

The Gospel of Luke (#101); The Arrest of Jesus

Last Lord's Day we left off with our Lord in Gethsemane, praying intensely to His Father and appealing to His disciples that they were also to be praying. After having been about a stone's throw distance from them, Jesus returned to them finding them asleep. He again warned them of the trial that was soon to come upon them. This is where we may resume our reading of Luke's account. Here is Luke 22:47-62:

And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him. ⁴⁸But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

⁴⁹When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

⁵¹But Jesus answered and said, "Permit even this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

⁵²Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

⁵⁴Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This man was also with Him."

⁵⁷But he denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him."

⁵⁸And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are of them."

But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

⁵⁹Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean."

⁶⁰But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!"

Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ⁶²So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

To better assess and digest what is before us, we will consider the following divisions:

1. The arrest of Jesus (22:47-53)
2. Peter's denial of Jesus (22:54-62)
3. A few lessons we may learn from this episode in the life of our Lord and His disciples

I. The arrest of Jesus (22:47-53)

Verses 47 and 48 set forth the treachery of Judas Iscariot and his leading role in the arrest of Jesus.

And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him. ⁴⁸But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

This account of Judas reveals the hideous nature of his betrayal. He is referred to in verse 47 as “one of the twelve”, one of the closest to the Master, who had given Judas great privileges and promises respecting his role and future in His kingdom. Judas betrayed Jesus to the mob through the sign of a kiss, which was the customary way of greeting a friend. Through this betrayal of Jesus, Judas became the archetype for traitor for all subsequent history.

Apparently Judas was not simply the guide for this armed band, showing them where Jesus could be found, although that is suggested in Luke’s account. “And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called **Judas**, one of the twelve, *went before them* and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him.” But Judas was not just directing the way for those bent on arresting Jesus, Judas was actually the leader of this mob. Matthew records, “Judas came..., with him a great crowd.” Judas is the subject of Matthew’s account. He is the leader, the chief of the band of thugs. John’s Gospel makes this point more pronounced. There we read, “So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons” (John 18:3).

Our Lord and His disciples must have known the mob was upon them even before Judas approached them in the garden. It was a rather large group of men, who could be both heard and seen some distance from the garden. Perhaps due to the “lanterns and torches”, Judas and his mob were known to the disciples as soon as they had passed through the city gate and had begun to travel up the hill the quarter mile, or so, to the garden.

Judas had gathered a group that represented several interests. There was “a great multitude with swords and clubs”, according to Matthew’s record, which may have included a Roman contingency, but was more likely a group of Jewish “soldiers”, who had authority within the Jewish community and particularly in the temple area. John recorded that this mob came “with lanterns, torches, and weapons” (John 18:3). Judas had come from the *priests* and the *elders* of the Jewish people. He came on their behalf and in their authority (Matt. 23:47). John’s Gospel also recorded that Judas and his mob had come from the *Pharisees*.

It was “a great crowd” that had come to arrest Jesus. Perhaps Judas and the Jewish leadership brought so many to arrest Jesus because they anticipated the people rising to defend Jesus to prevent His arrest. They had hesitated on other occasions to act, because they had been afraid of the people (cf. Matt. 21:46; Luke 22:2). This is why they came late at night with many in their number, having prepared for the worst of scenarios.

Matthew refers to Judas as “the betrayer” (26:48). He had provided the leaders of the arresting party with a sign. “Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; seize Him’” (26:48). This was a common manner in which a friend would greet a friend. It suggests that Judas was without the least bit of sympathy for Jesus. Judas did not hesitate, it would seem, for “he came up to Jesus at once and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ And he kissed Him.” As one wrote,

He (Judas) came close up to Jesus; surely now, if ever, his wicked heart will relent; surely when he comes to look Him in the face, he will either be awed by its majesty, or charmed by its beauty. Dares he to come into His very sight and presence, to betray Him? Peter denied Christ, but when *the Lord turned and looked upon him*, he relented presently; but Judas comes up to his Master’s face, and betrays Him... He said, *Hail, Master; and kissed him*. It should seem, our Lord Jesus had been wont to admit His disciples to such a degree of familiarity with Him, as to give them His cheek to kiss after they had been any while absent, which Judas villainously used to facilitate this treason. A kiss is a token of allegiance and friendship (cf. Ps. 2:12). But Judas, when he broke all the laws of love and duty, profaned this sacred sign to serve his purpose. Note, there are many that betray Christ with *a kiss*, and *Hail, Master*; who, under pretense of doing Him honour, betray and undermine the interests of His kingdom...¹

On occasion you may find an account in a movie or a book that portrays Judas in a sympathetic light, as though he were simply a misguided zealot who was attempting to force Jesus to come forward and deliver the Jewish people through a political and military victory against their Roman oppressors. But that is not how the Gospels portray him. Judas was a murderer, and a thief. We read about his thievery in John 12:3ff.

