

MATTHEW 26 (PART 5) & MT 27 (PART 1)

The focus of these chapters are unquestionably Jesus Christ. Yet, in the background of the main scene and story we watch the undoing of two tragic figures, Peter & Judas, two of Jesus' closest followers. As Matthew continues the account of Jesus' arrest and trial, he also records the failure, remorse, and collapse of these two disciples alongside the movement toward the cross.

Matthew 26:69-75 - Peter's Denials

v. 74-75 - Rooster Crowing - this was a signal to Peter of the words Jesus had said earlier in the night. Once the rooster crows, we read "And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said..."

Peters denials

1st denial - "*I don't know what you are talking about...*"

This first denial is interesting. It's evasive. He doesn't directly respond to the inquiry of the girl, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean..." (v. 69)

2nd denial - "*I do not know the man*" (with an oath)

Peter becomes more defensive, recognizing that his first deflection was ineffective. He directly says that he doesn't know Jesus and uses an oath, which would have been intended to show how serious he was, and shut down any follow up. This was something Jesus had discouraged his disciples from doing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:33-37)

3rd denial - "*I do not know the man*" (with cursing and swearing)

The gloves come off with the third denial. The questions are not just coming from a slave girl, but from other people who were asked the second question. There's a little more pressure in this instance as more people are suspicious. And under the pressure, Peter boils over.

"Cursing and swearing" wasn't necessarily profanity, but more likely invoking God's judgment if he wasn't telling the truth.

Peter was a fisherman, he was a strong-willed man, he was a fighter and in some sense unafraid. He is often the first to speak or first to act. He walks on water, declares Jesus to be the Christ (Mt 16:16), slices the servant's ear in Gethsemane, and even the fact that he's in the courtyard now, so close to the center of everything is on brand for the Peter we have come to know through the Gospels.

And yet, who causes him to buckle under the pressure? A young servant girl & unnamed bystanders.

Q - Why did Peter deny Jesus?

Q - How did Peter go from “even though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away” (26:32) to “I do not know the man!” (26:74)?

Q - What role did overconfidence, or misplaced confidence play in Peter’s denials?

Matthew 27:1-2 - Jesus Transferred To Roman Authorities

After condemning Jesus during night proceedings, the chief priests & elders formally reach their decision at daybreak & lead Jesus away to Roman governor Pontius Pilate. This is significant because the Jewish leaders, while possessing religious authority, didn’t have legal authority under Roman rule to carry out an execution. If Jesus was going to be crucified, Rome had to be involved.

It also fulfills Jesus’ words earlier in Matthew when he said of himself “and will hand Him over to **the Gentiles** to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.” (Mt 20:19)

Pilate The Governor (v. 2) - Pontius Pilate served as the Roman governor of Judea under the authority of Caesar. His primary responsibility was maintaining order and stability in a region that was often politically and religiously tense. Pilate governed Judea from approximately AD 26–36 under the authority of the Roman emperor Tiberius.

Matthew 27:3-10 - Judas’ Regret

v. 3 - When Judas learns that Jesus has been condemned (to death), he feels remorse and tries to return the money he had been given to betray Jesus. That’s an interesting reaction from Judas - did he somehow not know what his actions might lead to? Did he expect a different result?

ESV Study Bible - NASB “felt remorse”, ESV “changed his mind” (Gk. *metamelomai*). Judas experienced feelings of regret and remorse, but this is less than “repentance” (Gk. *metanoia*), which means a change of heart.

He’s unable to live after realizing what he participated in hits him & takes own life by hanging.

The chief priests’ response is so striking: “*What is that to us? See to that yourself* (v. 4).” The very men who paid Judas to betray Jesus now completely abandon him in his guilt and despair. The religious leaders show no concern for justice, mercy, or even the brokenness of the man they used to accomplish their plan. And yet they know how to keep the letter of the law in how they use the money Judas throws back at them!

v. 6 - The priest didn’t accept the money back to the temple treasury because it was “the price of blood”, (either for Jesus’ death or Judas’ later death). This came from the Mosaic Law’s direction:

Deuteronomy 23:18 - “You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog (aka a male prostitute) into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God.

So they use the money to buy a piece of property as “a burial place for strangers” (**v. 7**).

Old Testament Parallel

There is an interesting Old Testament parallel that may help us better understand the tragedy of Judas' betrayal. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is repeatedly presented as the greater Davidic King. In the life of David, there was also a close companion and trusted counselor who betrayed the Lord's anointed king and ultimately ended his own life in despair: Ahithophel. The similarities between the two accounts are striking.

