

DENYING YOUR DEPENDENCE – Matthew 26:69-75

Greeting:

Matthew 26:69-75 – ⁶⁹“Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, ‘You also were with Jesus the Galilean.’ ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you mean.’ ⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, ‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ ⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: ‘I do not know the man.’ ⁷³ After a little while, the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ ⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know the man.’ And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

MAIN IDEA: *We are too weak to deny our dependence on Christ.*

Peter's Fall

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played the University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game, a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California, somehow became confused, and started running in the wrong direction. He ran sixty-five yards before one of his own teammates overtook him and tackled him just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, which was the ultimate margin of victory.

That strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question, “What will Coach Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?”

The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room to regroup. As usual, they sat on the benches and on the floor – all but Riegels. He put a blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner with his face in his hands, and wept over his mistake.

As you know, coaches usually have a great deal to say to their team during half-time. But that day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt, he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels and what to do to turn his team around. The timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time. Coach Price looked at his team and said simply, “Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second half.”

The players got up and started out – all but Riegels. He did not budge. The coach looked back and called to him again; still, he did not move. Then Coach Price went over to where Riegels was, sat, and said, “Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second.”

Then Roy Riegels looked up, his cheeks wet with a strong man's tears, and said, “Coach, I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you. I've ruined the University of California. I've ruined myself. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life.”

Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegels' shoulder and said to him, “Roy, get up and go back, the game is only half over.”

There is a man named Peter in the Bible who truly has a similar experience. Peter always showed promise, but it seemed to be coupled with problematic behavior. A life with Peter seemed to come with great risk, as well as reward and promise. Peter is easily subject to criticism. He is impulsive and prideful and at times very arrogant. Jesus saw something special in Him. Jesus knew something that we didn't about Peter.

(v.69-70) Picture Peter sitting outside in the dark around a fire among other people like the other officers, the servants, and people who would have been present in the High Priest's courtyard. Despite the negative characteristics, I think we can **pause and recognize the courage that Peter demonstrates**. I don't know about you, but I'd say that for Peter to be here at this moment is bold.

However, I want us to recognize the mistake he's making at the same time. You see Peter wasn't simply around Jesus' enemies, he was warming up with them. It feels bold to be where he is but boldness would mean that he stands out. Peter's trying to blend in. It's easy to claim boldness when you're not where you should be. I don't know how many people have said, I hang out with them because I'm a healthy influence. In the mind of teenagers, there are decisions that are unwise, but we convince ourselves that it's a bold decision for Christ. It is a necessary thing that Christians be in this world, but we should not attempt to look like it! If you want to be noticed, you need to look, sound, or act differently, and that is the reality Peter lived in.

POINT 1: WE ARE DEPENDENT ON CHRIST FOR OUR ABILITY TO LIVE IN A HOSTILE WORLD

It's easy to watch the election as votes roll in and you might be encouraged by one state and discouraged by another. The hardest part about living here is that we don't belong here! We aren't from here but we call it our home. We are promised in scripture that lawlessness will come and increase. In fact, we are told that the day of redemption will not come until the rebellion comes first (*2 Thess 2:3*). We know that in later times people will depart from the faith and we are seeing it now (*1 Tim 4:1-5*)!

We need to be careful assuming that we can battle social pressures and immoral behavior around us! We must not place so much confidence in the flesh that we enable poor behavior in ourselves! The call is for Christians to live in this world and yet stay separated from it. We do this by showing the light and love of Christ in every decision we make and action that we take. Peter tried to find security in the fire, the people in the courtyard, not realizing that they were not his friends nor were they Jesus' friends. True eternal security is found in the hand of the creator, not in the world's fire pit.

We are and must remain totally dependent on Christ to live in this world – we are too weak to deny it.

(verses 71-72) Peter begins to flee but doesn't quite achieve the escape he may have wanted. Peter moves himself to a porch and someone else sees him and associates him with Jesus. This time we see another side of Peter's denial. It was no longer a simple no, it was an "I swear, I don't know." Now we know Peter is lying but now he swears that he was telling the truth. The wheels are falling off and Peter is falling apart. His own personal comfort is being taken and his safety is threatened.

Conviction is an uncomfortable thing, but it seems that before conviction comes, we experience the results of poor decisions. Peter should not have attempted to blend in, because it made him stand out. The accusations are building but Peter is doubling down in his denial. The issue is less of what Peter is being accused of and more of what the result of the accusation would be. His own personal comfort is being taken and his safety is threatened.

