

Peter's Denials and Jesus' Faithfulness
John 18:15-27

Meanwhile Simon Peter was standing in the courtyard warming himself.

They said to him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" Peter denied it: "I am not!" (John 18:25)

If you take a snapshot of any short period of time in our lives, it probably looks chaotic, uncomfortable and painful. We can fixate on any one moment of our lives and get discouraged, overwhelmed and impatient.

Grace, however, takes the long view. Grace is all about a "not yet" theology of ourselves and others. The Bible makes it very clear that God is not finished with us and this Christian life is a long process (Rom. 8:18, 2 Cor. 4:15-18, 1 Pet 4:12, etc.). Jesus doesn't take a snapshot assessment and make final conclusions about our lives and neither should we.

This morning we get to see this in action through the darkest moment in the Apostle Peter's life. We see, in a case study of the life of Peter, man's unfaithfulness and Jesus' uncompromising faithfulness.

We are unfaithful, but Jesus is uncompromisingly faithful.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed them as they brought Jesus to Annas. (Now the other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, and he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard.) ¹⁶ But Simon Peter was left standing outside by the door. So the other disciple who was acquainted with the high priest came out and spoke to the slave girl who watched the door, and brought Peter inside. ¹⁷ The girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, "You're not one of this man's disciples too, are you?" He replied, "I am not." ¹⁸ (Now the slaves and the guards were standing around a charcoal fire they had made, warming themselves because it was cold. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.) ¹⁹ While this was happening, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus replied, "I have spoken publicly to the world. I always taught in the synagogues and in the temple courts, where all the Jewish people assemble together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said. They know what I said." ²² When Jesus had said this, one of the high priest's officers who stood nearby struck him on the face and said, "Is that the way you answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus replied, "If I have said something wrong, confirm what is wrong. But if I spoke correctly, why strike me?" ²⁴ Then Annas sent him, still tied up, to Caiaphas the high priest. ²⁵ Meanwhile Simon Peter was standing in the courtyard warming himself. They said to him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" Peter denied it: "I am not!" ²⁶ One of the high priest's slaves, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the orchard with him?" ²⁷ Then Peter denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed. (John 18:15-27)

The Jewish leaders had to be thrilled at the opportunity to arrest him at Gethsemane, because it would be away from the Passover crowds. The Jews were not permitted to have capital punishment, so they had to convince Rome that Jesus was in rebellion against Rome. Jesus needs to be tried by two courts, so they march him to Annas (former High Priest (6-15AD) and then Annas' son in law, Caiaphas (18-36AD). Caiaphas had already put in play for one man to die for the people (John 11:50-52).

Two events are being described simultaneously by John. One is Jesus' interrogation by Annas and then by Caiaphas (and the Sanhedrin) as Matthew and Mark describe. The second is Peter's interrogation by those around him. At the very moment Peter is denying Jesus, the Lord is displaying His uncompromising faithfulness and integrity.

After the Gethsemane arrest, this same Peter and another unnamed disciple follow the soldiers and Jesus to the house of Annas (this probably wasn't the temple, because it would be unlikely that a slave girl would be watching the door). Peter comes because he's loyal, but he is cold and tired, drained of the sudden rush of emotions and energy at Gethsemane. He must know that if the guards realized he'd not only been at Gethsemane, but also cut Malchus' ear, he might experience a similar fate that Jesus was pushing towards.

Who is this other disciple? It's unlikely that a fisherman from Galilee would have such ready access to the high priest's courtyard. It's possible it was John, but he too was a Galilean fisherman and he usually described himself *as the one that Jesus loved* (13:23-25, 20:2, 21:7, 20). I don't think we know who it is other than a Jerusalem believer.

What does Annas question Jesus about? Annas interrogates Jesus about two things: 1) His disciples and 2) His teaching (vs. 18). If, today, you catch someone you think is an insurrectionist, you want to know what he's been teaching and who his closest associates are. Jesus won't give them any help with finding his followers, but when it comes to his teaching, his response is interesting. Jesus basically says, everything I said is out in the open! He doesn't have one message for public consumption and a more dangerous

message for His intimate disciples. Jesus replies, “I have spoken openly to the world...synagogues and temple courts” (v. 20). Jesus is bringing a revolution, but it wasn’t a political one that His contemporaries were concerned about; it was a spiritual one that Jesus was pioneering through the cross (Matt 16: 21-28).