¹ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible** (Fleming H. Revell), vol. 5, p. 400.

Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (he who was about to betray Him), said, ⁵“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ⁶***He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.***

⁷Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.” (John 12:3-7)

Judas stands forth as one of the most treacherous and evil men in all of literature. Because of his name, Judas, and its close sound to “Jewish”, there have been unjust and unwarranted association and identification of the character of Judas with all within Judaism. Anti-Semites seem to fixate upon Judas in their efforts to express and foment hatred for the Jewish people. One wrote of this:

The figure of Judas is one of the deepest and darkest not only in the Gospels but in all literature. People have written whole books trying to get to the bottom of what precisely he did and why. Sometimes he has been used, in much later so-called Christian thinking, as a reason to attack Jews. His name, after all, is ‘Judah’, the same root word as ‘Judea’; and in Greek the word for Jews is *Ioudaioi*, ‘Judea-people’, ‘Judah-people’, ‘Judas-people’. More recently, some have reacted against this madness in the opposite direction, either suggesting that Judas never existed and that the Gospel writers invented him as an anti-Jewish move, or that what he did wasn’t betrayal, but of what Jesus had intended all along.

None of this gets near the heart of the matter. All the characters in the story, except for the Roman officials, are of course Jews. And ‘Judas’, like ‘Jesus’, was a very common name among first-century Jews. Judah was the patriarch from whose family King David had come; Judas Maccabaeus was the great hero of two centuries before, who had liberated Judea from the Syrians. The leader of the tax revolt during Jesus’ boyhood was called ‘Judas the Galilean’. The name had both royal and revolutionary echoes. One of Jesus’ own brothers was called Judas. It’s not surprising there are two people with that name among the Twelve (the other one is probably the same person as ‘Thaddaeus’ in 10:3).

We distance ourselves and repudiate any and all efforts to use the name and reputation of Judas Iscariot to foment or perpetuate racism against the Jewish people. Antisemitism is evil and ungodly. This is not to say there was not collective guilt for the Jewish generation of that time for having unjustly put to death their promised Messiah. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, Pilate would later affirm that the trial of Jesus was due to the Jewish people. John 18:35 records his words, “Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’” But we do not castigate the Jewish people as being more wicked or guilty than any other racial entity that has existed in God’s world. The Jewish people had been greatly privileged before God. But with great privilege comes great responsibility and accountability. The Apostle Paul proved that the Jews were equally guilty and condemned before God as the Gentile world, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10). The law of God condemns all the world. Paul wrote, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). But thankfully, God is a merciful and gracious God in that He saves undeserving sinners through faith in Jesus Christ.

But Judas was a wicked, treacherous, and dishonest man. Judas was a traitor. He was moved by an absence of love for Jesus and a love for money to betray Him into the hands of wicked men. Judas became an archetype of a betrayer or traitor, perhaps only rivaled here in America by Benedict Arnold during The Revolutionary War (1775-1783). To be a “Judas” is to betray one’s friends with treachery, deceit, and heartlessness. One thousand years before this incident, King David had experienced a similar betrayal, as he expressed in Psalm 41.

⁴I said, “Lord, be merciful to me;

Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.”
⁵My enemies speak evil of me:
 “When will he die, and his name perish?”
⁶And if he comes to see me, he speaks lies;
 His heart gathers iniquity to itself;
 When he goes out, he tells it.
⁷All who hate me whisper together against me;
 Against me they devise my hurt.
⁸“An evil disease,” they say, “clings to him.
 And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more.”
⁹Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted,
 Who ate my bread,
 Has lifted up his heel against me.

David’s words of verse 9 are quoted in John’s Gospel as having been “fulfilled” in Judas betraying Jesus (John 13:18).

