

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." ⁷⁰But 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." ⁷³After 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. ^{27.1}When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. ² And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor. ³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸ Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

Introduction

Peter was ignorant of the proceedings of the trial that took place at night in the home of the high priest. He followed Jesus, true, but "at a distance" and anonymously (**And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end, 26.58**). Apparently, one of the lessons here is that disciples (then and now) may follow Jesus in a distant and fearful way. Peter follows with passion, flees in fear, and then follows distantly with cowardly curiosity (**to see the end**). However, the Lord does not let him (or us) hide in anonymity. It may seem that Jesus is alone in a crowd of judiciaries inside the palace and that Peter is alone in the crowd of soldiers outside the palace. It appears that Jesus has forgotten the disciples and Peter, and that the disciples and Peter have forever forsaken Jesus. However, things are not as they seem to be.

After the condemnation of Christ in the highest court, and before going to the Roman court, the narrative brings two disciples into view, Peter and Judas. Both seem repentant. Judas appears to have the more genuine repentance in that his regret goes beyond the bitter tears of Peter to a change of mind and an acknowledgment of sin. In this light, Judas seems to have a deeper and truer repentance than Peter by comparison. Granted, Peter weeps bitter tears *alone* (**And he went out and wept bitterly, 26.75**), but Judas *acknowledges his sin to the chief priests* (**Judas...changed his mind...I have sinned by betraying innocent blood, 27.3-4**).

Should we put Peter in the same category with Judas? It looks like we have an account of two hypocrites. They seem to have the same regret, a feeling of sorrow that amounts to feeling sorry for one's "self."

Should we even be asking about these two disciples? Should we focus on the suffering of Christ as the dominate theme in the passion narrative including the actions of the disciples? Schilder makes the point that in pondering the passion narrative, we must "begin and end with Christ" and therefore consider how each sub-narrative reveals a new phase in the suffering of Christ. Thus, he concludes that the reader must "try to discover the route by which Christ now moves towards deeper abysses of affliction in the moment of Peter's cursing and swearing" (*Trial*, 199). Schilder's bottom line is that Peter's conduct gives Jesus another taste of the bitterness of absolute isolation.

Schilder gives many good insights in his trilogy on the passion of Christ, but this way of reading the record about these two disciples does not square with some things. First, neither text here in Matthew places Jesus within hearing range of the words of Peter or of Judas. Granted, after Peter denies the Lord, there is a moment when the guards are taking Him from the palace to Pilate, and the eyes of Christ peer into the eyes of Peter (**Luke 22:61-62** ⁶¹ **And the Lord turned and looked**

at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly). Otherwise, if Jesus heard Peter's third denial (and He may have), one thing is clear; no reaction is on the record. Second, and close to the first point, the account is objective and not subjective. Therefore, it seems better to look at these disciples and their conduct in a different way, and from a different angle. That angle presents itself to us when we compare and contrast the sin and the regret of each disciple.

If we do not emphasize the subjective side of things, then what do we detect upon reflection? Let's do this reflection with part of what Schilder suggested in mind, namely, we need to begin and end with Christ.

In this light, on one hand, we have to consider the prediction of Christ that Peter remembered and how it is that he came to remember. On the other hand, we have to consider a prophecy from the OT regarding the potter's field. The topic for today then is "Calling Peter and Passing by Judas." Two points of outline help us collect our thoughts: the sin and regret of each disciple and the work of Christ in one and not in the other.

1A. The sin and regret of each disciple

We can overview each account and place them back to back for comparison.

1B. The sin and regret of Peter

1) His sin

Peter's sin has its counterpoint in the preceding narrative. People interrogate both Jesus and Peter and both men respond with an oath. Jesus proclaims His messianic calling as resurrected Lord and final judge of all men, but they condemn Him for speaking the truth. Peter denies his apostolic calling by denying all association with the Lord Jesus, and he avoids condemnation by speaking lies.

Thinking he can remain unnoticed as he seeks to satisfy his curiosity about the outcome of the trial, Peter sits outside while Jesus faces His accusers inside. Then, a servant girl accuses Peter as an associate of Jesus. He replies with a plea of ignorance: ⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean" (26.69-70).

Uncomfortable with this encounter, Peter moved from where he was sitting to the entrance to the courtyard. There another servant girl singled him out as an associate of Jesus. Again, Peter denied the Lord Jesus. This time he does so with an oath, and he refers to Jesus as "the man": 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" (26.71-72).

Some time passes. Then the bystanders approach Peter and affirm that he must be an associate of Jesus because of his Galilean accent added to the suspicions of the servant girls. This third encounter leads Peter to deny the Lord Jesus again, but now he adds an angry curse to his disclaimers, he places a curse on himself: ⁷³After 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" (26.73-74). Writers call this a self-maledictory oath by which he swears before God that he is telling the truth, so others will believe him. Thus, he says, "If I am not telling the truth, then may God set His hand of judgment against me." He clearly disobeys the command of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "swear not but let your yes be yes and your no, no" (Mat. 5.33-37).

2) His regret

Immediately, upon speaking the words of his third denial of Christ, the rooster crowed, Peter remembered what Jesus had said, left the area, and went off by himself to weep bitter tears: ⁷³After 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 (26.73-75). The narrator gives no comment.

2B. The sin and regret of Judas

The narrator presents the sin of Judas in a single summary phrase calling him Jesus' betrayer (27.3, **Judas, his betrayer**). Matthew returns to discuss Judas in the context of the deliverance of Jesus to Pilate: ^{27.1}**When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.** ² **And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.** (27.1-2). At this point in time, Judas expresses his regret to the chief priests. They respond callously to his scruples and change of mind: ³ **Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders,** ⁴**saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself"** (27.3-4; blame shifting they say: that is *your* responsibility). Judas then threw the money into the temple and went out and hanged himself: ⁵**And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself** (27.5). The narrator is silent as to any evaluative or interpretive comments.