It's natural for us to be bold Christians at church, right? I have no problem standing up here and talking about my love for Jesus and the need to repent of my sin and receive grace from God. This is the house of the Lord there should be no fear in His presence. The question becomes do I act with this same courage and boldness everywhere else? Maybe the deeper question is what are you willing to endure for the sake of Jesus?

POINT 2: WE ARE DEPENDENT ON CHRIST FOR STRENGTH AND COURAGE

Some of our own students helped organize Fields of Faith last month. This is an event that brings in athletes from the whole school and surrounding communities. They shared their testimonies, and read scripture, and the gospel was presented to about 130 kids that night. This is an open and public event held at the High School Athletic Facility and on the football field. This event requires courage from our students. To be willing to stand alone for what they believe in and encourage others to join them. As a result, a story was posted in the paper and on Geneseo Current and it received backlash. These students received some criticism for what they were doing from others in the community. As soon as I read some of the comments, I immediately thought of moments like this with Peter.

If the government decided that anyone who shows up to church next week would receive the death penalty, who would be here? If they said any man woman or child who steps foot inside the walls of a church will die, would you decide to watch from home? My prayer is that your fear of God would triumph over your fear of man.

True courageous faith exists in all areas of life, not just in church. The test of a Christian is never who they are on Sunday Morning inside the walls of a church, but who they are when their faith would cost them. Our job as teachers, preachers, and local church leadership is to send you out into a dark world as disciples of the light. Peter was spotted in the darkness, not for His courage, but because of His attempt to blend in. If you are sent into this community with a heavenly purpose, just know that you will not be able to blend in. Courageous faith should bleed through our presence.

(v.73-75) We make our way to the 3rd accusation from the bystanders. Peter has now been accused 3 times by 3 different people of His association with Jesus and Peter has denied it each time. The unique part is His denial gets worse each time. First, it was a simple answer. 'No, I don't know him.' Then it included an oath. 'I swear I don't know him.' Now we read that Peter invoked a curse upon himself. This curse means that he is inviting God's wrath to be upon him if he is lying. Do you know why you cannot

blend in as a true Christian? If believers in Christ are abiding in Him, we look like him, we sound like Him, we behave and walk as He does. We don't get to play on both teams!

Now you may not have considered this, but the rooster actually plays a pretty significant role in this story. Look at verses **74-75**.

POINT 3: WE ARE DEPENDENT ON CHRIST FOR CONVICTION AND CHANGE

For about 5 minutes, I did some research on roosters. You can go to chickensandmore.org to learn for yourself. While roosters are most known for their early morning crow, that is not the only time or reason that they crow. Among others, the one I want to point out here is **An Alarm Call**.

I find it fascinating that this scene is at night, around a campfire, and roosters crow if they spot a possible threat or enemy to the flock. Not only does the rooster's crow cause Peter to remember Jesus' Words and to weep, but I think this rooster shows us another important lesson. What if I told you that you have an inner rooster?

1. You ask yourself, where in the Bible does it talk about my inner rooster? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives? When we sin, who shows us? When we fail, who shows us? When we deny Jesus with our life, who shows us how we have strayed? We naturally weep as Peter did when we are faced with conviction that comes with guilt and shame, but we ought to also praise God that He does not let us live our lives totally oblivious to sin. Praise God that we are convicted by our failure and shortcomings.

I want to add at the end of our passage a few points to consider as you reflect on this text. If you looked at Peter today, you would envy His faith and His courage. The man who denied Jesus three times boldly stood at Pentecost and preached a powerful sermon that added 3,000 souls to heaven (1,000 for every denial). Peter composed two letters in our New Testament and when you read them you wonder where such conviction, courage, and wisdom came from. Peter was taken from a person of impulse, pride, and arrogance, to a place of courage, confidence, and discipline, and Peter was given more influence.

Through Peter's pride, we see our need to be humbled.

It is true that to the degree that God will use you He will also break you. Many times if we sit here in church and we cry out to God to use us, He will ask us to move. Under God's provision, Peter was broken far enough for His faith to be strengthened and His spirit to be empowered. Understand that we are not meant to live on the mountain, in this life, we are meant to live in the reality of the valley. This means you need strength and discipline to say God take me as you will and use me! It was necessary for Peter to fall, for His heart to be sifted and cultivated. For Peter to become of benefit to the body of Christ, the evil and unrighteousness had to be taken out. Don't be surprised when God uses a situation in your life to sift out disobedience or to cultivate the rocky soil of your heart. We need it.

