

The King, betrayed

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[0 : 00] Let us pray and then let us get into God's word. Heavenly Father, I just pray now that as I bring your word,!

Have you ever been hurt by a close friend? Perhaps you shared something with them in confidence, only for them to share it with people they shouldn't have.

Maybe they promised to help you out with something very important, but they didn't show up.

Perhaps they even, to use an especially strong word, betrayed you.

There is something particularly painful about being let down by someone you trust, isn't it? It's worse to be wounded by a friend than an enemy.

But let me now turn that question on its head and ask instead, have you ever been the one who has done the hurting?

[1 : 20] Perhaps you are the one who made promises, but for whatever reason, you failed to stand by them. Perhaps you've made a mistake so bad that your friend even feels betrayed.

And there is something particularly painful about letting down and wounding your close friends and your loved ones, isn't there? You're hit with all sorts of dark feelings, guilt over your offence, shame for falling short of your own or your friend's expectations, remorse for the pain you've caused, even fear of losing that friendship.

And the big question hanging over you is this, is forgiveness even possible? Is it possible for offenders and traitors?

Is it possible for a relational failure? A moral failure? A spiritual failure? Today God will pull no punches.

He will confront us with our failings. He will get us to peer into the darkness that we might see ourselves there. For this is a pretty dark passage, is it not?

[2 : 44] Just consider some of the words found throughout. Satan? Temptation? Transgressor? Deny? Betray?

Anguish? Sorrow? Perhaps it is best sum up at the end of verse 53. But this is your hour when darkness reigns.

Today's passage will be a journey into darkness. But thankfully this passage doesn't leave us there. Because we will also find the answer to that question, is forgiveness possible?

And the answer will burst through like a bright shaft of light in the darkness. And so this passage won't simply be confronting, it will also be confidence building.

So let's keep our Bibles open to Luke 22, and hear God's life-giving word today. And let's begin by seeing how Luke has structured today's passage, which I have also put on your handout.

[3 : 54] I think Luke has given us what is technically called a chiasm. That's when a piece of writing arranges phrases or ideas in an ABBA pattern.

Perhaps the best way to think of it is as a sandwich. So imagine verses 31 to 34 and verses 54 to 62 today as the two pieces of the sandwich bread.

In verses 31 to 34, Jesus predicts Peter's denial and failure. And in verses 54 to 62, we have Peter's actual denial and failure.

They bookend our passage today. And then we come, if you like, to the butter of the sandwich.

Notice in verses 35 to 38, that is where Jesus says he is to be numbered with the transgressors in fulfillment of Scripture.

And then in verses 47 to 53, we get the actual account of the arrest of this supposed transgressor or lawbreaker.

[5 : 04] And then we have the letters in the sandwich. In verses 39 to 40 and 45 to 46, where Jesus asks the disciples to pray and the disciples fail to do so.

And finally, we come to the meat in verses 41 to 44, where Jesus will talk with his heavenly Father about drinking a particular cup.

And in a chiasm, the meat is the heart of the passage. Jesus' prayer regarding this cup will be the key takeaway.

And the way Luke has intentionally structured this passage will also inform the structure of today's sermon, such that we will broadly follow him from the bread to the butter and lettuce and finally to its meat and heart.

So here is the first point Luke makes. We all experience failure. We all experience failure. Jesus begins with a warning, verse 31.

[6 : 15] Now, although Jesus is speaking to Peter, his warning is for all the disciples.

Satan isn't just targeting one of them. He is coming for all of them. Satan wants to test them, as he did with Job.

You see, what does Satan want in the end? To get us to abandon Jesus. He wants to shake us so violently that at the end of the day, we make a shipwreck of our faith.

And that is why Jesus gives the warning. Satan is not someone to fool around with. But Peter, as we all know, is no shrinking wallflower.

He's the kind of guy who is pretty sure of himself. And so with full bravado, he announces in no uncertain terms, he will be with Jesus to the end.

[7 : 25] Verse 33. Lord, I'm ready to go with you to prison and to death. He's full of confidence, isn't he?

Perhaps he saw this as his chance to prove he's the greatest disciple. Since that's what the disciples argued about two weeks ago. But as we'll become painfully clear, Peter is overconfident. That is an ever-present danger for us, isn't it? We can take the schemes of Satan too lightly. We can overestimate ourselves and underestimate evil.