Our Lord had known from the beginning who would betray Him (cf. John 6:44). Nevertheless, Jesus treated Judas as His friend. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote,

He (Jesus) calls him *friend*. If He had called him *villain*, and *traitor*, *raca*, *thou fool*, and *child of the devil*, He had not *mis-called* him; but He would teach us under the greatest provocation to forbear bitterness and evil-speaking, and to show all meekness. *Friend*, for a friend he had been, and should have been, and seemed to be. Thus He upbraids him, as Abraham, when he called the rich man in hell, *son*. He calls him *friend*, because he furthered His sufferings, and so *befriended* him; whereas, he called Peter *satan* for attempting to hinder them.²

We then read of *the trial and temptation of the disciples (22:49-51)*

⁴⁹*When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”* ⁵⁰*And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.*

⁵¹*But Jesus answered and said, “Permit even this.” And He touched his ear and healed him.*

The Lord had warned His disciples of the temptation that would soon come upon them (v. 40). They were to be watchful so as to recognize it when it came so that they would not fail. But they had been sleeping rather than praying. And because they had failed to pray, they failed to stand true and firm. The form of temptation was to take matters into their own hands in defending Him and themselves. In so doing they violated the will of God. It may be that more Christians violate the will of God through this means than any other. They fail to suffer for the glory of God by entrusting themselves to Him. They choose, rather, to act in a manner to secure their own perceived interests, with little regard for the glory of God.

We read of a feeble attempt of a disciple to defend the Lord Jesus and prevent his capture. **Verse 51** reads, “*And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.*” This was a rash action, and a futile one. Our Lord rebukes the action; “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place’” (Matt. 26:52). As one wrote,

Note, *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual*; and Christ’s ministers, though they are His soldiers, do not *war after the flesh* (2 Cor. 10:3, 2 Cor. 10:4). Not that the law of Christ overthrows either the law of nature or the law of nations, as far as those warrant subjects to stand up in defense of their civil rights and liberties, and their religion, when it is incorporated with them; but it

² Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible** (Fleming H. Revell), vol. 5, p. 401.

provides for the preservation of public peace and order, by forbidding private persons, *qua tales*—as *such*, to resist the powers that are; nay, we have a general precept that we *resist not evil* (Matt. 5:39), nor will Christ have His ministers propagate His religion by force of arms, *Religio cogi non potest; et defendenda non occidendo, sed moriendo*—*Religion cannot be forced; and it should be defended, not by killing, but by dying.*³

Matthew tells us that the Lord commanded the sword wielder to sheath his sword. The reason stated in Matthew, however, is different than what we read in Luke or John. **Matthew 26:52** reads, “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. ***For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.***”

Our Lord was not quoting Scripture when He made this statement. But He was, of course, stating Scriptural truth regarding God’s providential dealings in the world. God is the Sovereign Ruler of His world and He has established His law by which He governs the world in His providence. One abiding principle is that ***those who perpetrate evil upon others, will receive evil from others.*** This is a general rule, for there are exceptions in God’s dealings. Not that any evil action will escape a just recompense, for that will indeed happen. But it may not happen in this life. Retribution and justice will be fully administered on Judgment Day. Our Lord was setting forth a general maxim, or spiritual principle that is operative in His world. If you live in a manner characterized by violence, then your own end will result from violence. The common way we speak of this abiding spiritual principle is that ***a man reaps what he sows.***

Paul wrote of this spiritual law as applying to our salvation:

⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal. 6:7-10)

This principle of sowing and reaping is found throughout Scripture. We read these two proverbs that reflect the principle:

“The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.” (Prov. 11:18)

“Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail.” (Prov. 22:8)

Whereas above, the principle is set forth in negative terms, the same principle is set forth elsewhere in a positive way. Paul set forth the principle of sowing and reaping in the matter of charitable giving to needy Christians.

⁶But this I say: ***He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*** ⁷So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. ⁹As it is written:

“He has dispersed abroad,
He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, ¹¹while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. (2 Cor. 9:6-11)

³ Ibid., p. 401.

We need to understand that when our Lord said, “For all who take the sword will perish by the sword”, ***He was not condemning self-defense or self-protection.*** He was not condemning the use of force in ***law enforcement.*** He was not condemning the use of force of ***the military.*** He was addressing the kind of life that is characterized by ***impulsive, vengeful, aggression and violence.*** We read in the Scriptures that it is legitimate for society to have crimes punishable by execution. When Noah disembarked the ark, God established standards of righteousness that should govern all society throughout the world. In Genesis 9:6 we read, ***“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”*** We also read in the New Testament,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Rom. 13:1-4)

The Lord told Peter to put up his sword because *it was not necessary for our Lord to defend Himself by this means*. He said, “Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?” A legion was a term used by the Romans to describe large groups of their forces. The number of soldiers in a legion would vary at different times in history, but when the Lord spoke these words, a legion would have probably been understood as comprising about 6,000 soldiers. Our Lord told Peter that with just a word to His Father, He could have upwards to 72,000 angels dispatched to deliver Him and them from their oppressors. When we consider the power of even one angel to slay 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (cf. 2 Kings 19:35), the idea that our Lord was conveying was that infinite power was available to deliver Him, if that was what was needed and it was the will of His Father in heaven.

