded upon and upheld by this truth.

Think about it for a second. We begin the Christian life by recognizing the trustworthiness of Jesus' words. We trust that his claim that by believing in him as the one who lived, died, and was raised, we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Now, go to the end. Our ultimate hope is based on the trustworthiness of our Lord's word as he told us that we'll be raised from the dead. In fact, Paul said if that's not true, Christians are to be of all men most to be pitied. And everything in between in our lives is based on trusting Christ's word—that obeying his commands is better than sinning, that he works all for our good, that he'll not leave us nor forsake us, that he'll provide what we need as we seek his kingdom, and on and on. This truth of the trustworthiness of our Lord is as foundational and crucial a truth as there is. And we see it right here in this text. Everything that happens Jesus has already foretold. And what he says is trustworthy and true. So, feel free to live your life fully trusting in the sure word of our Lord.

And this brings us to the last element in our text: the suffering of Jesus.

The suffering of Jesus

It's hard to read verses 63-65. This is God the Son, our savior, who loves us and gave himself for us. He's being mocked, belittled, and beaten. He'll soon be nailed to a cross and killed. It's the most wicked act in all of human history. Whatever has been done, nothing holds a candle in terms of its vile nature to the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. And yet, for believers, this is our victory.

His suffering and death was for us. Our sin has merited us God's merciless wrath. And yet we'll never see it. There was a song we sang when we were in Louisville during 2007-2009 that went, "I don't deserve to be your servant. And how much less, to be your child. Anger and wrath, sure condemnation, should be my portion, my just reward. Never have seen it. Never will know it. Your lovingkindness enfolds my life. All you have shown me is grace, love, and mercy," and so on it went. And it's true. We will not ever see God's condemnation and all he's shown us is grace, love, and mercy. But it wasn't without cost. Forgiveness isn't free. Jesus suffered here so that we wouldn't have to. And no matter what we're going through—as hellish as it may feel—we can rejoice in that we'll never see what our sins have merited because he bore divine wrath for us.

Therefore, this morning, as we look to Christ's death and resurrection as our hope, let's make war against sin, rejoice in the forgiveness that Christ gives us, and trust his word as we obey his commands. And let this be our declaration as we come to the table. Amen.