Lessons from Peter’s Denial

Intro: The Bible gives us examples from which we are to learn. We can learn as much from those who presented us bad examples as we can from those who gave us good examples.

I. **Peter’s Denial**

A. Peter denied the Lord three times.

B. There was a continued increasing intensity:

1. The record of this account:

a. Mat. 26:69-75 “Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”

b. Mark 14:66-72 “And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.”

c. Luke 22:54-62 “Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”

d. John 18:15-27 “And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by
struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? 23) Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? 24) Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caïphas the high priest. 25) And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. 26) One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? 27) Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.”

2. The increased intensity:

a. A simple denial: “I know not what thou sayest.”
b. A denial with an oath (“guarantee by means of an oath”—BDAG).
c. A denial with curse (“to invoke divine harm if what is said is not true”—Louw-Nida) and swear (“to affirm the veracity of one’s statement by invoking a transcendent entity [God], freq. w. implied invitation of punishment if one is untruthful”—BDAG).

C. This denial despite being with Jesus:

1. From the beginning of His earthly ministry: Mat. 4:17-20 “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 18) And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 19) And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. 20) And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.”

2. At the healing of his own mother-in-law: Mat. 8:14-15 “And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever. 15) And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.”

3. Jesus walking on the water on the Sea of Galilee: Mat. 14:22-33 “And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. 23) And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. 24) But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. 25) And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. 26) And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. 27) But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28) And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. 29) And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. 30) But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31) And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? 32) And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. 33) Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

4. At the transfiguration mount, seeing Jesus speak with Moses and Elijah: Mat. 17:1-13 “And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart. 2) And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. 3) And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. 4) Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 5) While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. 6) And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7) And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8) And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. 9) And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. 10) And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? 11) And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. 12) But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever
they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. 13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.”

D. **We can learn from his mistakes.**

II. **Pride is dangerous**

A. **Mat. 26:33** “Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.”

B. **Jesus warned Peter what he would do.**
   1. Peter seemingly did not believe Him.
   2. Apparently he thought himself above temptation.

C. **No one is above temptation.**
   1. Too often we have more confidence in our abilities than we should.
   2. Peter:
      a. Christ promised the keys of the kingdom to him: Mat. 16:18-19 “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
      b. He had left everything to follow Jesus: Mark 10:28 “Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.”
   3. Satan aims high and no one is immune from his “cross hairs”; 1 Cor. 10:12 “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

D. **The destructive nature of pride**
   1. Pro. 16:18 “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”
   2. Mat. 23:12 “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”
   3. Jam. 4:6 “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

III. **Good Intentions Are Not Enough**

A. **Mat. 26:35** “Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.”

B. **Peter never intended to deny our Lord.**
   1. It is actions by which we will be judged, not intentions.
      a. 2 Cor. 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”
      b. Rev. 20:12 “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”
   2. In school, intending to study does not equal a good grade.
   3. In work, intending to work does not equal a paycheck.

C. **Good intentions must be joined with action.**
   1. Peter’s actions should have been to confess Christ instead of denying Him.
   2. Gal. 5:6 “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”
   3. 1 The. 1:3 “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;”
IV. WITHOUT PRAYER WE ARE EASY MARKS FOR SATAN

A. Prayer regarding Peter:
   1. Jesus prayed for him: Luke 22:32-33 “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. 33And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.”
   2. Jesus instructed him to pray: Mat. 26:39-46 “And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. 40And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 42He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. 43And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.”

B. Peter failed to heed the warning to pray.
   1. His flesh was weak—he was too tired.
   2. Many have been instructed to pray, but do not.

C. When one is tired:
   1. Many will be lost because of being too tired.
      a. “I cannot do [such and such] because I am too tired.”
      b. “I have to work all week long.”
      c. It may be the case:
         (1) You may need to drop some things.
         (2) You may need to reassess your love for and dedication to the Lord.
            (a) It is generally a heart problem and not a tired problem.
            (b) Do you find the energy and time to do those things you really want to do?
            (c) Mat. 6:33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
            (d) Mat. 22:37 “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”
   2. When one is tired, he will not make the best decisions.

D. We must be a praying people.
   1. Luke 18:1 “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;”
   2. Rom. 12:12 “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;”
   3. 1 Th. 5:17 “Pray without ceasing.”