But His escape from suffering and death was not what was called for. Jesus said to Peter, “***But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?***” There are a number of Old Testament verses that could be cited, but we might consider this from a Messianic Psalm:

LORD, how they have increased who trouble me!
Many are they who rise up against me. (Psa. 3:1)

Our Lord was resolved to fulfill His destiny. They would not take His life from Him, but He would give up His life to death in order to bring salvation to His people. In another place the Lord Jesus said,

“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father.” (John 10:17f)

The Lord had rebuked His disciples for wielding their sword in two ways. First, He gave them a stern rebuke: “***Permit even this***”, or, “***No more of this.***” The Greek text reveals that this was a command by Jesus not just for the one disciple who struck the servant of the high priest, but for all His disciples who were present. The Greek verb (Εἰ̅δ̅ε̅τε) translated “Permit” is (technically) a present, active, imperative (command) in the 2nd person plural. In other words, Jesus was speaking to all His disciples who were with Him in the garden, not just the one who had struck Malchus.

Matthew recorded more words of Jesus that corrected this action than did the other Gospel writers. In Matthew's Gospel we read Jesus saying,

“Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?” (Matt. 26:52-54)

The second way in which Jesus rebuked His disciples' action was by undoing their act, in restoring the ear of the servant who had been harmed. We read, "***But Jesus answered and said, 'Permit even this.' And He touched his ear and healed him.***" "Permit even this" is Jesus telling His disciples that they were not to prevent this mob from accomplishing their intentions to arrest Him. Jesus performed a miracle in restoring fully this man's ear. Luke, who was a Physician, was the only Gospel writer that recounted Jesus healing this man's ear. It is interesting that only John's Gospel records the name of this servant of the high priest as Malchus. It is also interesting that none of the three Synoptic Gospels⁴ identify which disciple attacked the servant of the high priest. John did so, however, having written, "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus" (John 18:18).

We read of *the ferocity of the arresting party* in verses 52 and 53.

⁵²Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Our Lord seems to use irony to confront those who came out to arrest Him, so many of them against Him alone. And yet, in another sense, He was indeed a great threat to them. As one described it:

The crowd that came to arrest Jesus brought swords and clubs. Jesus was certainly justified in teasing them for treating Him as though He was a heavily armed brigand with a band of soldiers to protect Him. However, they knew He was talking about God's ***kingdom***, and doing some powerful things to back it up. They may have figured that they could take no chances. If they were going to do anything during Passover-time, it had to be done quickly, at night, away from the huge crowds that were filling the city... What Jesus had been saying and doing was not perceived as what we mean by 'religious'. If you talked about God's kingdom at Passover-time, it could never be merely a matter of private spirituality. It means revolution. If someone else had a rival plan, it meant violence. If they caught you, it probably meant death.⁵

They were a mob, and they were treating Jesus like He was a violent criminal. Their treachery and injustice is heightened by the fact that they came to Him at night, being heavily armed, even though He had done nothing but teach the people daily in the temple. Jesus declared that they were motivated and empowered by satan, whose servants they were. He declared to them "***But this is your hour, when darkness reigns.***" This was all instigated by the devil working in and through evil men, but God was using them to accomplish His eternal decree of His Son dying to redeem His people from their sin. The apostles would later declare these words in their prayer to God the Father:

"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done." (Acts 3:27f)

We read in Matthew's account of our Lord's disciples: "***But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled***" (Matt. 26:56). This was in fulfillment of our Lord's words: "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'" (Matt. 26:31).

⁴ Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospels are commonly called the Synoptic Gospels for they generally record the same events of Jesus' ministry, and they generally follow the same order in which they occurred. John's Gospel is quite different in content and organization.

⁵ Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part Two* (Westminster, John Knox Press, 2002, 2004), p. 163f.

We may next consider...

II. Peter's denial (22:54-62)

⁵⁴Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This man was also with Him."

