

Walk by Faith

Scripture: John 18:15-27

15 Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, **16** but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. **17** The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” **18** Now the servants[a] and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. **20** Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. **21** Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.” **22** When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” **23** Jesus answered him, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?” **24** Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” **26** One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” **27** Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

Fix your eyes on Jesus and affirm your faith in Him

Introduction: Many Christians have paid a high price for their belief in Jesus. One such beloved sister is Yuen Meng'en, who was imprisoned in China in 1967. She had two young children, an eleven year old son and a nine year old daughter. After a year in jail, the chief warden offered her to be released if she would confess her crimes and renounce her faith. She was given a choice between Jesus and her children. She told them, “Jesus cannot be replaced. Even my own children cannot replace Jesus.” She was sentenced to 23 more years in prison. Her relationship with her son was shattered.

Thankfully, we do not live in that environment here in the United States. We do not worry that we'll be thrown in jail without a trial and abused because of the name of Jesus. We don't have to choose between family and faith.

However, for each person here who is a follower of Jesus, you will encounter a situation when you need to speak His name. All followers of Jesus come across times when someone will ask what you believe, or why you think or behave a certain way, or any other number of questions, and we have a choice. How will we respond?

We know intuitively the answer: we should respond for Jesus! We should affirm our faith in Him! We should gladly stand up and give testimony about Who He is and what He has done! But we also know that this is difficult. We all have walked away from situations thinking, “I should have mentioned the

name of Jesus." Or, "I should have been more bold in my faith." Or, "I should not have avoided the question." There are a number of times that I can think of where I've walked away with sadness and regret and shame for not speaking the name of Christ like I should.

In this morning's text, Peter flat-out denied Jesus. He straight up claimed that he didn't know Jesus and was not a follower of Him. Maybe this has happened to you at some point in your life, or not. But, even if we don't deny Jesus point blank like Peter, we all have times we feel the conviction of the Spirit because of a denial of sorts, including not saying something we feel like we should have said.

What do we do with these feelings? What do we do in these situations? Let's look at the text for this morning. I believe that through these verses we can be encouraged and strengthened in our faith and in affirming our faith. So,

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Context: In each of the three other Gospels, all of Peter's denials are told at once. Denial, denial, denial, rooster crows. In John, the denials are broken up by Jesus' appearance before the high priest. I believe that John is doing this to help his readers see what Peter did and to help them to affirm their faith instead of denying their Lord. When John wrote the Gospel, believers were facing persecution. All through the Roman Empire they were in danger. John is helping them to affirm their faith in Jesus in spite of the consequences. Most of us are not in physical danger, our lives are not on the line, when it comes to our faith. But we are still tempted when it comes time to affirm our faith in Jesus to try to hide. And here John gives us Jesus' example, in the midst of Peter's denials, to help guide us so that we affirm Him openly.

Notice first how this section begins with Simon Peter following Jesus. There were probably around 600 soldiers who had come to arrest Jesus. Other Gospels tell us that the disciples were scattered. But, Peter, and another disciple, who is unnamed, go back and follow Jesus. That means that nine did not come back, nine were not following Jesus, nine had abandoned Him. But Peter followed.

Jesus was led to the high priest. This is referred to as Jesus' trial, though in some ways He had been on trial as far as the religious leaders are concerned for a couple of years. Jesus is brought in, having been arrested, and He is questioned about His disciples and His teaching.

Though it is not official, Peter is also on trial. He gets into the courtyard, and is questioned three different times: "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" "You also are not one of Jesus' disciples, are you?" "Did I not see you in the garden?"

But Jesus and Peter's responses were as different as they could be. Jesus pointed to how open He was. He spoke openly to the world, He taught in synagogues and in the temple, said nothing in secret. This is how Jesus lived - out in the open, being manifested to the world, making God known. He invites all to come to Him, to trust in Him for life, to receive Him by faith. His invitation is always open.

But Peter hid. Each time he was asked - you are not a follower of Jesus, are you? he said no. We

don't have the motivation here - obviously at least the servant girl knew that the other disciple was one of Jesus' followers - but Peter denied His Lord. He said I do not know Him.