V. STAY CLOSE TO THE LORD

A. Luke 22:54 “Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off.”

B. Peter did not stay close enough to the Lord.
   1. He had been close by.
      a. When Jesus was popular.
      b. Even during unpopular times.
c. This was different.
2. Luke uses the Greek ἀκολουθέω (akoloutheo).
   a. It means, “to follow someone as a disciple, be a disciple, follow” (BDAG).
   b. It is in the imperfect tense.
      (1) The imperfect denotes action that is continuous or linear in the past.
      (2) Thus as Jesus was taken to the high priest’s house, Peter continues to follow at a distance.
      (3) He was afraid to be identified as a follower of Jesus.
         (a) What about you at work?
         (b) What about you at entertainment and recreational places?
         (c) What about children at school?

C. The other apostles:
   1. They were scattered so they did not face this kind of situation and temptation.
   2. Mat. 26:31 “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.”
      a. Offended is from the Greek σκανδαλίζω (skandalizo) “to cause to stumble and fall” (Zodhiates).
      b. We need to be cold or hot; Rev. 3:15 “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.”

VI. DO NOT BE IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME

A. Luke 22:55 “And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.”

B. It appears as if Peter was ashamed to be seen with Christ.
   1. It was easier to mingle with those of the world and enjoy their comforts.
   2. Mat. 26:58 “But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.”

C. He should have been with John and/or other apostles.
   1. It is easier to do right around others that want to do right.
   2. John may have confessed the Lord during this time:
      a. Notice also, Mat. 26:69 “Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.”
      b. John 18:16-17 “But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. 17Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples? He saith, I am not.”
      c. It would have been easier for Peter to overcome the temptation if he had been around John or another apostle.

D. How many are in the wrong place at the wrong time?
   1. Just as Peter, one cannot be “comforted by the fire” of the world and not get “burned.”
   2. Close contact with things that can harm has an adverse effect.
      a. Pro. 6:27-29 “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? 28 Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? 29 So he that goeth in to his neighbour’s wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.”
      b. 1 Cor. 15:33 “Be not deceived: evil communications [companionships—ASV; company—NKJV] corrupt good manners [morals—ASV; habits—NKJV].”
c. We need to be careful about choosing:
   (1) Our friends
   (2) Our hobbies
   (3) Where we go and what we do.

VII. **Sin Will Multiply Before You Know It**

A. **Sin escalates quickly.**
   1. Peter denied the Lord three times before he even realized it.
   2. Achan saw, coveted, and took the accursed things.
      a. Jos. 6:18 “And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.”
      b. Jos. 7:21 “When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.”

B. **We must be ever vigilant and watchful.**
   1. 1 Pet. 5:8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”
   2. 1 Cor. 16:13 “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”
   3. 1 Thes. 5:6 “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”

C. **We must overcome sin.**
   1. When sin rears its ugly head.
      a. We must recognize it and confess it; 1 John 1:8-10 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”
      b. We must repent of it
         (1) Luke 13:3 “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”
         (2) Acts 8:22 “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”
   2. We must be ready to get back up when we fall.
      a. This is what Peter was instructed to do.
      b. Luke 22:32 “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

VIII. **Remember That Jesus Can See You**

A. **Luke 22:60-61** “And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.”
   1. Apparently Peter did not know that Jesus could see him.
   2. **Looked upon** is from the Greek verb ἐμβλέπω (emblepo) meaning “to look at something directly and therefore intently, look at, gaze on” (BDAG).

B. **He sees in good times and bad.**
   1. Knowing that parents are watching makes children act differently.
   2. God is always watching.
      a. Pro. 15:3 “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”
b. Psa. 139:7-8 “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.”

C. Because of Jesus’ look, Peter went out and wept.
   2. The Lord looked at him with rebuke.
   3. The Lord looked at him with disappointment.
   4. The Lord looked at him with love (He was about to die for Peter’s sin).

IX. There Is Always The Possibility Of Forgiveness

A. God always desires to forgive and save.
   1. 1 Tim. 2:4 “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”
   2. 2 Pet. 3:9 “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

B. Peter
   1. The Lord showed His concern about Peter.
   2. We do Peter an injustice if we do not recognize that he repented.
      a. He affirmed his love for Christ; John 21:15-17 “So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”
      b. Jesus had given Peter the keys to the kingdom.
         (1) Mat. 16:19 “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
         (2) Peter used those keys on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Conclusion: If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. Let us learn from Peter’s denial of our Lord so we will not fall away from Him.