

Luke 22:47-62; John 21:15-19

The Certain Gospel: The Perils of Denying Jesus

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Jesus can turn the worst of deniers into the best of disciples. Let's think about **denial** for a moment. Denial means "to declare that something is untrue." We tend to think of denial as a bad thing. I recently watched the **Netflix Documentary** *Behind The Curve*. There is a growing movement of people who believe **the earth is flat**. They believe the earth is not a round globe but a flat disk surrounded by a barrier of ice. Some believe a dome covers the earth. If you've ever seen the **Truman Show** a dome covers his town. Others believe there is no dome but we stare up into infinite space. It's hotly debated.

Now how big of a denial is it to deny that the earth is **round**? It's huge. You have to ignore much of **modern science** as well as believe there's some sort of **conspiracy** that makes it **worth it for** someone to cover up that the earth is flat. You and I—I hope—would never deny the earth is round. But what if I were to tell you that this is **not the worst denial** we can commit? In fact, there's a **much worse** denial we **often** commit.

Each one of us struggles with **denying Jesus**. We struggle to **be faithful disciples**. We do this when we don't give **every part of our life** to him or we **don't tell others about him** because we're **embarrassed**. That's denying Jesus. It's actually much worse than denying the earth is round because what you believe and do about Jesus has **eternal weight**. If we're denying Jesus, the Lord of the universe, the Lord who created a beautiful round earth and all that lives and breathes on it, we need to change. In our text today we encounter **two forms of denying Jesus**:

Judas - Rejection of the heart (Luke 22:47-53)

We find the first denial in Judas who rejects Jesus in his heart. This is the week of Jesus' crucifixion and death. At the beginning of this week Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to **happy crowds** who believed he had come to overthrow the Romans. We call this the Triumphant Entry. Only the **religious leaders** are **rejecting** Jesus. Throughout that week leading up to Passover they try to find a way to **catch** Jesus, but they can't so they hire Judas to betray him. **Luke 22:3** says "**Satan** entered Judas" and then he betrays Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Luke 22:47-48 While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (NIV®)

We find our **first case** of denial in Judas. He is one of Jesus' twelve disciples and agrees to betray Jesus for "thirty pieces of silver" (Zech 11:12-13; Matt 26:15; c.f., Luke 22:1-6). Although the Bible doesn't tell us **exactly why** Judas did it it seems like he **loved money** more than Jesus (Matt 6:21). His heart didn't belong to Christ, but to other things he wanted more than Christ. He lived and traveled with Jesus for three years. He listened to his teachings, helped out, volunteered, but his heart was far from him and it was **disastrous**.

Matthew 26:24b "...But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." (NIV®)

When Jesus prayed for his disciples earlier that night after **Passover** he said this about his **disciples**.

John 17:12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. (NIV®)

The Bible goes on to tell us that Judas hanged himself (Matt 27:5; Acts 1:18-19). He didn't believe in **Jesus** or **forgiveness**. Rejecting Jesus in your heart is the **worst mistake** a person can make. You can go through all the right motions, looking and acting like a Christian or a good person, volunteering at church and helping out with outreach or the worship team or serving as a greeter, but if your heart isn't with Jesus you've rejected him. Judas kissed Jesus, a **warm** sign of greeting, but he didn't love him. We can lift our **hands** in **worship** and **song** and say the most amazing **prayers** but if our **hearts** don't belong to Jesus it's like we're a **foreign spy** living among God's people. One day we will be **caught** and brought to **trial**. Judas continued on this path and it destroyed him. Don't let that be you. Don't just be religious or go through the motions. Really love Jesus. Give him your heart.

Even at the end Jesus gives Judas the **opportunity to repent** by asking him **"if" he is betraying him**. Judas could have said **"No, I'm not going to betray you! I'm sorry!"** but he didn't. But you can admit you've betrayed Jesus and receive his **complete and total forgiveness** and come and be one of his disciples. *The first form of denial of Jesus we encounter we find in Judas, which is a rejection of the heart.*

The next person we encounter does not deny Jesus from the heart. His **heart is all in**, sometimes even in the wrong way. When the the soldiers come to take Jesus away Peter strikes "the high priest's servant, cutting off his **ear**" (John 18:10). Jesus says "no more of this!" and he **heals** the man (Luke 22:51). And then they lead Jesus away. Peter was going to be **brave** and **courageous** and fight them all off, but now his entire plan is **dashed to pieces** so he follows Jesus.

Luke 22:54-57 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. (NIV®)

Peter - Denial from fear and shame (Luke 22:54-62)

We find the second denial in Peter who denies Jesus due to fear and shame. You can **imagine** the situation where Peter **works up his courage** to follow Jesus so that if Jesus decides to fight back he'll be ready to assist. But then he encounters the "servant girl" and she's just **too intimidating a foe**.