And Jesus can see that's precisely what Peter is doing. And so he gently, but firmly pricks his balloon of self-importance.

Verse 34. I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.

[8 : 35] For Jesus already knows what we are about to see. Peter won't stand with him. He can't stand with him.

When the going gets tough, sadly, Peter will be found to be a failure. Jump ahead with me now to the other part of the sandwich bread, starting in verse 54.

At this point, the temple guards have seized Jesus and are leading him to the high priest's house. And then, Luke tells us, Peter was following at a distance.

And right there, Luke zooms in on Peter's movements. Notice verse 55, how he goes from following Jesus from afar to lingering in the high priest's courtyard to warming his hands with those who arrested Jesus.

So step by step, Peter is increasingly distancing himself from Jesus and increasingly aligning with his opponents.

[9 : 56] In other words, Peter's physical movements will mirror his spiritual drift. You see, just because we say, we'll stand with Jesus, doesn't mean we won't drift, does it?

It might not happen all at once or in obvious ways, but bit by bit, it is all too easy to inch away from Jesus until we are not just distant, we are strangers to him.

That's what happened to Peter. And his failure will be total. Look at what happens, verse 56. A servant girl gets curious about this newcomer by the fire, takes a good look at him and exclaims, oh, this guy's been with Jesus.

It seems as if she might not even be talking directly to Peter at this point, but simply commenting on him to another bystander. But Peter is so jumpy, verse 57, he immediately interrupts to deny it.

I don't know anything about this guy Jesus, he says. Confronted, not by soldiers or Pharisees, but merely a servant girl's remark, he experiences a failure of courage.

[11 : 37] But that's only the beginning. Someone else spots him, verse 58, and says, you're one of them. You're on team Jesus. And once again, Peter says, no, I've not been with Jesus.

I'm not even on team Jesus. This is a failure of loyalty. But there is still more to come.

One more time, verse 59, someone says, oh, this guy is definitely with Jesus. And once again, Peter says, no. Now, notice that this third statement happens about an hour later.

In other words, all these accusations are not coming thick and fast, giving Peter no time to think. No. He has had at least an hour to do some self-reflection, to mull over his words, to think about what he can say the next time he might be asked.

And so when it comes to his third denial, there is no mistaking it. This is intentional. This is repeated.

[12:58] It's not just a failure of courage or even loyalty. It is now a moral failure.

Peter deliberately lies. And so Peter's failure is comprehensive. He is a complete failure.

And if Peter can't stand with Jesus, what makes us think we will be any better? The 19th century English bishop, J.C.

Rao, points out in his famous commentary that this is the only time in Luke Jesus calls Simon Peter by name, which is significant, given his name means stone.

And yet even this so-called rock of faith crumbles, showing how even the strongest disciples can fail.

[14:03] What more us? You see, we might not have failed in a dramatic way like Peter, but we all probably have stories when someone said something obviously wrong or something that Jesus would urge us to correct, but we simply lack the courage to speak up.

We didn't stand up for Jesus. We failed to identify with Jesus as we should have. Or perhaps we can recall reaching a crossroads in some area of our lives and we have to decide which path to take.

One path is clearly harder and yet it is also clearly the one that Jesus caused us to go on. But we refuse to take up our cross and follow him.

We refuse to take up our cross by maybe saying the hard but necessary thing in a particular relationship. or to do the ethical thing in our school or in our workplace or to be sacrificial in our giving.

We decided, like Peter, not so much to deny ourselves and follow Jesus, but follow ourselves and deny Jesus.

[15:37] We fail. And we know it. And we know it. Or perhaps we remember a time when we have distanced ourselves from Jesus simply by distancing ourselves from Team Jesus, from our brothers and sisters in Christ who can encourage us to keep living for him.

Maybe we didn't intend to. It just kind of happened. But one day we woke up and realized that we have so removed ourselves from the body of Christ that we can't be said to be loyal to Jesus in any meaningful way at all.

And in all of this, Satan is more than happy to keep cheering you on. After all, Satan loves to see you fail.

And he'll do anything to make that happen. And when we fall, he loves to keep reminding you and I, we are failures.

And the thing is, Satan is right. Isn't he? He is not lying at this point.

[16:58] All of us have been guilty of singing a line like, Lord, I offer my life to you. Or, this is my desire to honor you.

