

PETER'S DENIALS

Key Passages: **Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 13, John 18**

(Focus on Matt 26v31-75, Mark 14v29-72, Luke 22v24-62, John 13v31-38, John 18v10-27)

Although this time in Peter's life was going to be one of the most painful, it was also going to be the most powerful. Peter was going to learn through bitter experience what it really means to be a disciple of Christ. He had to learn that putting trust in self and thinking we are strong is such a false hope. If your faith is not in God's strength and His word failure is inevitable! We are so blessed to have Peter's example to learn from so we can put our faith in God.

Jesus went to great lengths to help Peter understand that he was in need to conversion, like he did for all the disciples (Luke 22v31-32). Jesus quotes from the Old Testament prophet Zechariah to warn the disciples of what was coming (CR Matt 26v31 with Zech 13v7). What is fascinating is that this passage speaks about shepherds and sheep. The very analogy Peter was to use so heavily in his letter. We can only be amazed at how much this night was imprinted on his mind!

Looking at a timeline of key events (use the book "Harmony of the Gospels") helps us see that the number 3 comes up again in the life of Peter:

1. All gathered together for "The Lord's supper".
2. **Peter's 1st warning** – John 13v36-38
 - Peter's boast "*I will lay down my life for you*". Christ "*You will deny me thrice*"
3. Other apostles dispute who is the greatest – Luke 22v24-30
4. **Peter's 2nd warning** – Luke 22v31-34
 - Peter's boast "*I am ready*". Christ "*Three times deny you know me*"
5. Christ advises disciples about struggles when he is gone – Luke 22v35-38
6. Christ encourages them to the peace of God – John 14
7. They sing a hymn and leave upper room - Matt 26v30; Mark 14v26; Luke 22v39; John 14v31
8. Jesus speaks to them about the vine and the comforter – John 15
9. Jesus encourages them to overcome the world – John 16
10. Jesus prays for his disciples and us – John 17
11. **Peter's 3rd warning** – Matt 26v31-35, Mark 14v27-31
 - Peter's boast "*Although all will be offended, not I*". Christ "*You will deny me thrice*"
12. Jesus in agony in Gethsemane – Matt 26v36-46; Mark 14v32-42; Luke 22v39-46; John 18v1
 - Notice that Jesus takes "Peter, James and John" here again. During his agony he focuses on Peter, and Jesus even prays 3 times! (Find the references to Prayer in Peter's letter).

Follow the key events...

Luke 22v31-32

John 18v10-27

Luke 22v61-62

PETER RETURNED TO THE SHEPHERD AND BISHOP OF OUR LIFE

Key Passage: **John 21**

We should never underestimate the bitterness that Peter felt about denying his Lord. Yet in the same way we should never underestimate the amazing love and absolute forgiveness of God! Jesus had allowed Peter to go through a fiery trial in order that his faith would be found unto the glory and honour of God, at the THIRD appearing of Jesus to the disciples (John 21v14).

Jesus has appeared to the faithful women who followed him before appearing to his disciples (Matt 28, Luke 24). In fact, they came to tell the disciples, and THREE times Peter (and the eleven) didn't believe (Luke 24v11-12, Mark 16v11, John 20v8), until Christ himself appeared to Peter. Personally (1 Cor 15v5).

Can you imagine what this initial meeting with the resurrected Lord was like? Life changing! But Jesus had to restore Peter, because Peter was afraid that his denial was so great that the Lord would no longer want to call him to be a "fisher of men".

When we read John 21, we must not think that Jesus was "grilling him". Rather this was an act of love and forgiveness (1 Pet 4v8). Peter had to be converted completely in order to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22v32). Peter would have been bitterly disappointed at every thought of the once proud boast of being better than his brethren, for it was the very opposite of his calling and the example of his Lord. But it stood in his mind as the 'elephant in the room'. In order to strengthen others he himself first had to see the God of all grace would repair and complete him, "stablish" him (same word as Luke 22v32) so that his strength and faith were in God's forgiveness not himself (1 Pet 5v10, 1v21).

John 21 is all about Jesus purifying Peter, by him acknowledging and obeying the truth, to a sincere love of his brethren (1 Pet 1v22).

John 21

Activity - Bible echoes: there are so many parallels between this scene in John 21 and Luke 5. Can you find them? What does Peter say here that is significant?

Luke 5	John 21

Activity – In Verses 15 to 17, Jesus uses different words for “love”, “feed” and “sheep”. Peter also uses different words for “know”. Look them up and write out the verses with emphasis.