Through Peter's sorrow, we see the joy in redemption

Sin always comes with guilt and shame. As we rebel and deny God in our actions, we are alarmed by the Holy Spirit at our wicked behavior. In the moment it feels gross and like you just can't get it off you. You come to church, and you just feel so attacked by God's Word and you pray to Jesus and feel so broken and ashamed. Friends, that's called conviction. That means it's time to repent and

live the life God wants you to live. The result of sin is always grief and sorrow but pay attention to the next part. If you neglect what comes after repentance you may live with shame forever.

Roy Riegels did go back on to the field, and those who watched the game that day will tell you that they have never seen a man play football like he did that second half.

Through Peter's denial, we see how we are accepted by Jesus

Peter was not denied by Jesus. If you look at John 21 I think as I explain this it will feel like what I just described.

Jesus and Peter

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" What did Jesus just call Peter? Simon! It was the name of Peter before he became a Christian. Picture the moment as Peter can still picture Jesus' eyes after He denied Him. He can hear the echoes of the first crow of the rooster in this very moment. **He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."** **16 He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"** Here is echoed the second crow of the rooster and a building fear of what Peter had done in denying Jesus. **He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."** **17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.**

In Peter's Failure, we see Redemption in Jesus.

Peter's love for God called him to action. Your love for Jesus should compel you into action! You must do something with this love you have for God! For Peter, it was to tend His sheep and feed His lambs. This can be said for the parents in the room as well. Jesus has called you to tend to his sheep and to feed his lambs. Your kids are God's children that He has called you and trusted you to steward and take care of. If you love God, you will do this job faithfully for His glory.

Jesus met Peter with the words "Follow me..." (Mark 1:17) Jesus called Peter away from His boat, His career, His goals, and his missions. Now in one of Jesus' last conversations with His disciples, He tells Peter to "Follow Me..." Peter is now called from denial of Jesus to total denial of self – this is the call that Jesus gives every single one of us.

You ask yourself today how is a man who denies Jesus used by God? How is a man who kills Christians used by God? How are unfaithful, undisciplined men used by God? How can a nation that is unfaithful and corrupt and evil be used by God?

If you ask Peter, Paul, David, Moses, Pastor Steve or Pastor Ryan or me, or any other man in your life the answer is the same. The answer must be the same. Denial of self.

If we fail to deny ourselves, we also *deny our dependence* on God to use our broken, weak, and corrupt vessels of life for His glory. Praise ought to be given to God for His power to use someone as small and weak as myself to glorify Him. We ought to worship God for the fact that He can use you now, and today, regardless of yesterday. If you will deny yourself and turn to Him, He will use you. Do you know what the next step requires of you? Genuine pursuit. *It is better for us to be followers who fail than*

those who fail to follow. Peter followed Jesus with the most genuine heart. He followed Jesus with a fire and a passion that often lead to moments of failure and disappointment. Do you know what happens when we offer something that we think is perfect? It denies our dependence on the only perfect offering to exist, which is Jesus. God wants genuine servants who love Him. Do not offer God perfection or practice. Do not offer God what you wish was true, offer Him the very reason it isn't. Offer your weakness and receive His strength. Offering strength will expose your weakness and you will know that you were deceived. Offering weakness exposes your need for strength that does not come from you.

POINT 4: OUR DEPENDENCE ON CHRIST SHOULD SPARK AN UNDENIABLE FAITH.

Just like Peter, we need Jesus more than we realize. As parents, you may ask yourself how you could be trusted to take care of His children. You wonder if you're capable. You may even look at your past and wonder what you could be used for now.

Do know why Peter's life was fall was not permanent? Peter didn't realize it at the time, but Jesus prayed for Peter in the garden, and it was for Peter's protection. Satan was working and wanted to sift the disciples. Jesus prayed that though Peter would fall, He would not fall away completely. If it were not for Jesus' interceding for Peter, it's hard to say what would have happened to Peter after this moment of denial. Do you realize that this is exactly what Jesus does for you and for me? 'For there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ.' He is the one interceding for us to the Father. He loves us and wants to protect us from Evil, but we also have a job to do.

This moment with Peter should remind us that there was no one else worthy of bring God's suffering servant. It is, was and always will be Christ alone. We are wholly and completely dependent upon Him for our life! To deny Him in any way is to deny our dependence upon His grace and mercy which sustains our lives today.