And then doing the complete opposite. And if we are all spiritual failures, like Peter, what are we left with but guilt and shame and remorse and fear and perhaps even self-hatred?

we have nothing. We can't even look Jesus in the eye. But you know what?

We have failed. But God says that is not the end of the story. Peter's failure certainly isn't how Luke ends the story.

For at the precise moment of Peter's third denial, just as the rooster crowed, verse 61, the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.

[18:10] Pause for a moment and picture that scene. Remember, Jesus and Peter are not the only ones there. There must have been dozens of others, temple guards, servant girls, interested bystanders.

But at that moment of great betrayal, Jesus made sure Peter saw him and only him.

Now, we know that there are all kinds of looks in this world. Some of us know the I told you so look, the one where one's facial features are rearranged in such a way as to convey maximum condescension and haughtiness.

Some of us know the withering death stare when someone fixes their eyes on us so intently that it makes us feel uncomfortable or even threatened.

Some of us know the look of resentment, the after all I have done for you, this is what I get in return kind of look. and some of us know the look of disappointment, the kind of gaze that looks slightly pain and says without words, I expected better.

[19 : 36] But what did Peter see in Jesus' eyes at his greatest moment of failure? How does Jesus look at you and I when we fail him, when we deny him and turn our backs on him?

Luke does not tell us explicitly in verse 61, but from the rest of the passage, I think we can safely say it is at the very least a look of great compassion.

It is a look that Peter does not really understand at that point, but which he will come to do so in time. Why do I say so?

Because having pointed out our failings, Luke now wants to point out two more things, and they are all to do with the kind of person Jesus is.

And so here is the second point Luke makes. We all experienced failure, Jesus was numbered with the transgressors.

[20 : 48] Jesus was numbered with the transgressors. Let's come now to the butter in the sandwich, verse 35. Then Jesus asked them, when I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?

Jesus is recalling an earlier time, back in Luke 9 and 10, when he had sent the disciples out on mission with nothing.

No money, no bag, no extra shirt. Why not? Because as they went out, they would encounter open homes and open hearts.

Everything will be provided for them, just as God intended. But now, the circumstances are changing. They are going to encounter more hostile situations, and so they will need to make adequate provisions in advance.

And that's why, verse 36, if you have a purse, take it. And if you don't have a sword, get one as soon as you can. Now that command might catch us off guard.

[22 : 05] Is Jesus endorsing violence and vengeance? The context urges us otherwise. Later, in verses 49-51, when Peter draws a sword to defend him, Jesus rebukes him and heals the injured servant.

So clearly, he is not interested in any sort of uprising. Uprising. Indeed, when the disciples produce two actual swords in verse 38, he dismisses them.

Enough talk of swords, he says. He's exasperated at the way they take his words too literally. Because his point isn't about starting a rebellion.

His point is to be ready for opposition. Opposition so fierce, they might need self protection.

But here is the question we haven't quite answered yet. Why are the circumstances changing? Why do they need to be prepared in this way?

[23 : 21] Jesus tells us verse 37, it is written and he was numbered with the transgressors and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me.

So here is the answer. They must be prepared because Jesus is going to be treated as a transgressor or lawbreaker.

And if so, then his followers should similarly expect that they won't be getting the red carpet any longer either. And that's why they need to be ready.

But Jesus isn't simply saying verse 37 to prepare them. He's doing so also to help us understand how to interpret what is about to happen.

You see, in verse 37, Jesus is quoting Isaiah 53 verse 12. And what is Isaiah 53 all about? It's about a servant of God who endures great suffering, who is said to be numbered with the transgressors because he experiences God's judgment, God's rejection.

[24 : 43] But why? It can't be because of his own transgressions, because Isaiah 53 makes clear this servant is innocent.

Rather, it is because he has placed upon himself the sin of others. As the whole of Isaiah 53 verse 12 on the screen goes on to say, for he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

And Jesus, by identifying what's about to happen to him as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 verse 12, is therefore identifying himself as the servant of Isaiah 53.

Everything that is now about to happen from here on in is to be understood in those terms. So jump with me for a moment to the other side of the sandwich in verses 47 onward.

Did you notice how clearly innocent Jesus is? Have a look at his defense statement to the arresting party down in verses 52 and 53.

[26 : 03] He makes a simple point. Am I some sort of violent criminal that you need to come with swords and clubs? He asked them. I haven't been hard to find.

