

**PETER, THE BORN LEADER**  
**3 Lent Midweek**  
**Luke 22:31-32,61,62; John 21:17**

*Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial*

*Luke 22:31-32,61,62;*

<sup>31</sup>“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup>but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

<sup>61</sup>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.”

<sup>62</sup>And he went out and wept bitterly.

*Jesus Questions Peter's Love*

*John 21:17*

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to Him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

Perhaps no two people of the passion had more in common than the disciples Simon Peter and Judas Iscariot. You could make a case that they were made of the same stuff, but they ended up radically different. As we observe Peter today, we see that he was a born leader with some qualities very similar to Judas.

## **I. PETER WAS MUCH LIKE JUDAS**

He was a man with a strong will, Simon Peter was quick to make decisions and move into action. He seldom missed grabbing hold of an opportunity to assert himself. He became the unofficial spokesman for the twelve. He is the man who walked on water with Jesus and who cut off the high priest's servant's ear at the Garden of Gethsemane.

The disciples came to expect Peter to take the lead when called into action. If Judas was the treasurer of their group, Peter must have been the manager, at least in appearance. Both men exhibited leadership qualities.

Peter was arguably the more outgoing and energetic of the two but not so calculating. In his impetuous manner, he was at times unstable and changeable. He was as capricious as he was courageous. He was always well-meaning, but often mistaken. He vacillated from the bold confession (“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Matthew 16:16) to bold audacity (when he rebuked Jesus for talking about His pending death in Jerusalem, Mark 8:32).

Peter and Judas were two headstrong men both heading for a fall. Both had misplaced hopes for the Christ to establish Himself as an earthly power. Both of them offered enthusiastic support. Both shrank from the humiliation of the cross. Both of them did not fully understand Christ's great love. And both suffered the consequences: when the confrontation came, they both denied the Lord Jesus.

But, for all of the corresponding characteristics, one element distinguished Peter from Judas. Peter had faith. Peter had begun to see more clearly the spiritual side of Jesus as the Messiah. He realized that Jesus had “the words of eternal life” and that he was “the Holy One of God” (John 6:68,69).

When the moment of truth came, Peter had faith in Jesus to fall back on and to carry him through, whereas Judas denied faith in Jesus sometime before his shameful deed.

## **II. PETER DENIED JESUS**

Peter came close to following the path of Judas to eternal ruin. He was a self-made man, a strong personality. He offered Jesus total allegiance. He was the rock, as Jesus called him.

But until Peter learned that he could not be merely a man of his own making and could not dictate the terms of Christ's work in his life, he would remain a born leader wandering about for looking for a cause. Until he learned to lose himself in Jesus and to trust implicitly in Jesus, he would not be the apostle we know and revere today.

Satan wanted Peter. He had gotten Judas to betray Jesus, and he would get Peter to deny the Lord. Jesus even warned Peter: “*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat*” (Luke 22:31).

So the devil was allowed to put Peter to the test. He would shake Peter violently in hopes of shaking him loose from his faith. As wheat was shaken and sifted to separate the chaff from the wheat, so Peter would be shaken by the devil in the hopes that he would prove to be nothing but worthless chaff. Peter had to pass through the test. But he would go knowing that the Son of God promised to pray that his faith would not fail him.

When the test came, none of Peter’s leadership qualities, none of his bravado, none of his courage, none of his boldness would sustain him. Only the faith placed in Christ could bring him through, provided he did not deny his faith.

Jesus also told Peter that as part of his trial Peter would deny Jesus—three times before the cock crowed.

Peter objected. He would remain loyal to Jesus even to death. But the scene was set and the forces of evil were at work. In a short time Peter would fall.

Short of the torture and death of the Savior, can you think of anything sadder than Peter denying Jesus? The disciple from whom we would expect the most, failed in the clutch. He who most passionately professed his loyalty to Jesus even more ardently denied knowing him. He, whom we call the rock, fell into pieces like sand.

Peter put Jesus’ warnings out of his mind. He repeated his denial. We wonder: “Did he rationalize his behavior?” Peter may have felt that he would still fly to Jesus’ aid if Jesus would but call for him. Besides, he did not owe any answers to the servants and other onlookers. They had no right, morally or legally, to insist on knowing his connection with Jesus. Why incriminate himself and possibly Jesus too? After all faith is a private thing!

“I do not know the man!” he insisted with a curse.

Just then the cock crowed, and “the man” came into view and looked at Peter. Peter was about as low as he could go. Satan was ready to pick up the pieces and claim them for himself.

### **III. PETER KEPT FAITH AND LEARNED HUMILITY**

But Jesus’ prayer for Peter did not go unheeded. Peter’s faith, though badly bruised, was not yet dead. The cock’s crow and the look from Jesus penetrated to the depths of Peter’s soul, fanning the spark of faith still there. Peter remembered all that Jesus had warned. He went out and wept bitterly in repentance over his terrible deed. He resolved again to stay with Jesus, but this time with a firm, silent, humble, and wiser resolve than ever before.

Peter fell, but his Savior’s love kept his faith alive. Peter had learned a hard lesson. Although he could still be impetuous, he now saw more clearly the unconditional love of Jesus. He had gained a measure of true humility. He had come to see that the suffering and death of the Savior paid also for his sin, his sin of denial.

Unlike Judas, Peter lived to see Jesus alive from the dead. And Peter learned to put aside his own self serving interest. Instead, he would listen to, live for, and tell about Jesus. He would one day give up his own life for Jesus. But the only sword he would use in the battle was the sword of the Word. Once Peter learned what it really meant to follow, he became a leader in spreading the Gospel of Jesus.

So what does Peter’s story mean for us today, as we sit in the shadow of Christ’s cross pondering Peter’s part in His passion? Do you recognize any of Peter’s failings in yourself? I’m sure that more than one of us recognizes the need for more humility. Do you think any differently of the leaders in the church? Can we expect them to be totally free from those Peter - like failings?

If we take this account of Peter to heart, we will not be so presumptuous and bold about our, or anyone’s, personal abilities. We will let our own strong self-wills give way to the interests of Christ’s kingdom. We will watch that we do not assert ourselves instead of Jesus. We will be ready to listen to Jesus. We will deeply value the love of God in Christ and the forgiveness of sins. We will pray that our faith will never fail us. We will strive to live for Jesus.

Let the account of Peter's denial remind us of the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death. Jesus suffered and died because even the born leaders among His followers (maybe especially the born leaders) need the forgiveness of sins He won for us. He died because we all, with Peter, need to have His love and His mercy. He died because that's the only way He could rise again to assure us of everlasting life. He died to set us free from Satan's tyranny. He gave Himself for us so that we might be set free to give ourselves for Him. For in Christ Jesus all of our sins have been forgiven, even the sin of denial. In Jesus name, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.