Regardless, nothing in secret was being communicated, unlike this unlawful trial he was going through in the middle of the night in someone’s home. It was illegal to try a man at night and Jesus is saying to Annas, “I have taught openly during the day...but you men are trying me at night, illegally.” This causes one of the temple guards to strike Jesus’ face. Jesus replied, “Testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” (18:23). If it was contempt of court, let’s talk about this. Jesus isn’t refusing to “turn the other cheek” in this moment (He is obviously moving towards the cross); rather, He is honest, direct and unconcerned about other’s opinions. Violence has begun and will escalate from here.

However, the case needed to rest on the witnesses and this is where we need to rely on Matthew and Mark to describe the next trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:57-68, Mark 14:53-65). Witnesses pass by, but all of them fail to meet minimum requirements. No two witnesses agree, and when two finally agree, the charges were not viable. They bring up his statement about the temple, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again” (John 2:19). In 19BC Herod the Great had begun a program of rebuilding the temple and 46 years later one of his sons was completing it. The main structure was finished in 9BC but work continued on it until 64AD (6 years after it was completed, Titus destroys it in 70AD). If Jesus’ words could be twisted as a threat of damaging Herod’s temple, then a threat to law and order could be established and Pilate would step in.

They ask Jesus in Matthew and Mark, “Why aren’t you answering?” And finally they just ask, “Are you the Christ, the Son of God?” Jesus responds, “I am the Son of Man coming in power and coming in the clouds of heaven.” In Daniel 7, Daniel has this great vision of the Ancient of Days that took his seat on his throne. His robes and hair are white as snow. A stream of fire came from his throne and tens of thousands stood ready to serve him. The court convened and the books of judgment were opened and one came like a “Son of Man” (7:13) and the Ancient of Days gave the Son of Man ruling authority, honor and sovereignty, His kingdom will not be destroyed (7:14). This judgment will be in favor of the holy ones of the Most High (Dan. 7:22, also a reference to Ps. 110:1—the royal authority of God’s vice-regent). The irony is that the council of the Sanhedrin are not the true judges; rather, the Son of Man, Jesus the Nazarene, is the final Son of Man judge.

Meanwhile Peter has followed Jesus—at a distance. Jesus is telling the High Priest the truth while Peter is telling lies to the servants. Jesus is speaking openly; Peter is doing his best to hide.

Servant girl who was the doorkeeper—“Surely you are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” (18:17)	1 st denial--“I am not.” (18:17)
Those standing in the courtyard warming themselves—“You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?” (18:25)	2 nd denial—“I am not.” (18:25)
Relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off—“Did I not see you in the orchard with him?” (18:26)	3 rd denial—“Peter curses and swears, ‘I do not know the man!’” (Matt 26:74, Mark 14:71, see also Luke 22:60, John 18:27)

In that final denial, Luke says that the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter and the rooster crows (Luke 22:60-61). Matthew, Mark and Luke say that Peter flees into the night weeping.

GRACE TAKES THE LONG VIEW

In our text, no one comes out looking good except for Jesus. Everything Jesus predicted happened just as He said it would. Under more stress and pressure than we will ever know, Jesus never failed. We are unfaithful, but Jesus is uncompromisingly faithful. Paul says, “If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, since he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:13). The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus will never leave us or abandon us (Heb. 13:5-6).

A snapshot of Peter’s life right here would have told us that Peter’s life would be an absolute train wreck. This is Peter on his worst day. Jesus restores Peter and we get to talk about that later (John 21:15-17), but with the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we find a transformed Peter. Acts 4:8-13 describes a Peter who now boldly proclaims the gospel, in spite of opposition.

If you pick up any one of our books and read a single entry, a single chapter, things might feel pretty discouraging and bleak. You might even feel panic and hopelessness. But Jesus is not finished writing your story and He isn’t finished writing my story.