

The Heights Baptist Church

ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS • FROM FAILURE TO FAITHFULNESS •

JOHN 18:15-27; ACTS 4:1-20 • 2/7/2021

MAIN POINT

We all have a natural bent toward self-preservation, but once we encounter Jesus, He gives us a gospel-centered boldness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is your initial reaction or feeling when you realize you've made a mistake? Are you hard on yourself, do you lash out at others, shift blame, or something else?

What is one way you feel like you have betrayed God or let Him down recently? How did you react, and how did that affect your relationship with Him?

We all have a natural bent toward self-preservation, which means that sometimes we will make decisions that hurt others, let them down, or highlight our own weakness. This was the position the apostle Peter found himself in when he denied knowing Jesus after Jesus was arrested. Peter chose to betray Jesus in order to serve and protect himself. Thankfully, God loves us enough to pursue us and strengthen us in our weakness. As we see from Peter's story, once we encounter Jesus, He gives us a gospel-centered boldness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 18:15-27.

The stage had been set. Jesus was arrested and delivered to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest. In the night, the drama in the city of Jerusalem unfolded with Roman guards and temple police tying Jesus up in the garden of Gethsemane and taking Him to Annas (John 18:12-14). As they led Jesus away, two disciples followed Him. One went inside the door into the courtyard with Jesus, while Peter remained standing outside. As John wrote about what happened next, he didn't give the identity of the disciple who went inside; instead, he focused his attention on Peter.

What do you know about Peter's relationship with Jesus in the Gospels?

Why do you think Peter followed Jesus after His arrest? What does it say to you that of the Twelve, only Peter and "another disciple" (possibly John, the author of this account) followed Jesus?

Peter was one of the first men Jesus called to be disciples, along with his brother Andrew (Matt. 4). During Jesus' three years of earthly ministry, Peter was present for some of the most miraculous moments, like the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Peter exhibited great faith—like the time when he jumped out of the boat to walk on water (Matt. 14)—and was one of Jesus' best friends.

Why did Peter, who was known for being brash and impulsive, deny that he was one of Jesus' disciples?

Read Luke 9:18-20 and Luke 22:31-38. Note how Peter talked about Jesus when conflict wasn't present. What is the lesson for us when we compare Peter's words about Jesus in Luke 9 and Luke 22?

Even though Peter denied knowing Jesus, it is clear that he loved Jesus. Peter loved Him enough to go to Caiaphas's house, just not enough to stand with him. Peter's answer to his questioners was a sharp "I am not!" For John, who focused repeatedly on the affirmations of Jesus as "I am," the contrast here is very striking. The denial is especially significant in light of Peter's earlier forceful statement that he would be willing to die for Jesus (Luke 22:33) and his acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 9:20). When Jesus was present, Peter was filled with boldness. But when he was alone and challenged, he lost his courage and betrayed his Messiah.

How do you think Peter felt when he heard the rooster crow, as Jesus said he would (John 18:27)?

What are some ways we betray Jesus or deny knowing Him today?

Look at Luke 22:62. What does Peter's response to the rooster's crow in tell us about the right response to sin?

Betraying Jesus goes beyond saying we don't know Him. We betray Jesus when we have an opportunity to speak up for Him but fail to do so. We betray Jesus through ungodly speech and unethical actions, and when we compromise godly standards to go along with the crowd. When Peter heard the rooster crow, he realized what he had done and responded by weeping bitterly. He was truly grieved over his sin, as we should always be, too.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 4:1-20.

Quite a change came over Peter after Jesus returned to heaven. In Acts, there are no traces of the Peter who huddled fearfully in the high priest's courtyard. That Peter was gone, replaced with a Peter who was bold and passionate about completing the work Jesus entrusted to him. Emboldened by the Holy Spirit, Peter was no longer afraid, and he was preaching and healing in Jesus' name.

Compare and contrast Peter in these verses to Peter in the courtyard. What differences are evident? How do you explain the change that came over him?

Read John 21:15-19. How does Jesus' love for us empower us to love and live for Him?

When we finally release our fears and commit to live boldly for Jesus, the Spirit empowers us to do things we never imagined ourselves capable of. When that happens, people sit up and take notice. Whenever Peter had an opportunity to talk about Jesus, he did so without shame, and people were coming to Christ by the thousands—literally. As long as we're motivated by Jesus' love and fueled by His Spirit, He'll take care of the rest.

What did Peter's newfound boldness communicate about his commitment to Christ?

Do you put yourself in a position to be used by God in miraculous ways? If not, what holds you back?

Peter failed in his denial of Jesus, but his failure didn't define him. Instead, he spent the rest of his life boldly serving the Lord. Even after an experience of failure, God can empower us through the Holy Spirit to be effective servants for His kingdom.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How have you been challenged by today's discussion about betrayal and self-preservation?