	JESUS	PETER
v15	1 A. “Do you <u>love</u> me more than these?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love = 1 C. “ <u>Feed</u> my <u>lambs</u> ” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed = • Lambs = 	1 B. “Yes Lord, you <u>know</u> that I <u>love</u> you” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love = • Know =
v16	2 A. “Do you <u>love</u> me?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love = 2 C. “ <u>Feed</u> my <u>sheep</u> ” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed = • Sheep = 	2 B. “Yes Lord, you <u>know</u> that I <u>love</u> you” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love = • Know =
v17	3 A. “Do you <u>love</u> me?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love = 3 C. “ <u>Feed</u> my <u>sheep</u> ” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed = • Sheep = 	3 B. “Lord, you <u>know</u> all things, you know that I <u>love</u> you” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love = • Know = • Know =

- What is the difference in the two words for “love”? Can you find any occurrences of these two words in Peter’s letter?
 - Agape –
 - Phileo –

EXTRACT FROM VINES:

“The distinction between the two verbs finds a conspicuous instance in the narrative of John 21:15-17. The context indicates that *agapao* in the first two questions suggests the “love” that values and esteems (cf Rev 12:11). It is an unselfish “love”, ready to serve. The use of *phileo* in Peter’s answers and the Lord’s third question, conveys the thought of cherishing the Object above all else, of manifesting an affection characterized by constancy, from the motive of the highest veneration”.

The key to this section is to understand the parallels between John 18 and here in John 21. After Peter’s boast he was to deny the Lord THREE times before a fire of coals. Now Jesus has recreated that scene in order to restore Peter. To help him acknowledge the forgiveness of God and reconfirm his important calling. Peter was now to be a shepherd over Jesus’ flock, but not as a lord over God’s heritage, rather a pattern of humble submission to others, like the chief Shepherd demonstrated.

Jesus' questions are in front of all the disciples. As there was a public THREEFOLD denial of Jesus, so Christ was going to publicly restore Peter through a THREEFOLD affirmation of his love.

1 A. The **first question Jesus** posed referred to Peter's boast above his brethren (Matt 26v33). Jesus asked Peter if his love (in giving up his life as he claimed) was actually more than any of the other disciples.

1 B. **Peter's first reply** now contained no such boast or comparison to his brethren, rather he was content to speak only of his personal affection for Jesus. How he had changed! Peter had learnt that we should not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3v18). For the truth of his affection for Christ he appeals to Jesus himself "knowing" it, rather than endorse himself!

"That he chooses to make Christ himself judge of it, rather than say any more of it himself; though he modestly declines saying that he loved him more than the rest of the disciples did, having had an experience of his vanity and self-confidence. He was sure he loved Christ heartily; but whether he loved him more than the rest did, he chose not to say:" (Gill's Commentary)

1 C. **Jesus' first command** was for Peter to nourish the lambs (lambkins), the little ones, for now he was not lording over them. Jesus affirms to Peter that now his love was to be seen, in action, towards his brethren, not over them. In this way the little lambs would find pasture and be fed (Isa 40v10-11).

2 A. The **second question Jesus** posed was now to individually affirm Peter's own love (value and esteem) of Christ, the Messiah, who must suffer (Matt 16v20-21) and by extension Peter's sharing in his sufferings (1 Pet 5v1). To see Peter's use of the word agape in 1 Pet 1v8 (and the context of 1 Pet 1v6-7) shows us that Christ was wanting to affirm Peter's own deliberate choice in serving Jesus despite the fiery trials that this would bring. This degree of love requires more than a mere affection or emotion (1 Pet 2v17-18). It was based on whether he really understood and loved his Messiah.

2 B. **Peter's second reply** again demonstrates his humbled position. Once he had claimed he was "ready" (Luke 22v33) to share with Jesus his sufferings (to "go to prison or to death"), only to find "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak". So Peter again is only willing to affirm his certain affection to his Lord, rather than an impulsive answer of self-confidence. How he had changed!

"A good shepherd, Jesus had said, 'lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11, 15), and it is not surprising that the mention of Peter's pastoral responsibility leads to a reflection on his eventual death (vv 18-19; cf 13:36, 'you will follow later'). Peter himself had adopted the terminology of the shepherd discourse in 13v37 ('I will lay down my life for you'), yet without any specific awareness of responsibilities to his fellow disciples" (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series)

2 C. **Jesus' second command** showed that Peter was now ready, for he is told to **shepherd** the sheep (the word is even translated "rule over"). Like Moses, when he thought he was ready he spiritually wasn't. But when humble we trust God and His strength, not our own. Such shepherds are what God

loves over His sheep for they lead the astray sheep to God, not themselves (CR 1 Pet 5v2, Isa 56v11, Ezek 34v8)).

