

Luke 22:54-62 – Return from Denial

The evening had absolutely run off the rails. It started off so well! The camaraderie of being with His friends; the warmth of their fellowship; the joy of being with their master and hearing all that He had to say ... it was wonderful. One of those moments that just kind of freeze in your memory and make you happy just to think about them.

But it started to slip when Jesus made that comment about one of them betraying Him. That sent a ripple through the group; men looking with suspicion on one another, wondering who would do such a thing.

Oh, and then the argument about who was the greatest. So stupid! As usual, though, Jesus turned it into a teachable moment. The astonishing things that man said! “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you!” He encouraged them to do everything upside down. “Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.”

For Peter, it really got awkward when Jesus leaned over with a troubled look on his face and said that Satan had demanded him, but Jesus had prayed for him. Peter was aghast. “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death,” he said. But Jesus knew better. He said that Peter would three times deny that he even knew Jesus, all before the rooster crowed.

And if that weren’t enough to completely wreck the evening, when they went to the Mount of Olives for Jesus to pray, the disciples fell asleep while they were waiting. They couldn’t help it; they were just worn out after everything that had gone on and were still trying to process what Jesus had said was coming.

But, then it got worse. There were soldiers. Judas Iscariot had led them in. And the chaos that followed was unbelievable. That servant of the high priest got his ear cut off in the melee! But Jesus shut it down. Even healed the guy’s ear.

Didn’t matter. They arrested Him. Dragged Him to the high priest’s house.

And Peter couldn’t help himself. He followed. He had to see what was going to happen. Had to do something, even if it was just to follow along and see it for himself.

As he stood in the courtyard, Peter could see Jesus with the council inside. It didn’t sound like it was going well at all. In fact, Jesus was barely talking. He just kind of stood there and took it.

Peter had moved close to the fire to warm himself, but he wasn’t really paying attention to what was going on around him. His attention was laser-focused on what was going on inside. He didn’t notice the girl sitting next to him, studying his face intently, until she blurted out, “This man also was with him.”

Peter jumped. He turned to her, and for the first time took stock of where he was. He looked around at the crowd gathered in that courtyard and realized that these folks weren’t all that friendly to his group of friends. He hoped to shut her down without drawing further attention to himself. He looked at her, and quietly said, “Oh, no ma’am, I don’t know him.” That seemed to satisfy her, so he returned to watching the events unfold inside.

There was more arguing. Raised voices and accusations were being shouted across the room. Peter shivered; he wasn’t sure whether it was from the cold or from a sense of foreboding. That pesky woman had moved on, but a young man had taken her spot and was looking at Peter. “You’re one of them, too!”

Peter was a little irritated. He needed these people to quit interrupting his concentration. He was trying to see what was happening to Jesus. “Naw, man, I’m not,” he said. The young man seemed to take that at face value and walked away, although Peter noticed him a little later whispering with a group of men off in the corner of the courtyard. Still, his eyes were riveted on Jesus and the proceedings inside.

Time passed. It was late at night ... or maybe even early in morning; Peter had lost track of time. He couldn't tell exactly what was happening, but it didn't seem good. There was a lot of yelling. The high priest had been carrying on for a while and was obviously agitated.

That's when it happened.

From across the courtyard, the voice rang out. As soon as the man began speaking, Peter knew it was about him. He was standing and pointing at Peter: "I'm telling you, this guy was with him! I heard him talking earlier, and he is definitely from Galilee; his accent gives him away." All eyes turned to Peter. He wasn't sure how to react or what to say.

What if they realized he really was with Jesus? Would they arrest him, too? He didn't know, and he didn't want to find out. He figured if he responded aggressively, maybe they would stop saying it. "Man! I do not know what you're talking about!" He spit each word out in turn, hoping this guy would just back down. The courtyard grew quiet, and Peter heard a rooster crowing in the distance.

Peter just glared at his accuser for a moment, and then he turned to see what was going on inside.

It was like Jesus knew what was happening outside, even though He was up to His neck with the council inside. Slowly, He turned and made eye contact with Peter. His eyes were sad, accusing. And Peter remembered what He had said about denying Him three times before the rooster crowed.

Tears welled up in Peter's eyes as he pushed through the crowd. He had to get out of that place. He couldn't face Jesus after what he had just done. He was so embarrassed. So lost. What did this mean?

How often do you do the same thing? Fail to acknowledge your faith in public because you're scared of how people will react. Or join the crowd in mocking another believer because you don't want to be seen as different. You deny the One who died for your sins, without even realizing you've done it.

But when you see it, the guilt can be overwhelming. It may be hard to even step into the church, knowing what a hypocrite you have been. Can a wretch like me even be saved?

The answer, dear brothers and sisters, is simple: Yes.

After His resurrection, Jesus confronted Peter and his denial. He did it in the form of a question, asked three times: "Do you love me?" And Peter responded affirmatively every time. "Then you've got work to do. Tend My flock, feed My sheep, and build them up."

See, Jesus has dealt with the denial already. He took it to the cross along with all the other sins you've committed; along with all of the sins I've committed; along with the sins of the whole world.

Do you love Him? Then you've got work to do, too. Share this good news. Tell other people about it. Don't shrink from claiming your Lord and Savior in public! He has called you to return from your denial, because He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and because He relents from disaster. Your salvation is done. You are a forgiven child of God. Because just as He said, "It is finished."