

Mar. 22, 2015 – Mark 14:27-31

I Tell You the Truth...You Will Deny Me

- *Heed His warning*
- *Hear His promise*

There is an ancient Greek saying that has become somewhat famous. It says: “know thyself.” It can be beneficial to look at who we are and consider our skills and abilities, as well as our weaknesses. In Mark 14:12-21, which we considered last week, Jesus encouraged His disciples to do some self-reflection when He said to them, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”

But sometimes we do not have an accurate picture of who we are. Often others know us better than we know ourselves. Sometimes the best way to learn about yourself is not to look in the mirror, but to listen – especially to the One who knows you the best: your Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ. In Mark 14:27-31 Jesus shows us how well He knows His disciples and us.

Jesus and the eleven disciples had just sung the closing Psalm of the Passover celebration and left the upper room. On the way to the Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26, 32) Jesus told His disciples that they would all stumble and desert Him that very night.

Peter protested: “*Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be [made to stumble].*” Jesus replied with another “I tell you the truth” statement. This one is unique in that it is addressed to only one person – it is addressed specifically to Peter. Jesus said, “*Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.*”

When we look at the record of this evening in Luke (22:31-34) and John (13:36-38), it seems that Jesus had already warned Peter even before they left the upper room that he would deny Him. I can imagine Peter thinking, “Why does Jesus keep saying that I will deny Him?!? I would never do that!”

Peter thought he knew himself better than Jesus knew him. He vehemently protested: “*If I have to die with You, I will not deny you!*” How do these words sound to you? Peter seems pretty self-confident, even proud. “Even if everyone else leaves you, I will stay by your side.” The book of Proverbs says: “*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Proverbs 16:18).

For Peter, this proverb came true. He did fall. The words of Jesus were fulfilled. At the fire in the courtyard of the high priest Peter denied being one of Jesus’ disciples – he denied even knowing Him at all! (Mark 14:66-72) Even though Jesus had warned him, he still did it. He did not listen to or believe Jesus words here. Peter here illustrates the warning in 1 Corinthians 10:12: “*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*”

But we should not single out Peter here. The disciples “*all said likewise*” (v. 31). They all claimed that they would not fall away but that that they would all stand by Jesus, even though He had told them that they all would “*be made to stumble*” and be scattered that night (v. 27). These words of Jesus also came true. When He was arrested, “*they all forsook Him and fled*” (Mark 14:50).

What about you? Have you ever denied Jesus? You may not have said the words: “I do not know that man Jesus” (see Mark 14:71). You may never have said, “I am not a Christian.” But how often have we denied Jesus by what we have done or what we have failed to do. When we have an opportunity to tell others what Jesus has done for them, but find it easier to say nothing, we deny Jesus. When we speak hurtful words or do sinful things, we deny Jesus.

It is also easy to have the same attitude as Peter and the other disciples. We think that we are stronger than we really are. We convince ourselves that the questionable things that we may do will not affect us. “Even if everyone else falls, I will stand.” But we should heed the warnings that God gives us in His word. We should learn from Jesus and the disciples not to be confident in ourselves. Rather we should say with the Apostle Paul, “*I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells...*” (Romans 7:18).

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God warns us that “*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*” The Lord goes on to say: “*I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.*” This can be a scary thought when we consider what is sometimes in our hearts and minds.

But the words of Jesus here are not just bad news. He also spoke good news. Did you catch it? Between telling the disciples that they all would be scattered and telling Peter that he would deny Him that very night, Jesus said, “*But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee*” (v. 32). His disciples would scatter that night, but the Shepherd who was struck would rise and gather His sheep. Even though they deserted Him, He would still go before them to Galilee and call them to Himself. They would stumble, but Jesus would restore them.

The very reason the Shepherd was struck was to earn forgiveness for their sins. He was struck to earn forgiveness for the sins of the whole world. Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from dead, God forgave the disciples all their sins, even their sin of denying and deserting the only Son of God. It is because He had taken away their sin that Jesus could go before them to Galilee and receive them again as His beloved disciples.

When we read the words of Jesus to Peter here, we may gloss over the rooster crowing as simply a way to mark time. But it is more than that. It was a way that Jesus would remind Peter of this warning and call Him to repentance. It shows the love and concern of our Savior. We read later in this chapter that when Peter denied Jesus the third time, the rooster crowed a second time, “*Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.’ And when he thought about it, he wept*” (Mark 14:72). Luke records that the rooster crowed while the words were still coming of Peter’s mouth. Peter heard the rooster crow and it brought to mind what Jesus had said. This simple rooster caused Peter to realize his sin and led him to go out and weep bitterly for having denied his Lord (Matthew 26:75, Luke 22:62).

How often do you weep over your sin? I don’t often weep over mine, but I should. We have all denied Jesus one way or another. And our sins, whatever their form, caused Jesus to suffer and die on the cross.

But don’t lose sight of the good news of Jesus here. When the women came to the tomb that first Easter morning, the angel told them to go and remind the disciples of what Jesus had said here in verse 28. The angel said them: “*But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you*” (Mark 16:7). Notice that in these words Peter is again singled out. That is no accident.

After Peter denied Jesus and went out to weep, we don’t hear anything about him until Sunday morning when he receives this message from the angel through the women who went to the tomb. We can only imagine what was going through his mind. Jesus had been put to death on a cross and buried. It seemed like their three year run of touring the area and performing miracles had come to a violent end, and the last thing Peter had done was deny Jesus and Jesus knew that he had denied Him. But here Peter received a personal reminder, not of Jesus’ warning, but of Jesus’ promise – His promise to go before him to Galilee.

In this promise, Jesus points the disciples to Himself. He is the solution to their sin. He didn't tell them, "You will fall, but you will come around and do better." Rather He said that He would call them and lead them to Galilee.

This is why it is important to listen to Jesus, the One who knows us the best. If we ignore His warnings, like Peter, we will try to stand on our own, and, like Peter, we will end up falling. If we miss His promise of rising and going before us, we will again focus on ourselves and try to do better on our own and fall again. The solution is in the Shepherd who was struck but didn't stay down. He took all of your sin with Him to the cross and rose again so that your sins are forgiven. You have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you (Galatians 2:20). It is by fixing our eyes on Jesus, not on ourselves, that we can live a new life, for it is He who makes us a new creation.

Every Sunday we pray the words of Psalm 51:10: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*" We ask God to do these things because are things only God can do. Self-reflection and analysis can only go so far. We need God to work in us and save us from our sinful selves. This is also illustrated in the prayer of Psalm 141:3-4a, which asks: "*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice wicked works...*"

So listen to the One who knows you the best. Heed His warnings and listen to His promises. May they lead you to turn to Him for the forgiveness you need and for the strength and ability to follow Him. He is the only one with the solution for your sin. He was struck for you and has been raised up and He has gone before you. You can look forward to a reunion with Him – not on a mountain in Galilee – but in His eternal kingdom where He has prepared a place for you.

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