3 A. The **third question Jesus** posed demonstrate how *“faithful are the wounds of a friend”*. For on that same night Peter denied him, Judas had betrayed him, *“...and the kisses of an enemy are deceit”* (Prov 27v7). Judas had been lost because his guilt consumed him, for like Esau there was not a godly repentance. But Jesus was not going to let that happen to Peter, for *“open rebuke is better than hidden love”*.

This third time was an obvious reference to his three denials, so it would have recalled in Peter’s mind the bitterness of his failure. However, Peter would find peace and forgiveness by Jesus dealing with “the elephant in the room”. This is why Jesus’ THIRD and final question, using Peter’s own word was so vital. Peter had to acknowledge what they Lord was doing and why.

This lesson is illustrated in the connection of the word “grieved” (John 21v17) with Peter’s own words in 1 Peter 1. The word “heaviness” (1v7) is exactly the same! Peter therefore tells us in that passage what and why Jesus did this:

“Blessed be God, for his great mercy in causing us to be born again, to a living hope. For by His power we will be guarded, through our faith, till that amazing salvation day. So let us be glad in this fact, that it is necessary for us to be **grieved** for a little time, being tested, so that the genuineness of our faith (eg living out in action what we claim we believe) can be clearly seen as more valuable than gold, because the fire will remove the rubbish, and leave only the vessel that gives glory and praise to God when Jesus finally returns...to whom you give your love (Agape) although we can’t see him...and the faith that you have in him will give you joy beyond words, to the end that you might receive the ultimate result of your faith, the salvation of your life” (Paraphrase 1 Peter 1v3-9)

3 B. **Peter’s third reply** showed that Peter had truly repented. He was grieved because the Lord had skillfully tested the genuineness of his faith, and rightly so. Clarke’s commentary suggests that maybe he was fearful “lest Christ saw something in his heart which he saw not himself, and which might lead to another fall; and Christ was about to tell him of, as he had before predicted his denial”.

However the most powerful way of interpreting why Peter was grieved may have more to do with him feeling like Christ did the night he suffered. When Jesus turned and looked at Peter as the cock crew what must Jesus have felt? Peter would have recalled the pain on Jesus’ face when he turned to look on him. He would therefore have felt what it was like to *“suffer with Christ”*. If this is so, then the true power of Christ taking him back is revealed. For it having suffered with him, then *“when his glory shall be revealed, ye may also be glad with exceeding joy”* (1 Pet 4v12-13).

The hardest thing is trying to determine the tone in Peter’s voice. It seems a voice that is slow and soft, having felt the grief he put his master through. So there can only be the sincerest and humblest response:

- *“Lord you know (eido) all things”* – you can see, perceive, know absolutely, from what is inside my heart, to what is going to happen in the future!
- *“You know (giosko) that I love you”* – you have come to know and understand that I have a deep affection for you.

Peter was willing to commit his life and such a judgement into the hand of God (1 Pet 4v19), and not to speak presumptuously like he had before. He was confident that “all things” were in Jesus’ hands, and not his own. In this he willingly surrendered such judgement to Christ.

3 C. **Jesus’ THIRD command** was the all-encompassing directive that Peter needed. Forgiveness, based on God’s conditions of true repentance, was going to be the driving force in Peter’s life from this moment on. Having “returned to the shepherd and bishop of our souls” he himself could be a valuable shepherd to God’s flock. In fact, so much so, like the chief shepherd, he would ultimately share in his sufferings by actually laying down his life for the sheep (John 21v18-19).

John 21v18-19

- Verse 18: Where had Peter heard the phrase “*Verily, Verily I say unto you*” before? What is this again connecting this section in John 21 to? (Hint: John 13v38)

- “*When you were young*” - What defined the way that Peter lived before his conversion?

- “When thou shalt be old” – What was now to define the way Peter lived?

- How many times was Peter told to “Follow me”? What key lesson can we learn from this?

Activity – We can learn from Peter that all of us need to be converted! Jesus tapped into Peter’s heart to help him find forgiveness and peace so that he could turn him around into a loving carer of God’s sheep. To do that we have to acknowledge what we have done wrong and put it away.

Try to spend some time in personal reflection of your life. Work out what you want to change and give to God. What you want to find in God’s grace and forgiveness.

Then write down some goals, about what you would like to do in service to God, and how you can do that. Try it...it really helps!