

## **DENIED**

Luke 22:54-62

Have you noticed how many times people featured in the news will make strong, adamant statements about where they stand on a particular issue and then a year (or maybe even a few months) later will say things that are just the opposite? Did the truth of the matter change during that brief time? Probably not! We observe these things and wonder “what is happening?” We may also be thinking that we would never be so wishy-washy.

There are so many examples related to politically sensitive issues such as climate change, undocumented immigrants, our nation’s involvement in foreign conflicts, Israel and the Middle East, the Covid pandemic, abortion, race issues, the right to own a gun, voting rights, and the list goes on and on. In most of these, many politicians say, “I was for it before I was against it.”

I suspect that many of us are thinking, “Well, what would anyone expect in politics beside what we are seeing?” The problem is that such inconsistencies and denials are not limited to the political realm, but we can find examples among Christians and churches. Several decades ago, the phenomenon was called “hot-tub” Christianity in which the objective of some churches was to make everyone “feel good.” Today, we are seeing “woke” Christianity in which many well-known churches and preachers have proudly embraced the woke culture. After all, shouldn’t followers of Jesus speak up about social and racial injustice? The problem is that culture’s definition of justice is vastly different from God’s definition. We also see that many things attached to the woke movement are contrary to God’s Word. So, the irony of being a “woke Christian” is that it requires keeping quiet about a number of biblical truths. Is this just another example of “denying” what we have said that we believe?

A quote from an article on this subject states “Woke Christians won’t speak against such nonsense for fear of being publicly shamed, being labeled as racist and homophobic, or being outright cancelled.” Of course, we realize that the church and individual Christians have been in such compromised positions many times in the past. What was the church in Germany doing when the Jews were being rounded up and taken to extermination camps nine decades ago? We could ask the same thing regarding what happened throughout western Europe during the seventeenth century and especially in England that drove those who sought religious liberty to risk their very lives to find a place where freedom to worship was not severely punished. Why are we today still electing wishy-washy politicians who legalize abortion and actively promote and protect sexual perversions that are as bad as what was happening in Sodom and Gomorrah?

One of the better-known scriptural examples of denial of what was a “stated belief” is found in the example of Simon Peter following the arrest of Jesus.

### Distance – 22:54-55

<sup>54</sup> Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. <sup>55</sup> After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. Luke 22:54-55 (NASB95)

From the words used in John’s account of the arrest of Jesus (John 18:3) it is probable that some Roman soldiers and officers were with the group that Judas led to the garden where Jesus and His disciples were located. Just from this, it seems that the Jewish leader had anticipated resistance from the followers of Christ and had already engaged the political and military leaders to help with their plans to eliminate or cancel Jesus of Nazareth. In a parallel fashion, the humanistic religious advocates in our nation have enlisted our governmental leaders to help with their plans to cancel the influence of the Church of the Lord Jesus.

Since the Jewish leaders were coordinating the plan to eliminate Jesus, they had alerted the high priest to be ready. Luke tells us that the mob took Jesus to the house of the high priest and John (18:13) filled in the missing information that this was actually the house of the former high priest Annas who was the father-in-law of the present high priest Caiaphas.

Just as a historical note: Before the Babylonian exile, the high priests served for life. After the exile, the non-Jewish occupation forces influenced the high priests' appointments and they served until the ruling occupiers decided that a change was needed. There were ten influential Sadducee families from which selections were made. One of the most influential was a family whose patriarch was named Annas. Members of this family held the office for about thirty-five of the seventy years from the birth of Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem and included eight of the twenty men who were designated high priests during this seventy-year period. Although Annas had not officially held the role of high priest since A.D. 15, he was still the one making the really important decisions.