Peter had turned his eyes from Jesus. He saw the soldiers. He saw the others in the courtyard. But his heart and his mind were not fixed on his Lord, or he would never have denied Jesus.

Peter and Jesus both suffered. Jesus was struck when He answered the high priest. But, the suffering that Jesus experienced was undeserved. He was only speaking the truth. He should not have been struck. He was in the right, and suffered for it. Though we don't see it here, Peter suffered too. In this account we follow Peter until the rooster crowed; elsewhere we learn that he went out and wept bitterly. He suffered the guilt and shame of his denial.

John sets up this back and forth between Peter and Jesus for our edification and encouragement.

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Here are three takeaways for us, for today:

- **Follow Jesus**

- An important part of this story is found in the first line: Simon Peter followed Jesus. If he didn't follow Jesus, he would not have been put to the test. If he didn't follow Jesus, he would not have had those people ask him about Jesus. Though this story ends in denial, it begins well for Peter.
 - Notice this: Unless you follow Jesus, you will not be put to the test for your faith. Unless you follow Jesus, you will not have the opportunity to be questioned about your faith.
 - Jesus told us over and over to take up our cross and to follow Him. There are ways that we follow Him that differentiates us from nice people in the world: giving generously, loving extravagantly, dying to sin, working for justice, making peace, extravagant forgiveness. That will not and does not make sense to the world. Following Jesus is about laying down our lives and living by faith that what He says is true: that we can give up ourselves and gain even more.
- But if church is an activity, if Jesus is a ticket to heaven, if we are Christian in name only - why would anyone ask us about Him? Why would people wonder? Only by following Jesus closely do we have the opportunity to be asked about Him - by family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. Or even enemies.

- **Reveal Jesus**

- Are you following Jesus closely? Are you giving up your life for Him? If so, be ready to reveal Him! Peter learned this lesson well - let's read what he wrote a number of years after this incident, in 1 Peter 3:
 - 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that,

when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

- This convicts me. I've read this verse countless times, but I don't have anything ready, I don't have anything definitive prepared. I need to!!!! So I can affirm my faith in Jesus, so I can have something to say, immediately.
- Being prepared is important in affirming your faith, but so is fixing your eyes on Jesus. Peter again is a helpful illustration for this, when he walked on the water. He saw Jesus walking on the water and wanted to join Him. Jesus said, "come." As long as Peter had his eyes on Jesus he was fine; as soon as he noticed the waves and he thought about what he was doing, he was in trouble.
- So it goes for us. When we are affirming our faith, who are we thinking about? Our eyes should be fixed on Jesus. But, it is all too easy for us to think about ourselves, "How am I coming across?" "What will this person think?" Or to think about the other, "What are they thinking?" "What will their response be?" Like Peter, when we take our eyes off of Jesus, we begin to sink.
- We often, like Peter, stumble at this point out of fear. Maybe we don't deny Christ straight out, but we hem and haw, we miss opportunities, because we are worried about what others will think, having taken our eyes off Jesus. So lastly, we must be ready to

- **Share in Jesus' sufferings**

- Paul writes in Philippians 3 that the sufferings of Jesus are to be desired, because we have fellowship with Jesus in them. He writes, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death." Men and women, we live in a culture that does not meet us with injury or death for our following Jesus, but it has taught us from our childhood to value safety and security. So there is fear, and it is valid, about what we might suffer should we confess Jesus. We might suffer the loss of friends. We might suffer ridicule. We might lose our job. We might be looked down on or thought of as weird.
- If we suffer, that is a blessing! That is a gift! That is a unique opportunity to know Jesus more intimately and to fellowship with Him. Listen again to Peter from 1 Peter 3 and how he describes the suffering:
 - 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.
- Praise God that very few, if any, of us will ever experience what Yuen Meng'en did. We do not face death or imprisonment or loss of children because of our faith. But, as she was, we are tempted. We are tempted to deny Jesus, to excuse rather than affirm our faith.

Let us, like her, look not at self, or others, but only at Jesus. Let us follow Him, reveal Him, and if we suffer we can rejoice that we have been found worthy of suffering for His name.

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