⁵⁷But he denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him."

⁵⁸And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are of them."

But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

⁵⁹Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean."

⁶⁰But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!"

Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ⁶²So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

We spent sufficient time on this matter several weeks ago when we were considering Luke 22:31 through 34, in which Jesus foretold Peter of his betrayal that very night. And so, so we will only touch on these events at this time. Jesus earlier had told Peter over his objection, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me" (Luke 22:34).

Peter was about to learn a great lesson, and in so doing he would be stripped of all self-reliance and self-confidence. He would be rendered a very humble, trusting disciple, who was thereafter fit to lead men, due to this humiliating event of his life.

Upon Judas' signal, we can assume that the crowd violently seized Jesus and led Him away. "Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him" (26:50b). It was rightly said that "He became a prisoner, that He might set us at liberty." But Peter then "followed at a distance." Not all the disciples did so. Most of them fled and went hiding. But Peter (and John) followed "at a distance" the mob that had bound Jesus and were carrying Him to the house of the high priest.

Perhaps Peter could be compared to many professing believers in Jesus, who claim to follow Him, but do so at a distance--close enough to Him to convince themselves, "Yes, I am following Jesus", but far enough so that the reproach of Christ might not fall on them--just far enough away that they could make a denial, if things got difficult to stand up for the Lord.

We do not mean to be too hard on Peter, for he reflected our own tendencies. We want the benefits of believing on Jesus, but we also want an easy out, if the costs seem too high for us. By the way, Luke's account of Peter's denial is rather mild when compared to Mark's account. Mark records Peter cursing when he denied knowing the Lord. We read there, "Then he (Peter) began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this Man of whom you speak!'"

Why is Mark's account so severe? Very likely Mark's Gospel is a record of Peter's eyewitness testimony; early church tradition records it as such. So you see, Peter speaks of his denial of Jesus in much harsher terms than did Luke. A person without grace will try and paint his failures in as favorable a manner as he can devise, but a person who has God's grace operative in his life will own up to his failures and describe them as hideous acts deserving of condemnation.

The murderous mob took Jesus to the house of the Jewish high priest, perhaps Annas, or maybe his father-in-law, Caiaphas. It was a house which was not Jewish in architecture, but Hellenistic (Greek). It was a large house with an inner courtyard with rooms which opened to it. In this way Peter at the fire in the courtyard could see Jesus in the room in which He was being interrogated, and Jesus could see him throughout this ordeal. I imagine Peter thought himself to be standing quite firm for his master as he stood by this fire in the courtyard. But the three denials came as Jesus had predicted. And Peter was humbled. The Lord has a way of plowing through us in a very thorough manner.

Had it first been an armed soldier which had threatened Peter which led to his denial, Peter might have justified himself to a measure in his own thinking. But the Lord ordered events in order to strip him bare and humble him before Him. It only took a young maid to cause Peter to cower in fear and to voice his denial; the Lord use this rather lowly, helpless maid to shrivel Peter's pride. And then, if it all had happened at once, all three accusations and denials in a few moments of time, one might have excused Peter somewhat for his response. But these three denials were spaced apart. He had time to think after one failure, "what shall I say if the challenge comes again?" The third charge was about an hour after the initial challenge (22:59ff).

It was the rooster crowing which signaled to him his failure (22:60). And the fact the rooster crowed at the precise time of his third denial drove his failure home to him. Of course it was the Lord's purpose in doing so. He sovereignly caused that rooster to crow at the exact moment Peter denied Him on the third occasion, just as He had predicted earlier that evening. Peter then looked at the Lord. The Lord looked at him (22:60). And it was done. Peter was cured of his pride.

Self-confidence may be an admirable trait in the eyes of the world, but it has no place in the heart of a disciple. Peter had self-confidence at the supper table a few hours before, which led him to boast of his love for Christ and of his courage and fidelity to stay true. Peter had a measure of *self-confidence* in the garden shaken somewhat, but it was sufficient for him to attempt to remove the head of Malchus. But Peter was no soldier, only a fisherman. His former degree of courage also was sufficient to embolden him to follow at a distance and to enter the courtyard. But here, self-confidence was taken from him. From here on he would look to God's grace to enable him to stand, rather than to his own resolve or strength which fails under real trial.