It was at the compound of Annas' residence that the first of three trials of Jesus by the Jews was held. This was the location of the courtyard where we find Peter and another disciple mentioned only in John's account. Some have speculated that this "other disciple" was John, but other sources suggest that this "other disciple" was not "one of the twelve" but was an undeclared follower (believer) who was probably a respected religious leader since he was known by those who were the servants of the chief priest. In fact, John reported that this "other disciple" went "in with Jesus" into the hall of the chief priest. Based on that comment, he was not following "from afar" but was right in the crowd that was escorting Jesus to the compound of the high priest.

There seems to be some inconsistencies (among the various accounts) in whether this was the residence of Annas or Caiaphas. It could have been that Annas and Caiaphas lived in different parts of the same compound. There were likely several "residences" around the courtyard of this compound or palace.

Luke did not mention "the other disciple" but did note what happened to Peter. The first thing we see is that Peter followed at a distance. Some commentators suggest that the other ten disciples had, in effect, abandoned Jesus and were not loyal to Him in this moment of crisis. We certainly have a contrast with the actions that Simon took compared to the other ten disciples who were with Jesus. As we remember from the initial arrival of the mob that came to arrest Jesus, John reported that Jesus told the mob that since He was the One they were looking for that the others (His disciples) be allowed "to go their way." This request by Jesus was also a message to the disciples to go immediately go away. It was then that Peter acted with impetuous bravado and stuck a servant of the high priest with his sword. It is amazing that he was not killed by someone in the mob in his ineffective effort to defend Jesus against being arrested. Matthew reported that all the disciples deserted Jesus and left.

Actually, they did exactly what they should have done! They ran off so that there would not be eleven more crucifixions. "Running away" was in fulfillment of the prophecy from Zechariah 13:7 which has a statement about "strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." Earlier that evening Jesus had told them that they would run away. If they had been arrested and killed, then there would have been a need for twelve resurrections rather than one. Otherwise, the invested preparation of these disciples over the past three and a half years would not have resulted in changing the world.

A better description of what happened to the disciples was that they "stumbled" in that they encountered doubts regarding what that had believed about Jesus during their association with

Him. As we know, they were still “stumbling” or dealing with doubts even into the evening of the day of the Resurrection as Luke related in his account of the Emmaus Road experience.

### Denial – 22:56-60a

<sup>56</sup> And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, “This man was with Him too.” <sup>57</sup> But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know Him.” <sup>58</sup> A little later, another saw him and said, “You are one of them too.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” <sup>59</sup> After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, “Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.” <sup>60a</sup> But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” Luke 22:56–60a (NASB95)

How did Simon Peter wind up in such a mess as he was facing that night? Should Peter be admired that he dared to follow Jesus even at a distance? Most commentaries give Simon high marks for being the only one who did not “abandon” Jesus. Simon had already stated earlier that evening that even if all left Jesus that he would follow Him unto death. (Incidentally, all the rest of those present at the time said the same thing, according to Matthew’s account.) What brought on such a bold statement as this pledge for martyrdom? Jesus had told them that they would all “fall away” or be “offended” because of Him that very night.

It could be argued that all of the disciples did, in fact, fall away or were scattered. However, Simon was motivated or driven to do something else which put him in a situation that he would not only “be scattered” like sheep and “fall away” like the others, but that he would also deny Jesus. Jesus had warned Simon that this would happen. We’ve heard the expression, “being forewarned is being forearmed.” This statement is said to mean that if you know about something before it happens, you can be prepared for it or even avoid it.

Having been forewarned, Simon needed to either prepare for what might happen or make choices to avoid what was predicted to happen. Was there any way that Simon could have prepared himself for the temptation that he would face in the courtyard of the high priest? He apparently had not anticipated that someone there would accuse him of being a follower of Jesus who had just been arrested and was being roughly interrogated. It is a good guess that Simon was caught “off guard” by the question and had not thought through how he would answer such an accusation.

What would likely have happened if Simon had admitted that he was a follower of Jesus? One possibility could have been arrest and trial and death. Another, more likely, possibility would have been taunting ridicule by the servants sitting around the fire in the courtyard or they may have demanded that he leave. Not having thought through the possibilities, he was unprepared to do much other than a basic survivalist response.