I have been in the temple in broad daylight all this while and yet you never tried to seize me there. If anything, I have been in the light and you guys are the one working under the cloak of darkness. I am innocent. And notice how it is the people around him instead who are the real transgressors. Consider Judas verse 47.

He's been close to Jesus. He's one of the twelve. And Jesus has been close to him. Very close in fact.

As Thomas Moore, the Lord Chancellor of England back in the 16th century once wrote, the Lord did not deny him companionship.

[27 : 12] He did not take away from him the dignity of his apostleship. He did not even take the purse strings from him even though he was a thief. He admitted the traitor to the fellowship of the beloved disciples at the Last Supper.

He designed to stoop down at the feet of the betrayal and to wash with his most innocent and sacred hands Judas' dirty feet.

But despite all that Judas is now going to engage in an act of profound betrayal. He approaches Jesus to kiss him.

Kisses of course normally convey respect and greetings in ancient culture. Jesus and the only other time Jesus is kissed in Luke's Gospel is by a woman who is shunned as a sinner and as an outsider to convey her profound gratitude and faith.

But ironically the kiss of the insider is the kiss of one who has lost faith in Jesus. It is a kiss of transgression if I can put it that way for it marks the moment of treachery.

[28 : 40] And yet in all this remarkably Jesus still wants to extend a hand of mercy to Judas. Look at verse 48.

Jesus asks him Judas are you betraying the son of man with a kiss? Why does Jesus ask that? Is he trying to make sense of what is happening?

As if Judas' betrayal is a new piece of information to him? No, of course not. Jesus is being kind. He is asking Judas if he really is going to follow through with his plan or if he is still willing to reconsider. You see, this is Jesus. He's not someone who is reluctant to engage with transgressors. All throughout his ministry, Jesus regularly associated himself with those seen as spiritual failures. He went to lepers, he went to the demon possessed, he shared tables with tax collectors, and even now, he is still willing to give a traitor a chance to repent.

[30 : 02] You see, my friends, no matter how much you have failed Jesus, the thing is, Jesus is always ready to engage with you still.

If you desire to turn back to him, he will never cut you off. Now, isn't that the Jesus we need? The one who doesn't turn away even when we have let him down?

But Jesus is not just in the business of engaging with transgressors. To be truly numbered with the transgressors, he must be treated as one.

He must be killed. But why? Well, this brings us to the third point Luke wants to make today. We all experience failure, but Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, so he may prayerfully become our sin bearer.

He may prayerfully become our sin bearer. We come now to the lettuce and to the meat. And here at the very heart of this passage, we find Jesus and his disciples making their way to the Mount of Olives.

[31 : 29] This is where they normally go to pray, and that's what Jesus wants them to do. Verse 40. Clearly it is a matter of urgency, since Jesus will ask them to pray!

Again, down in verse 46. But instead of praying, they fall asleep. Verse 45. At the moment where Jesus probably needs his friends' prayer support the most, once again, they fail him.

And yet it is also relatable, isn't it? How often do we find it easier to sleep than to pray? But that means Jesus is now completely alone in verses 41 to 44.

And alone, he prays. And what he prays for, verse 44, leaves him in anguish. It has him in deep agony, so much so that his sweat became like drops of blood.

Now that is definitely not what typically happens when we pray. So what is it that leaves Jesus in such turmoil? Let's listen in verse 42.

[32 : 56] Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done. So now we know it's got something to do with a cup.

But why is this cup so agonizing? Isn't a cup of water thirst quenching? Isn't a cup of wine enticing? What is so horrendous about this cup's content?

To understand, once again, we need to come back to Isaiah. Listen to Isaiah 51, verse 17. Awake, awake, rise up Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord, the cup of his wrath.

You who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger. And now we realise why this cup is not refreshing at all.

Just the opposite, in fact. For this cup is filled with God's righteous, proper, perfect anger at sin.

[34 : 10] it is his deep seated judgment against every form of injustice, whether big or small, visible or hidden. You see, here is the good news we believe in.

No wrongdoer will finally get away with it. Every serial murderer, every sexual abuser, every genocidal dictator, every massive scammer, they will all one day have to drink from this cup.

They will all one day be held to account and that is wonderful news. And yet at the same time, it is also alarming news because you see, God's wrath will come against every form of injustice including ours.

Every selfish act, every prideful act, God cannot overlook it. He must account for it. He must punish it.

As one pastor puts it, a God who is committed to justice is good news for us as sufferers but it is terrifying news for us as sinners.