Luke 22:58-60a A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. 59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." 60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" (NIV®)

All four gospels include Peter's denial of Jesus (Matt 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27). All of them **start** with a **lowly servant girl** asking Peter if he was one of Jesus' disciples. Just a short time prior he was **drawing his sword** and cutting off a man's ear, and now he is **cowering** under a **little girl's lie-detector test**. He must be afraid to **tell the truth** might lead to the **cross** for him too.

But Peter is **relatable**. His **heart is not in question**. He believes Jesus is the **Messiah** (Matt 16:16). He doesn't quite **understand** what that means but he's very much a disciple of Jesus. He doesn't want to betray him like Judas, but he's **easily ashamed**, easily afraid. For most of us I think we're just like Peter. We believe in Jesus but it's **difficult** for us to talk about him because we are **easily ashamed**. How many of us will admit we are Christians or go to church to our coworkers but won't tell them **the gospel**? An **author**

once said, “**Walk in line with your prayers.**” That means pray and then **act on your prayer**. Pray about your coworker’s need for Christ **and then go** tell them about Christ. Jesus said this earlier in Luke.

Luke 12:8-9 “I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. (NIV®)

Peter knew how serious it is to deny Jesus. Earlier that evening Jesus **prophesied** Peter would deny Jesus **three times** but Peter denied that too.

Luke 22:31-34 “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” 33 But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” 34 Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” (NIV®)

Satan laid claim to both Judas and Peter, but Peter’s heart belonged to Jesus and Satan **couldn’t enter** him. Peter **belongs** to Christ and here Christ is already prophesying Peter’s **restoration** after his denial in verse 32, “And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” It doesn’t say Satan entered Peter, **only Judas**. Peter **belongs** to Jesus and it **wounds him** when he realizes what he’s done.

Luke 22:60-62 Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly. (NIV®)

Peter’s tears are the mark of a **true disciple**. Judas was **remorseful**. He tried to give the money back (Matt 27:3-4) but he **doesn’t repent** from the heart. Instead he tries to **atone for his own sin** by taking his own life. Peter repents. Peter weeps from a **broken heart**. Peter gets he **can’t atone** for his own sin.

Three days later when he hears Jesus isn’t in the tomb he **runs** to it (Luke 24:12; John 20:4). But even after Jesus appears to the disciples, including Peter in a locked room (John 20:19), Peter **doesn’t** seem to **feel forgiven**. John’s gospel tells us Peter goes back to **fishing** in Galilee and that’s where Jesus finds him.

John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” 16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” 17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. (NIV®)

Jesus - Offers restoration (John 21:15-19)

Jesus offers restoration to any disciple who denies him. Jesus asks Peter **three times** if he loves him. Jesus is **walking Peter back** through his **three denials**. He is given him **three opportunities** to **repent** and **follow him**. **Jesus can turn the worst of deniers into the best of disciples**. I don’t care if you’ve put your faith in him and haven’t told a soul, or maybe you’ve even pretended like you don’t know Jesus or he’s not Lord of this world, Jesus can **forgive you** and **restore you** and **turn you** into the best disciple. I don’t think Jesus is going to **magically** take away our fear and shame but by his grace and Holy Spirit we can **work through it**.

Jesus can turn the worst of deniers into a reasonably okay disciple. What's **your story**? **Who** do you need to talk to? Where have you denied Jesus in your own life and need to **walk that path again**? Are you thinking of someone? **It's time** to **walk that path** with Jesus.

On the beach near the Sea of Galilee Jesus walked Peter back through his denials but he also promised that one day he would give Peter **another opportunity** to walk with Jesus to **the cross**, to **face his same fears from the night of the Passover** and **this time prevail**.

John 21:18-19 Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" (NIV®)

Jesus is prophesying Peter too will die on a cross. Church history tells us that Peter died by crucifixion. He became a **bold** disciple of Jesus. He shared the gospel and saw God work and we can too. Pick up your cross and follow Jesus (Matt 16:24).

Jesus can turn the worst of deniers into the best of disciples.

Jesus can do this because he also was **tempted** to deny God's plan. Satan tried to get him to turn on his Heavenly Father but he wouldn't. Jesus walked down the path God planned for him and he **never stumbled** and **never fell**. If you **repent** of your sins and put your **faith and trust in Jesus** you get Jesus' **unfaltering record on your account**. We're **not saved by being bold for Jesus**. We're **saved by God's grace**. There are some people we **still have time** to share with and this is an **encouragement** to go share with them. But there are others who have **died** who we can no longer share with. We can't hold that over ourselves but can let it drive us to **God's grace** and to obedience. Peter failed but Jesus still loved him and restored him. We're saved by **belonging to Jesus**. It's only **as we realize this** and **let the Holy Spirit leads** that we will share Christ with those who need him most. *Jesus can turn the worst of deniers into the best of disciples.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.