

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 14:66-72 - The Good News Is Denied Three Times

Peter's denial of Jesus is one of the most memorable aspects of his life. Mostly because it is such a serious failure on Peter's part. Peter's humiliating downfall in span of a few short hours is a sight to behold.

And I think the Lord has preserved this account in all 4 gospels for our encouragement and good. I think there's two main truths we take away from this passage.

First is that we are called to confess the Lord Jesus boldly. The second is that when we fail there is grace. Let's talk about both of those issues before we get to our passage.

First: We are called to confess the Lord Jesus boldly.

Part of following Jesus is confessing Jesus out loud with our words and our lives.

**Turn to Luke 12:8-12.** Jesus makes confession a defining feature of the people of God. Those who are followers of Jesus will acknowledge that reality in front of the whole world even if it costs us our lives. And to deny Jesus is bring about eternal damnation. **Read 8-12**

So there's a connection. If you acknowledge Jesus before men, you can be assured he will acknowledge you before the angels of God. What does that mean? Why do the angels matter?

**Matthew 10:32-33:** Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven but whoever denies me before men I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Why does Jesus add the angels here? Because the idea is that Jesus is standing in the heavenly throne room before the Father surrounded by all the heavenly hosts - billions and billions of angels. And eternity is on the line for individuals.

And while we're down here with people who might hurt us or make fun of us or even kill us because we acknowledge Jesus, there's another scene going on in heaven. A bigger scene with eternal significance. There's angels and heavenly host and the Father. And the question is: Will Jesus acknowledge me as his before the Father or will he say "I never knew you?" What's it going to be?

That all depends. Will we acknowledge Jesus before men? If so, then he'll acknowledge us before God and all the angels.

If we deny him, he'll deny us. It's very simple. Very straight forward, very stark and very humbling. Which is why Jesus starts with this admonition. **Read 4-7**

Don't fear men. All they can do is kill us. Who do we fear? God. Why? Because he can kill us and then throw us into hell. Usually the reason someone who loves Jesus might be tempted to deny him is because of fear. Fear of other people. So Jesus tells us why we should fear God first and foremost: eternal destiny is in his hands.

When we're tempted to deny Jesus - and I think we all have at some point - what we need in that moment is a reminder of the eternal situation going on. We need to be reminded of the very real throne room of God where there will be another acknowledgement or denial.

Now, just to be clear: you're not saved by what you say or don't say in front of people. There's a lot of heretics who are very bold about their false faith. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are all very bold about their faith - maybe more bold than we are often times. But if you are a true believer in Jesus, you are called to boldly acknowledge him before all men.

**Turn to Rom. 1:16-17.** This is probably a well known verse to most of us. A convicting verse. **Read 16-17**

Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel. I think if we're honest there are times we're ashamed of the gospel. We're afraid of people. Or we think people will think we're crazy or gossip or slander us. Think we're religious freaks. Jesus freaks. Bible Thumpers who are so backwards we believe there's only 2 genders, who deny evolution, were so bigoted we think there's only one way of salvation.

You know, the same stuff we've believed for 2,000 years. People will try to shame us. But we don't need to be ashamed.

Imagine there was a deadly disease that would kill everyone who gets it. There's three signs: a huge rash, fever and your hair turned green. But there's a pill you can take that will save you.

And you've got all these friends who have a rash, fever and green hair and you're trying to convince them that they should take this pill. You took it and all your symptoms went away. But they're calling you judgmental. "What's wrong with my green hair?"

They're calling you narrow minded that your medicine is the only cure. "I can take other pills if I need to."

Others are saying you're a fool. "There's no disease, hair is supposed to be green. You're the problem with blonde hair and no fever."

If that were the case we'd probably laugh. They're crazy. Of course there's a problem. We're not the fools. They're going to die if they don't take the pill. We're not trying to be judgmental, we're trying to save them. If we could save our family and friends from this disease, we'd boldly proclaim it.

Well, the real disease is not green hair and a rash. The real disease is sin and the end is death. And they can call us whatever they want, but we have the only cure in the shed blood and righteousness of Jesus. There's nothing to be ashamed of. We're trying to help them whether they know it or not. **Read 16-17**

The gospel is like that pill. It's the power of salvation. And it's revealed from faith for faith. I proclaim my faith in Jesus so that others will have faith in Jesus. And our whole lives revolve around this faith being proclaimed unashamedly.

**Turn to Rom. 10:9-10.** Here we see a passage that most of us are very familiar with. That faith in Jesus is what saves us. But I want you to notice the confession aspect. **Read**

We know that someone is saved by faith alone. So what's the deal with confession? Does someone have to just say the magic words "Jesus is Lord" and automatically they're a believer? Absolutely not.