Ahithophel was one of King David's most trusted counselors, so highly regarded that his advice was viewed almost "as if one consulted the word of God" (2 Sam. 16:23). One of David's sons, Absalom, rebelled against his father in an attempt to take over the kingdom. The rebellion and betrayal began subtly and undercover. When Absalom made his rebellion official and public, David's close friend and advisor, Ahithophel, also betrayed David and sided with Absalom instead (2 Sam 15:12, 31).

2 Samuel 15:12 - "And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh, while he was offering the sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom."

2 Samuel 15:31 - "Now someone told David, saying, 'Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.' And David said, 'O LORD, I pray, make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness.'" As the rebellion unfolded, Absalom chose to listen to the advice of someone other than Ahithophel, surely as a result of David's prayer.

2 Samuel 17:14 (NLT) - Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "Hushai's advice is better than Ahithophel's." For the LORD had determined to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, which really was the better plan, so that he could bring disaster on Absalom!"

Think about this for a moment: Ahithophel had betrayed the anointed king of Israel, sided with the rebellion, and aligned himself against David. When Ahithophel realized that his plans were failing and that he had chosen the wrong side, he was devastated and took his own life:

2 Samuel 17:23 - "Now when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself; thus he died and was buried in the grave of his father."

Ahithophel was David's trusted counselor who betrayed the LORD's anointed king, sided with the rebellion, and ultimately ended his own life in despair when his plans collapsed—a striking parallel to Judas and Jesus.

Closing Thoughts: Peter's denials reveal something deeply human about the progression of sin. People rarely suddenly arrive at open rebellion or complete collapse all at once. More often, compromise develops gradually. Peter begins evasively: "I don't know what you are talking about." It is indirect & defensive. Then the pressure increases, & so does the denial: "I do not know the man." Finally, Peter digs in even deeper, denying Jesus with cursing and swearing. There is a noticeable progression as fear and self-preservation begin to take control. What is especially striking is that

Peter's first instinct is not honesty, but avoidance. Rather than plainly owning the truth, he immediately begins protecting himself, and each denial makes the next one easier and more severe.

In many ways, we often respond similarly in our own relationship with God. At first we soften the truth, avoid conviction, justify our actions, or distance ourselves from what we know is right. Instead of taking honest accountability for our attitudes, words, or behavior, we become evasive and defensive. But sin rarely stays contained. One compromise often leads to another, and unless something interrupts the pattern, the human heart tends to double down rather than repent. Peter's story is also a warning about spiritual self-confidence. Only hours earlier he boldly declared, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I never will." Yet in the moment of pressure, he collapsed in a way he likely never imagined possible. The passage reminds us to approach our walk with humility, honesty, and an awareness of how desperately we need God's grace and strength.

The rooster crow became a mercy to Peter because it awakened him to reality. In that moment, he remembered the words of Jesus and finally saw clearly what he had become in only a few short hours. In the same way, we need moments of conviction that wake us up before our hearts drift even further. God often uses conviction, consequences, Scripture, other people, or moments of clarity as a kind of "rooster crow" in our lives, an interruption that exposes where compromise is leading us. The danger is not simply failure, but continuing down the path without repentance. Peter's story reminds us of the importance of responding quickly when conviction comes, before our hearts grow harder and our compromise grows deeper.

And yet, how amazing that stories of failure are part of the Bible, God's inspired book. Amazing because we too fail and God wants us to learn and grow and change and know that God will help us right in the real world, true to life, messy days of our lives.

"The fact that the New Testament records such failures in its heroes is a remarkable testimony to its veracity and reliability. If the story had been made up, nobody would have dreamed of making Peter fail at so crucial a juncture. It was true, and that is why it was recorded. It was a warning to other leaders who might be in danger of promising more than they could perform and who, through failing to watch out against temptation and pray for God's strength, might succumb to denying Christ themselves in a hostile environment—which is what most of them lived in."
(Source: Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Bible Speaks Today*, page 286)"

In the very verses detailing the events of his sacrifice for us, we are being shown that we need a savior. Jesus is so much better than us. While Jesus is unmoved and bold before the High Priest, Peter falls apart at the question of a servant girl. While Judas is undone when realizing his plans and attempts to control God's plan aren't going to work out, Jesus remains faithful, even when things are hard and dark. This is why Jesus is such a great savior, worthy of our trust, love, obedience, and whole-life devotion.

Philippians 2:8-11 - (Jesus) humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 ***Therefore*** God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.