What would it look like to stand up boldly for Jesus in your community or at your workplace? In what ways has the Holy Spirit empowered you to stand up for Christ? What was the result?

Peter's boldness can be seen as the Holy Spirit's redemption of his natural impulsive character. What might it look like for your natural personality traits to be redeemed and focused for the kingdom of God?

PRAYER

Close by praying that group members will no longer be hindered by past failures, but will move forward to a life filled with service and usefulness in Christ's kingdom. Ask God to heal and restore any in your group who have failed. Pray that God will give them the strength to seek out His help and the help of others, that their lives will become a testimony of His restoring power.

COMMENTARY

| JOHN 18:15-27

18:15-16 The other disciple was probably "the one Jesus loved" (20:2).

18:16-17 The girl who was the doorkeeper was probably one of the high priest's slaves.

18:18 The Roman soldiers had returned to their barracks, entrusting the task of guarding Jesus to the temple police. Another charcoal fire was lit at Peter's restoration in 21:9.

18:19 High priest refers to Annas. Questioning Jesus about His disciples and His teaching suggests that the primary concern was theological. Political charges were later added (19:7,12).

18:20 Jesus' words I haven't spoken anything in secret echo God's words in the book of Isaiah (Isa 45:19; 48:16). Jesus did not mean that He never spoke in private with His disciples but that His message was the same in private as in public; He was not leading a conspiracy. John recorded instances of Jesus teaching both in the synagogue (cp. 6:59) and in the temple complex (Gk hieron; cp. 2:14-21; 7:14,28; 8:20; 10:23).

18:21 Jesus' response is understandable, especially if the questioning of prisoners was considered improper in His day. Note also the legal principle that a person's own testimony about himself was inadmissible.

18:22 One of the temple police standing by was probably one of those who helped arrest Jesus (vv. 3,12). The slapping was likely a sharp blow with the flat of one's hand (Isa 50:6 LXX; cp. Mt 26:67; Ac 23:1-5). The phrase, is this the way you answer the high priest may refer to Ex 22:28: "You must not blaspheme God or curse a leader among your people" (quoted by Paul in Ac 23:5).

18:23 When challenged about His response to the high priest, Jesus alluded to the law of Ex 22:28 and denied having violated it.

18:24 Before Jesus could be brought to the Roman governor, charges had to be confirmed by the official high priest, Caiaphas, in his function as chairman of the Sanhedrin.

18:27 On the crowing of a rooster, compare 13:38.

| ACTS 4:1-20

4:1-3 The religious authorities confronted and ultimately arrested Peter and John for unauthorized teaching about the resurrection from the dead by using Jesus as the example. The Sadducees in particular were provoked by this, for they did not believe in resurrection because they did not think it was taught in the Pentateuch, the only portion of the Hebrew Bible they acknowledged as authoritative (Mt 22:23). The apostles were held in custody overnight because Sanhedrin trials were not conducted at night. Rome had granted the Sanhedrin legal authority over the temple area since disputes arising there were religious in nature rather than civic.

4:4 Repeated attempts to suppress the Christian message only caused it to spread more quickly. On Pentecost morning the believers in Jerusalem only numbered 120 (1:15). In response to Peter's sermon that day, another 3,000 were added (2:41). Now, with the healing of the lame man, Peter's sermon, and the arrest of the apostles, the church grew to about 5,000.

4:5-7 The parties listed in verses 5-6 represent all the most powerful players in the Jewish religious establishment. They made Peter and John stand before them, two men against all the powers of Israel. Ironic, therefore, that they asked the apostles by what power they had performed the miracle and preached the gospel. It was clear that the apostles, who shirked the traditional powers, considered themselves answerable to and empowered by a different authority.

4:8 Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, a necessary prelude to his successful confrontation with the Jewish religious establishment.

4:9-10 Peter again emphasizes to a Jewish audience that Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom the nation had crucified, was raised from the dead by God. This same Jesus is the power by which the lame man was made healthy.

4:11 Peter again identifies Jesus with OT testimony by citing Ps 118:22. Though Jesus was a stone rejected by the Jewish leaders, God made Him the cornerstone (foundation) of the church.

4:12 Peter concluded by making clear the uncompromising claim of Christianity: There is salvation in no one else besides Jesus. This message rings throughout the NT. Jesus Himself said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6).

4:16-18 Remarkably, the Sanhedrin admitted that an obvious sign had been done through them (the apostles), and yet rather than repent and believe they focused on damage control among the people. They sought to halt the spread of Christianity at all costs, so they ordered the apostles not to preach or teach any more about Jesus. It seems they wished to guard their status as religious authorities even at the expense of obvious truth.

4:19-20 Peter and John's reference to what they had seen and heard included their experiences with Jesus plus what they had witnessed since the founding of the church at Pentecost. All told, they had been eyewitnesses to many of God's revelatory acts.