

A Spiritual Warning We All Should Hear
John 13:36-38, 18:1-11, 15-18, 25-27

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Text Introduction: We have spent a great deal of time this year in the Gospel of John. Most of our attention has been wrapped around two topics—the miracles of Jesus and the 7 “I am” Statements from Jesus. To give some conclusion to our survey of John’s Gospel, we are isolating a few other texts. Today, I want us to consider the whole scene of Peter’s denials of Jesus. You will be reminded that Peter is one of Jesus’ 12 disciples. Of this 12, there seems to even be an inner circle of 3, of which Peter is a part. But, even this one, so close to Jesus, has a period of betrayal and denial of his relationship with Jesus.

Text: ³⁶“Lord,” Simon Peter said to Him, “where are You going?”

Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow later.”

³⁷“Lord,” Peter asked, “why can’t I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You!”

³⁸Jesus replied, “Will you lay down your life for Me? I assure you: A rooster will not crow until you have denied Me three times.

After Jesus had said these things, He went out with His disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, and He and His disciples went into it. ²Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with His disciples. ³So Judas took a company of soldiers and some temple police from the chief priests and the Pharisees and came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.

⁴Then Jesus, knowing everything that was about to happen to Him, went out and said to them, “Who is it you’re looking for?”

⁵“Jesus the Nazarene,” they answered.

“I am He,” Jesus told them.

Judas, who betrayed Him, was also standing with them. ⁶When He told them, “I am He,” they stepped back and fell to the ground.

⁷Then He asked them again, “Who is it you’re looking for?”

“Jesus the Nazarene,” they said.

⁸“I told you I am He,” Jesus replied. “So if you’re looking for Me, let these men go.” ⁹This was to fulfill the words He had said: “I have not lost one of those You have given Me.”

¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. (The slave’s name was Malchus.)

¹¹ At that, Jesus said to Peter, “Sheathe your sword! Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given Me?”

¹⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was following Jesus, as was another disciple. That disciple was an acquaintance of the high priest; so he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard. ¹⁶ But Peter remained standing outside by the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the girl who was the doorkeeper and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ Then the slave girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?”

“I am not!” he said. ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the temple police had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold. They were standing there warming themselves, and Peter was standing with them, warming himself.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, “You aren’t one of His disciples too, are you?”

He denied it and said, “I am not!”

²⁶ One of the high priest’s slaves, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, “Didn’t I see you with Him in the garden?”

²⁷ Peter then denied it again. Immediately a rooster crowed.

Introduction: We have warnings everywhere. We have health warnings, weather warnings, traffic warnings, and unfortunately, now we have, terror alert warnings. We have warning lights that come on in our cars when something might be wrong. I think the key concept in this story about Peter’s denials is one of warning. Jesus in telling Peter of his denial before the rooster crows is sounding a warning of the denial to come. How are we to take this? Was Peter’s denial inevitable? Did Jesus, being God, foresee Peter’s denial? Obviously, He did. But, there is more than just foreknowledge. To give us an example of our own possibility of denial of Jesus, we see what causes Peter to be so weak. That is the alarm that is sounded in this passage. It’s what I want you to see today.

Graduates, it’s what I want you to see today. Ready to graduate and take this world by storm, I want to sound a warning for you. The warning that I sound to you today is that statistics are not on your side. A Barna survey from 2011 put into statistical form what all of us in church have realized in our own ministries. Here are the findings:

- 1/10 students who grow up in the Church leave after High School never to return.
- 4/10 students who grow up in the Church leave after High School for a season.
- 2/10 students who grow up in the Church leave after High School but not necessarily their relationship with Jesus. They leave over frustrations with the Church. (This is dangerous I might add. It will be very difficult, if not impossible to have a vibrant faith outside the context of a local church).
- That leaves just 3/10 who remain connected to the Church after High School with no “wilderness-like” experience.

These numbers scare us as parents and pastors.

But, it's not just high school graduates. It can be anybody. I have known scores of people in different settings of life that just abandoned the things of God. So, in that context, hear the warning from the testimony of Peter.

What do we learn from Peter's Denials?

Jesus warned Peter and warns us because He knows...

- That Passion today does not guarantee passion tomorrow. Peter, of all people! Peter, as we have already noted, was in that inner circle of Jesus. Peter was one of the three brought up to the Mount of Transfiguration to see the glory of God on Jesus. It was Peter, who among all of the rest of the disciples makes that monumental declaration about Jesus first, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" Peter was the one with the faith that said to Jesus, "Command me to walk on the water." It was Peter, as our reading today reports, was willing to go with Jesus even to the death. It was Peter, who in his passion for Jesus, draws his sword and takes off the ear of one of those who came to arrest Jesus. It is Peter, in the book of Acts, that first boldly proclaims the first sermons about Jesus.

All of the disciples denied Jesus in one way or the other, but I think we know Peter's story because it is important for us to be warned that sin can happen to the best of us.

- The Power of Sin and temptation. Why did Peter deny Jesus? He didn't set out to deny Jesus. He followed Jesus, but in that moment of temptation, he succumbed to the power of temptation and sin. He fell a second and third time—each time growing stronger in his denial. Mark says that he proclaimed a curse and an oath against himself in the third denial. In other words, he said, "May I be cursed to die if I'm not telling the truth."

To our graduates, I would say that the power of temptation is especially strong in seasons of transition in our lives. We sense freedom, and that freedom does not always lead to right choices.

- The Power of Pressure. I'm convinced that Peter did not deny Jesus because he was afraid to die. Rather, he denied Jesus because he fell to the pressure of public opinion. In that moment, he failed to speak what he knew to be culturally unacceptable. Graduates, but really all of us, I hope someone has told you that peer pressure never ends. Peer pressure is the pressure to do what others want you to do with no respect to what God wants you to do. My own testimony to that would be that this kind of pressure increases instead of decreases. Today, I face greater pressure to do what someone else wants me to do than any other time in my life.
- The Propensity for us to depend on ourselves. Here, I find Peter's greatest problem, and perhaps ours as well. Instead of depending on God, we depend on ourselves. When Jesus knew the way of the cross, Peter drew the sword. In the Garden, while Jesus prayed with such intensity, Peter slept. We cannot make it in our own strength.
- The penalty of sin. For Peter, there was the guilt that would come when he heard the rooster crow.

So What?

- Heed the Warning. What are you going to do with the warning?
- Go to War. Draw up a battle plan. Stay connected to God through His Word, His People (the Church), and His Power (through prayer).

One Last Thing!

Some of you have already failed. You are here even in a state of rebellion.

Remember the look. That's how Luke put it. On the third denial, Jesus looked at Peter. (Luke 22:61) It led Peter to go outside and weep bitterly (Luke 22:62).

Remember the breakfast. It's a breakfast of restoration in the last chapter of John. In that breakfast, Jesus invites Peter again to "Come, follow Me."

He invites you to do the same today.