There will be many on the last day who call Jesus "lord, lord" and he will say "depart from me I never knew you" because although they said with their mouths "Jesus is Lord" they were workers of lawlessness. They never actually believed and repented from their sin.

So just saying some words doesn't save anyone. But, true salvation will also result in bold confession. Those who truly believe in Jesus are also those who truly confess out loud with their mouth that Jesus is Lord.

You can't be a closet Christian. You can't be a secret agent Christian where no one knows what side you're really on. You have to take a stand. You have to be unashamed. You have to be willing at any time and anywhere to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord because that heart willingness to confess shows your salvation.

Paul tells Timothy to: Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession. **1 Tim. 6:12-13**

Just as Jesus confessed to Pilate he was King and Lord, so too we confess to anyone who asks that Jesus is King and Lord.

In the early church when there was a lot of persecution figuring out what to do with people who denied Jesus in the midst of hardship became a big deal. What do you do with people who claim to be Christians, seem to walk the walk, but when they're threatened with death they cave and deny Jesus? What do you do with them? This was a hard thing because the early Christians took these passages very seriously. If you abandon Jesus at the hardest hour, are you really a Christian? Is that possible?

So people who denied Jesus were called "Deniers" and they were often excommunicated from the church. Or shunned. They had stumbled at the worst possible moment. They had denied the Lord when it mattered the very most. And the church struggled with what to do with those who said they were repented. How can you be a real Christian if you cave at the biggest test?

Those who confessed Jesus and were murdered were called "Confessors." They were martyrs. And the persecution was so intense that people began to long to die for Jesus. That's where we get the idea of a martyr complex. Someone who wants to die for the faith. That's bad too. You shouldn't want to die. But you should be resolved to do it if you're called to it.

But everywhere in the NT confessing out loud with our mouth before men who might kill us is a test of our faith. And it's tied with our standing before Jesus. This is eternally serious.

Again, just to be clear, we are saved by grace through faith - not saying specific words. But if you refuse to confess Jesus as your Lord before men, he makes it clear he will refuse to confess us as his people before the Father.

So as we **turn** back to **Mark 14**, this is what's at stake with Peter's denial of Jesus.

Now, if you look at one of those Bible harmonization charts, you know that what Jesus went through in these early morning hours was ridiculous. He went to Annas, then Caiaphas, then to the whole Sanhedrin who found him guilty. Then they took him to Pilate, then to Herod, back to Pilate who finally had him crucified. Jesus was marched all over Jerusalem in the early morning hours of Friday before he was crucified.

Mark gives us the Cliff's notes version and summarizes the whole event into two simple parts: the religious trial and then the trial before Pilate.

And it's at this religious trial where Peter is hanging out in the courtyard. The religious trial is at the high priest's house - that was illegal. And it's in the middle of the night. Also illegal. And it's during a feast, also illegal. But it's happening anyway.

And all the gospels paint Peter in the worst possible light. And I think they do that in purpose and I think if Peter were here with us he'd confirm the situation was just as bad as it's made out to be.

Jesus has already foretold his denial. Peter denied the denial, but here we are. First denial: to a slave girl. **Read 66-68**

In the early spring it's rather cool during the night and into the early morning. Peter does want to be close to Jesus. No one really knows what's about to happen except Jesus. But it's cold outside and he's by the fire.

And his first denial is to the lowest person on the social totem pole: a slave girl. Not only was a slave the lowest class in Roman society, but a woman was certainly lower than a man. And to top that off, the word that is used denotes a little girl; not even an adult.

This isn't a queen or royalty or someone of power. This is a bottom of the rung slave who is up in the middle of the night working for the household.

And Peter, who just hours earlier pledged to die for Jesus even if everyone else failed, caves to this little slave girl. She says “You were with the Nazarene, Jesus.” Calling Jesus “the Nazarene” may have been a little bit of an insult. We’re not 100% sure. Those in northern Israel were looked on with scorn and contempt and Nazareth was as backwoods Galilee as you could get.

One of the gospels says that they recognized him because of his accent. Just like folks in the south have an accent to us, Galileans had an accent as well.

So this comes across as “Did you know that crazy hillbilly Jesus?” And Peter denies it. It’s not a simple “no.” The word deny is very emphatic - it’s a complete rejection, a complete renunciation of Jesus. He answers as though he doesn’t even know who this guy is.

I read a book last year about a British spy in the 1980s. He spied for England while he did business in Russia. And the deal was that because he could easily pass information between contacts he could carry a lot of useful information to England. And he probably prevented nuclear war between the west and Russia once or twice.