To say that Simon was impetuous is an understatement, at best. He had a lot of confidence in Simon Peter and thought that he could handle whatever might come up. Usually, the more removed we are from a situation, the stronger is our self-confidence. Just four or five hours earlier, he was convinced that he was ready to die for Jesus. Now, he was not so sure, or so it seems. If Peter had been less self-confident, he would not have been in that courtyard. If he had said less about going to prison and death, he would not have thought he had something to prove at the time of testing. What business did he have going into the palace courtyard? Over reliance on self leads us to put ourselves in the place of temptations which it would be better to avoid. He had apparently forgotten Christ’s warnings. Christ predicted the denial so that it could be avoided and if we listen to Him, we are less likely to find ourselves in such compromising situations.

Other than the fear of death and wanting to avoid ridicule, what else might have influenced Simon’s statement that he was not one of those who were with Jesus? Think about what had happened several weeks earlier at Caesarea Philippi when Peter stated to Jesus “You are the Christ,

the Son of the Living God.” Now, add to that what happened immediately afterwards when Peter, James and John witnessed the event on the Mount of Transfiguration. At that point Simon’s faith seemed to be solid as a rock (no pun intended) and unshakeable. Now, let’s return to the courtyard and try to think of what might have impacted his rock-solid and unshakeable faith that Jesus was the Christ. It had been some time since Jesus feed the five thousand and it had been a while since He was literally shining with divine glory on the mountain.

What was the image of Jesus that Peter was now observing? Jesus looked like an ordinary person who was tied up and powerless to keep the Jewish authorities from abusing Him or to even to verbally defend Himself. How much is our faith dependent upon the last thing we saw or the last news story we heard, or even the last failure or success we experienced in life? What is our reaction when we see something occurring that doesn’t agree with the Scriptures? Do we believe the Word of God (or in this case the words of Jesus) or do we just go with what we see? The problem that Simon was experiencing was that he was focusing on the “moment” or what was happening at that instant of time rather than looking past the “immediate” and realizing that what is happening now is just part of a process that is leading to a promised outcome in the future. The ultimate promise was for a “Way” of salvation that had to go through “sacrifice” (shedding of blood – meaning death) in order to have a means of salvation.

#### Defeat – 22:60b-62

<sup>60b</sup> Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.”

<sup>62</sup> And he went out and wept bitterly. Luke 22:60b-62 (NASB95)

There are times in our lives when the events of the moment seem to be overwhelming and we take our eyes off the goal and objective and the finish line and we sometimes need to have a reminder of the bigger picture. That reminder for Simon was the rooster crowing which helped him remember what Jesus had said. He had let the immediate visual picture of what seemed to be a helpless human being blur the reality of the divinity of Christ and the multitude of miraculous events that he had previously seen.

When Simon was jolted back into the reality of the relationship he had with Jesus he was heartbroken that he had allowed his bravado and over confidence in himself (which was insufficient for the temptation he had just faced) result in denial of what he was sure he actually believed. The sorrow and the tears would not change what had happened but it was a good beginning to bring about healing of the damage such a denial had on him.

This failure of Simon can serve as a reminder to each of us that we are vulnerable to being over confident in our own ability and we wind up failing to heed God’s warnings to avoid exposing ourselves to temptations with which the world is overflowing. Everywhere we look, everywhere we go, everyone we encounter, and even things that may seem to be something “good to do” can be temptations in disguise. Most of us and most of the time we have enough discernment to recognize such things and we can avoid them. The danger comes when we realize what is happening and fail to separate ourselves from the opportunity to be tempted because we may think “I can handle this, no problem.” Another danger that we should be sensitized to is failure to confess and repent if (or when) we get involved in errors that come from temptations and we are not sorrowful when convicted of the errors.