2A. The work of Christ in one and not in the other

Let us take these accounts in reverse order: Christ does not do a work in Judas, but He does do His work in Peter (not...but, not in Judas, but in Peter)

1B. Not in Judas

Throwing the pieces of silver into the temple *to the potter* according to OT prophecy is figurative (Zech. 11.13; **Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"- the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter**). It refers to throwing the money into the temple (as Judas did) with the money eventually used to purchase the field that was once owned by a potter.

Thus, God fulfilled His will. He decided ahead of time which sins these people (Judas and the chief priests) would commit, of all the sins that they purposed to do. The despairing regret of Judas, cynical indifference of the "holy" priests, the casting of the coins into the temple, the suicide of Judas, the hypocritical piety that led to the purchase of the potter's field (for a place of burial for strangers who might die in Jerusalem to be buried at the city's expense), and the naming of the field as the field of blood (as a perpetual indictment against the Council and nation) all fall into place by the providential controlling hand of God. Accordingly, Matthew says, **Then was fulfilled what had been spoken..."And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel,¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me"** (Mat. 27.9-10; there are of number of difficulties in this citation of the OT that merit discussion at another time, cf. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 513-515). The Lord did not intervene to prevent any of these events; He so directed the affairs of men (so directs them always) that His will comes to pass through them. This included the lack of mercy from priests toward Judas, his inflamed conscience, their rebuff, and His death by self-destruction.

Powerfully, Zechariah states that the *shepherd* throws the money into the temple to the potter under God's direction (Zech. 11.12-13). Matthew puts various OT passages together to make the astounding point that *Jesus* threw the coins into the temple: His plan came to fulfillment. In other words, He passed by Judas leaving Him to this course of events under His sovereign control. In the end, the Lord Jesus chose not to reveal the Father to Judas. As He had said, the Son of man will be delivered up, but woe to that man by whom He is delivered up (Mat. 26.24; 11.27, He reveals the Father to whom He chooses to reveal Him).

2B. But in Peter

With Peter, there is an entirely different story. Interestingly, this account of Peter's denial and regret is the last mention of Peter by name in the book of Matthew. The narrative before us gives us no commentary on this bitter weeping. On the surface, it might be of the same category with the regret of Judas. However, when we compare Peter with Judas in this way, our intuitions, I dare say, cry out against putting them in the same category. This is the case because we have a larger context and we know the end of the story. We have the Gospel of John and the resolution of Peter's three denials by three questions of love (Jn. 21). We have the record in Acts of Peter's preaching. We also have Peter's own writings in which he indicates how "tearful" suffering carries with it the promise of spiritual development more precious than silver and gold.

In Matthew's account, Peter is put with the disciples and not with Judas when we read that the *eleven* went to Galilee to meet Jesus (28.16). Judas is consciously, though silently, passed by in the record of eleven instead of twelve. Peter, therefore, goes to meet and worship the Lord Jesus.

Furthermore, we know that Peter weeps tears of true repentance because of the promise of Jesus to make him the rock of the church: ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mat. 16.16-18). Therefore, Jesus put everything in place in order to keep a tight grip on Peter. What work did He do for and in Peter that He did not do in Judas? We can answer this briefly: He worked in Peter's heart by prayer, eye contact, and a rooster.

1) He prayed for Peter

Luke 22:31-34 ³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." ³³ Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." ³⁴ Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." Jesus prays effectually for the people God gave to Him to save (cf. Jn. 17; Heb. 2.11-13). His "five bleeding wounds...pour effectual prayers" crying "forgive...forgive...nor let that ransomed sinner die" (*Trinity Hymnal*, 223).

2) He turned toward and looked Peter in the eyes

Luke 22:59-62, And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly. His working is truly personal (analogously, by name).

3) He pierced Peter's heart with His word by means of the crowing rooster

The timing is a wonder of providence in fulfillment of the Lord's prediction regarding the desertion of all the disciples with special and pointed emphasis on the three denials of Peter. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crows: ³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' ³² But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." ³³ Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." ³⁵ Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same (Mat. 26.31-35). On that occasion, Peter (and the disciples) had the last word (v. 35): **Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!** Now, the time comes when the guards bring Jesus out of the house of Caiaphas. He passes near Peter, *but He does not pass him by!* Instead, He peers into the eyes of Peter and into His soul, and at that moment, just after Peter's third and emphatic denial of Jesus, the rooster crows. Therefore, Peter repents with true repentance because Jesus, the smitten shepherd sought him and found him ("loving me, seeking me, finding me, keeping me, He is mine").

Conclusion

Jesus will at times let us stray from the narrow path of obedience. He will even sometimes allow us to make fools of ourselves on one hand in our overconfidence and on the other hand in how we deny Him because of fear, because of our desires for our life and safety. However, He will never remove His firm grip on our souls. He continues to work on our behalf by His word and works of providence to call us to repentance *over the course of our journey*. This is His call that not only brings us to Him efficaciously in the beginning of the Christian life, but that also brings us along in fellowship efficaciously in the progress of the Christian life. It is certain that we will accomplish the specific works that He has ordained for us to do despite our sins and the painful consequences that our sins may bring upon us. He will see us through to the very end of our journey in ways that accord with His infinite glory and our eternal good.

To Him be all glory both now and forevermore, amen.