But the deal was that if he got caught the country would disavow all knowledge of who he was. The country would use this guy for every advantage they could but the moment he got caught and arrested they denied ever knowing he existed.

That’s Peter with Jesus. He emphatically disowns - to a little slave girl - ever knowing Jesus existed or even comprehending what she’s talking about.

Which is pretty pathetic because why else would another Galilean be at the high priest’s house on a festival day in the middle of the night when Jesus just happens to have been arrested and is right inside?

Now, Mark adds a little tidbit the other gospels don’t. **Read 68**

The other gospels just say before the rooster crows you will deny me three times. Mark actually clarifies that Jesus said “Before the rooster crows twice you will deny me three times.” So here’s the first crowing. Why does that matter? I think it tells us two things. First, the first rooster crow serves as a warning to Peter. Jesus’s words are still fresh in his mind, and I think this was the first warning.

The other thing is that I think it tells us the speed of the whole situation. Usually rooster crows are fairly close together. The speed of Peter’s 3 denials is probably within minutes. He denies Jesus, the rooster crows and it’s not hours later or even a half hour later. It’s lightning fast how emphatically over and over he denies him.

And just a reminder for the whole scene: Peter probably fears for his life. Jesus was just arrested by maybe 600 soldiers. They’re probably still wandering around the area. And he’s in the enemy camp - he’s at the high priest’s house. He realizes his very life could be on the line. It’s not like he’s casually hanging out in the park. There’s a chance he could be implicated too and put on trial as well with Jesus. So he’s afraid.

Then he does it again. **Read 69-70**

So the same girl goes over to some bystanders and apparently begins talking to them about Peter. And he again denies it. That’s two.

Then a little bit later - probably not a very long time at all, the bystanders again say to Peter: You’ve got to be with Jesus. You’re from his same area. They know Peter is with Jesus. Why would he be here?

But the third time is the strongest denial yet. **Read 71**

Peter lies as clear as he possibly can: he doesn’t know Jesus. The idea of cursing and swearing here isn’t that he used swear words, filthy language.

The idea is the he is calling on God to curse him if he does know Jesus. In the OT the way someone swore an oath was often “God do so to me and more also if this thing doesn’t happen?” Basically “God curse me if my oath is broken.”

This isn’t a simple denial, this is Peter taking an oath that God would curse him if he knows Jesus. Does he know Jesus? Yes. What’s he deserve? God’s curse.

There could also be a sense in which he’s also cursing the people accusing him for such a thing. **Read 71**

Some think Peter is not only placing himself under a curse if he knows Jesus but cursing the people for even suggesting such a thing.

All of this, of course, is a lie. Peter has spent the last 3 years with Jesus in intimate fellowship. And his downfall is complete. He is denying the very Lord that is about to purchase his salvation, denied him with a curse. **Read 72**

This is a very dark hour in Peter’s life. The other gospels record that when he denied the third time Jesus actually looked out a window at Peter and stared at him as the rooster crowed. Can you imagine that?

Paul says in **2 Tim. 2:11**: that there is a trustworthy statement.

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;  
If we endure, we will also reign with him;  
If we deny him, he will deny us.  
If we are faithless, he will remain faithful for he cannot deny himself.

Is this the end of the road for Peter? Is this the end of the road for us who have denied the Lord in some way?

I don’t think it is. **Turn to John 21**. This is after the resurrection. After the disciples went back north to the lake of Galilee. They see Jesus by the shore cooking breakfast and Peter sees Jesus again. **Read 15-19**

Is Jesus done with Peter? No. Three times he denied, three times he confessed. This is the Lord restoring Peter.

But what about all the warnings, all the threats of Jesus? Do those just mean nothing? Are they just empty threats?

No. They are very serious threats. But they are threats to those who never repent. Threats to those who call Jesus Lord for a season, deny him and never come back.

Who descend into apostasy forever. Jesus’s restoring of Peter reminds us that there is always hope for those who have confessed Jesus but then denied him. And not just hope that they’ll barely make it into the Kingdom. Think of the rest of Peter’s life:

God uses his preaching to save 5,000 on Pentecost.  
He goes on to be the chief apostle among the Jews.  
He writes 2 books of the Bible.  
Mark relies heavily on him to write this very gospel.  
Eventually he is crucified for Jesus.

Have you ever denied Jesus? Know that there’s grace and forgiveness if you’ve repented and turned back. And you’re not out of the game, God can use you in amazing ways yet.

Do you know someone who has denied Jesus? Do you have a prodigal son or friend? The story isn’t necessarily over for them either. As long as they’re alive, there’s time to repent and return to God’s grace. And who knows? Maybe God will use them in amazing ways just like he used Peter. **Pray**