[35 : 34] For remember we are complete spiritual failures are we not? And so this cup is actually ours to drink.

But now I want you to listen to Jesus and he says he is holding this cup of wrath. It is not his cup but our cup and so there is no reason he must drink it.

He's innocent. But that's what he's about to do. He's preparing himself to enter into darkness into despair into death into spiritual desolation.

He's preparing himself to bear the curse of our sin on our behalf. And so no wonder as one who is not just fully divine but also fully human, he has to pause and he has to take stock.

Humanly speaking, he fears what is coming. How could he not? And that's why he prays, take this cup from me. Rid me of the horror that I am about to take on.

[36 : 57] But here is what we need to understand. Jesus might fear the path ahead, but he never disagrees that is the path he must take.

Your will be done, he says. On this, he and his father are in complete harmony. You see, although this cup is filled to the brim, every drop of it, a result of every way that we have failed God, Jesus wants to bring this cup to his lips and then he wants to drink it all down.

Even though it brings him great anguish, he won't stop until there is absolutely, absolutely nothing in the cup.

Why? Simple. Because he loves us. He loves us so much that every failure of ours becomes his and every bit of his righteousness becomes ours.

My friends, at the heart of this passage day is the heart of the gospel. And if today you are someone acutely aware of your feelings before God, I have such good news for you.

[38 : 39] Jesus has completely dealt with every single one of them. It is not that what you did doesn't matter. It does. It matters so much that Jesus himself had to drink that cup for you.

But the key thing is he did. He has paid for you and he has prayed for you like he did for Peter in verse 32.

And his prayers are effective. You might stumble badly as Peter did, but Jesus is ready to get you back on your feet. And perhaps one or two of you especially need to hear that today.

Where there is deep contrition, a deep clinging to Christ and a deep commitment to change, there can be deep certainty God is not angry with you.

There can be deep certainty Christ is interceding for you. It's true. Now perhaps today you don't call yourself a Christian but you are aware of some past wrongdoing, past misdeed, some past misdeed.

[39 : 48] Which is haunting you even today. And you've been trying to deal with it yourself, to pay for it yourself, to prove yourself worthy again? Well, I have the exact same good news for you.

Come to Christ, accept what he's done for you, follow his will for you, and you have nothing to fear. He has drunk your cup.

But don't forget, if you don't want Christ to drink this cup, you will still have to drink the cup yourself. But perhaps for some of you, talk of spiritual failings don't really resonate with you. You don't really see yourself that way. In fact, you're pretty confident in yourself.

if so, then what Jesus did will seem small to you. Or what is the big deal about this cup, you will say. But if that is you, then this passage is meant to be a wake-up call.

[40 : 52] Are you sure you are not overestimating yourself as Peter did? After all, spiritual complacency can blind us to our spiritual weaknesses.

And indeed, past success doesn't guarantee future faithfulness. Peter walked with Jesus for years and yet he still stumbled. So don't wait till you hit rock bottom the way Peter did.

Instead, humble yourselves and ask God to give you a fresh sense of your sin so that you might have a fresh appreciation for your saviour. And as we go to Christ, here is the privilege Jesus gives us.

You see, when Jesus looked at! and prayed for Peter, he saw someone worth restoring. Look again at verse 32.

You will turn back Peter, he says, and not only that, you will strengthen your brothers. And it was true. You see, in this passage, Peter might not have been able to go to prison or to death for Jesus, but in the book of Acts, Peter does end up encouraging the church as he faces prison and death.

[42 : 13] And so my brothers and sisters, do this. You might have failed before, but God can still use you to be a source of strength to others as long as you have first placed your trust in Christ.

So today, if you are complacent, let God confront you, but if you are contrite, let God build your confidence in Christ.

For Jesus has drunk the cup of wrath that our cup might overflow with his blessing. Let's pray.

Father, this morning as we hear your word, Lord, I'm conscious there might be people here who would have felt especially that they have failed you in some great way.

They can identify with Peter and so Lord, I just pray that you would grant them the comfort that you have given Peter. Help them to know that they can turn back to you, that they can put your faith in you, that you are faithful and just to forgive!

their sin in Christ. And I pray for those of us who maybe have gotten a bit too comfortable, I pray that this will help us not to downplay what Jesus has done, but to recognize how much we need him and also to turn to him.

[43 : 39] I pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen. Amen.