You and I are an hour away from failure if we trust in ourselves. Our reliance on ourselves will put us in places, like this garden, places of temptation where we cannot stand. Peter went out and wept bitterly. Our Lord's spiritual surgery upon Peter was complete and successful. He would bear the scars of this surgery for a lifetime, reminding him of what would occur if he trusted in himself, rather than his Master.

III. Several lessons we may glean from this episode in the life of our Lord and His disciples

1. There are times when we may legitimately attempt to escape hardship and danger.

Our Lord chose not to escape the threats and the danger of those who opposed Him. But we should not assume, therefore, that we are never to take steps with regard to self-defense, to escape danger, or preserve our lives.

Some would argue that to live as a Christian, to live with Jesus Christ as a pattern for us, that we should not take steps to secure our safety or protection. They would say that a Christian should never take up arms or prepare himself in order to protect himself and his family. One should be wholly passive and vulnerable, and trust the Lord alone to provide protection. But this is not correct. Our Lord saw to it that His disciples had the means at hand to protect themselves. Jesus had told His disciples earlier that evening that two swords were sufficient for their self-defense.

2. There are times when we should not attempt to deliver ourselves from hardship and suffering; it is the will of God to endure hardship, not escape it.

There are occasions when Christians fail to suffer for the glory of God, entrusting themselves to Him, but rather choosing to act in a manner to secure their own perceived interests. They see their happiness or the preservation of their riches or reputation in the eyes of the world as greater motivation than being faithful to the Lord and suffer for doing so.

Many Christians forfeit the great blessing they could enjoy in being fruitful in our Lord's service because they do all they can to avoid the tension, hardship, ramifications for taking a stand before unbelievers for the cause of Jesus Christ. "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). As Paul had earlier written to Timothy

⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began... (2 Tim. 1:8f)

3. Self-confidence and self-sufficiency is characteristic of an immature Christian. Growth in grace involves stripping the Christian of independence and reliance on anything or anyone, especially himself, learning, rather, to trust in Jesus Christ alone to live for Him and before Him. Paul wrote,

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” (Gal. 2:19-21)

Growing in grace involves the Lord stripping you of your pride, self-reliance, your independent spirit. He does this by letting you fail and fall in your sin and then He picks you up, dusts you off, and sets you back on course in humbly trusting Him to do for you and in you that which you are incapable of doing or achieving for yourself.

It was David, the restored sinner, who declared these words upon our Lord’s exposure of his sin:

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,

And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

¹⁶For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;

You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷***The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,***

A broken and a contrite heart—

These, O God, You will not despise. (Psa. 51:14-17)

When “*Peter went out and wept bitterly*” (22:62), he was crushed. His heart was broken and he had a contrite heart. He was not aware of his actual, true condition before the Lord, even as he felt himself to be perhaps the lowest that he had ever been in life. But he himself was then a greater sacrifice unto the Lord than he could have ever offered, for

“a spirit *rightly* broken, and heart truly contrite is to God an excellent thing... Mark, He (God) rejecteth sacrifices, offerings, and sacrifices—that is, all Levitical ceremonies under the law, and all external performances under the gospel –but accepteth a broken heart. It is therefore manifest by this, were there nothing else to be said, that proves that a heart rightly broken, a heart truly contrite, is to God an excellent thing; for as you see such a heart is set before all sacrifice; yet they were the ordinances of God, and things that He commanded; but lo, a broken spirit is above them all, a contrite heart goes beyond them, yea, beyond them when put all together.”⁶

David elsewhere wrote,

The Lord is near to those who have ***a broken heart***,
And saves such as have ***a contrite spirit***. (Psa. 34:18)

⁶ John Bunyan, **The Acceptable Sacrifice; the Excellency of a Broken Heart** (The Chapel Library, 2025), 4, 5.

Peter was now in a state, a place, at which Jesus had desired for him and had prayed for him (cf. Luke 22:32). Peter's standing before the Lord was now more important and greater than even heaven and earth.

Thus says the Lord:
"Heaven is My throne,
And earth is My footstool.
Where is the house that you will build Me?
And where is the place of My rest?
²For all those things My hand has made,
And all those things exist,"
Says the Lord.
***"But on this one will I look:
On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit,
And who trembles at My word. (Isa. 66:1, 2)***

Peter was now greatly blessed, though he did not know it, as the Lord had once declared in Peter's hearing,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
⁵Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth." (Matt. 5:3-5)

May our Lord perform such a heart work in each of us that we might see ourselves in Him alone, depending on Him alone in faith, to enable us to live before Him and for Him.
