

# The story we need to keep hearing

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] well I don't know if you have any favorite stories that you read again and again if you've spent an afternoon with young children you'll quickly realize what their favorite stories are and you'll become haunted by that cry again again again and you'll read it again and again and again and there are many books that you might have read as children so many times you can memorize them for me um I can still remember probably most of the words of Dr Seuss's green eggs and ham or we're going on a bear hunt books like that well I wonder as Christians whether we can sometimes come to the gospels especially in the passion narrative and feel like we're reading something again and again and again we feel like we know it off by heart and that part with Peter's denial I think especially well known it's a historical event that all four gospel writers choose to include as an aside if this is your first time hearing an account of Jesus's life the fact that all four gospel writers include this event is really good evidence that it really happened what's more that if it was made up it's just about the worst fake news that the early church could make up because it is an account of how Jesus was betrayed and let down and denied by one of the leaders the lead apostle of the early church it's far from flattering it would only be included if it really happened and John includes this story though because it's a story of a disciple who stumbled and sinned he's deliberately included because it shows a disciple who sinned but it's not just that it's also the story of a savior who died it's the story of a savior who predicted and watched his friend close by deny him and still chose to die in his place verse 14 is our key really key verse really

Caiaphas's words that it would be good if one man died for the people we already know that that one man is Jesus but I hope over the next few minutes we'll see what good news this is what good news it is that Peter and those like him are the people that Christ came to die for I pray that this time that we have together we'll even if whether this is a new story for you or an old one we'll realize that this is good news that we really need to hear again and again we've got two points the disciple who died denied and the savior who died so first of all the disciple who denied we pick up the story as Jesus is beginning as being led away by a band of soldiers and officers from the Jewish leaders just hours ago Judas and his one of his disciples was eating the Passover meal with Jesus but for 30 pieces of silver

Judas has betrayed Jesus into the hands of his enemies and now with hands tied Jesus is being led away to the head honcher of the Jewish leaders this guy called Annas Annas used to be high priest until he was replaced by the Romans with Caiaphas his son-in-law but Annas is clearly the one with all the power because Jesus is taken to him first now by now most of Jesus' disciples have scattered but verse 15 tells us that two remain Simon Peter and another disciple who's probably our author the apostle John because he's able to record all this in such eyewitness detail and because he often refers to himself in the third person in this gospel like he does here anyway you can imagine them keeping to the shadows as they follow the band of soldiers through the winding streets pretty soon they reach their destination the courtyard of the high priest the door to the dragon's den if you like but fortunately for the other fortunately this other disciple was known by the girl at the gate so he's able to slip in and but then he has to go back to the door because Simon Peter needs to get in too and you can imagine

Peter not knowing what's happening not knowing anyone in there kind of head down the hood up he probably put the hood up cautiously going forward wanting to just duck through the door get out of the way get all this over the other disciple is clearly known as a disciple of Jesus and so the servant girl sees Peter and naturally assumes oh this man must be another disciple as well so she says you aren't one of this man's disciples too are you perhaps she said it disdainfully not you as well or with surprise but whatever it is Peter replies I am not and he walks through it's shocking isn't it here is Peter the de facto lead apostle who back in chapter 13 verse 37 you can look that up later he said I will lay down my life for you but now under just this light interrogation of a servant girl he denies his savior it wasn't even like Peter was alone in the situation the other disciple was right there it's like he had his Christian mate standing right next to him but he Peter declared still that he wasn't a follower of Jesus and in case we haven't grasped the severity of his word just look at the details in verse 18 having denied Jesus John goes out and points out that Peter now stands with the very soldiers who arrested Jesus in denying Jesus he chooses not to stand with him but with the world who hates him but that's not the end of the story if we just look over to verse 25 maybe the flames flickered brighter for just one second around the fire but the others around the fire get a quick glimpse of Peter's face including the relative of the man whose ear Peter slashed off and twice they ask if he is a disciple and twice he denies it and Peter's faithlessness is only accented by the way John interweaves Peter's interrogation with Jesus's do you notice how the camera switches from outside to inside to outside again and we just get this brutal contrast while Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing

Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything this is truly the low point of discipleship in the gospel I don't know how you feel as you read this my stomach clenches and I want to call out on the page Peter no how can you do such a thing it's like in a film where you see someone do absolutely absolutely terrible you know that this is going to lead to them dying or to some breakup in relationship or whatever it is you're like how can you do such a thing Peter how could you how could you be so weak how could you be so cowardly it's that hands-on-head dismay that John wants us to have that's the first part of why he includes this to show us the tragedy of denial this is a tragic account but the longer we stare at Peter the more uncomfortable I think we also get we come to John's second purpose this is a tragic account it's also a convicting account because it exposes our hearts it reminds us reminds me at least of when you've been when we felt ashamed of Christ see denial excuse me denial and shame are often parallels in the New Testament and I think that this language of shame is really helpful to bring out what this passage is saying what denial means for ourselves personally I can think of a time when I was on holiday with my sisters and extended family on my mum's side and we all had a big house that we had rented between a bunch of families on New Jersey shore we've been looking forward to this for ages and enjoying spending time with cousins I hadn't seen in a while and first the first morning dad told me and my sisters that we were going to read the bible before we were going to head off to the beach and I straight away discouraged the idea I thought oh no I don't want my cousins who weren't believers to see me sitting down and reading the bible as a family they're going to think I'm such a religious killjoy I mean they already know that I'm about to start working at a church and I in my mind you know these kind of irritating snot-nosed legalistic priests that are in tv dramas I'm picturing my face on there and just thinking that's how they're going to see me instead of seeing this as a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate to them what the real Christian life looked like I was ashamed I was scared I didn't I wanted to distance myself from that I wonder how many of you have a similar story that comes to mind as you read this account I'm sure a lot of us can think of times when our classmates or our teammates or work colleagues have asked what we get up to in the weekend and we have artfully mentioned everything except Sunday and church meeting with God's people those of you who are students might have had an experience maybe when you're flyering for a CU missions week and a friend or a lecturer walks past and you just want to hide within yourself just hope that they don't see you hope you don't have to then later talk about Jesus with them or something like that you know five years on I still catch myself worrying that my lecturers might recognize me and wonder what on earth I'm doing with my life so easy to it's longer than five years actually but it's so easy to revert to a pattern of just of being afraid of people seeing you of people questioning who you are of your priorities of why you don't go with the drift of the world maybe you've been maybe you try to explain to a friend what

[ 11 : 04 ] you believe and you're just listening to yourself and you're thinking they must think I'm so backward or it might be that you've had a work colleague who has just read something about what churches believe on marriage or gender identity and they've said oh you don't believe that do you those of you in secondary school if you're listening you might have had to be in a group discussion in religious studies in class and the teacher has said okay put up your hand if you believe in God or something about that it's scary and I know that there are times when God has wonderfully helped us to stand for him we praise God for that but it's also a painful reminder of the times when we have spoken or have not spoken because we're ashamed of Christ because we're ashamed to maybe be with his people or ashamed of his teaching now I want to acknowledge that there are some people out there who will have very tender consciences I remember a friend chatting with me who felt that they had denied Christ just like Peter because they hadn't spoken up about Jesus when their colleagues were mocking Christianity but I think there's a difference between denying Jesus out loud and not speaking up when Jesus is mocked because I think it's more about our motivation than whether we actually say something or not at that minute the person who is the quietest of all and might not say something at that moment might later go and have a chat with a friend some of us are just naturally more confrontation and so we will jump straight into a debate or an argument it's about our heart at the time however nonetheless in various degrees Peter's denial is exposing and convicting whether outright or not we are all disciples who have been ashamed of our master but thankfully the story doesn't end there there is another reason why John has included this there's another reason why John has woven Peter's denial with Jesus's trial this is a convicting account this is a tragic account but it's also a comforting account

John didn't just insert Jesus' interrogation into the middle of Peter's denial to highlight how fickle and faithless he was he did it to show that Jesus went to the cross for disciples like Peter I don't doubt that Peter would say that denying Christ was the worst thing he ever did but that's also precisely why it is here John is saying that if Jesus could die in the place of Peter then he can die in the place of you too and that brings us to the second point for this evening the saviour who died I want us to look back at verse 14 verse 14 is an editorial comment that John has slipped in a number of times throughout his gospel John slips in these comments inserts these comments that interrupt the flow of the narrative and it's worth looking out for them you might know that comment at the end of chapter 20 it says these things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and by believing you may have life in his name as those as God's people who are seeking to learn how to read his word better it's worth us looking out for these comments because they're often the key to understanding a passage or even understanding the whole gospel like that but in chapter 20 so we need to pay attention to this editorial note in verse 14 that really is I think the key verse in this passage where Caiaphas says as where John writes that Caiaphas was the one who advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people now in chapter 11

John has already related and narrated this plot where Caiaphas gives his grisly guidance which unintentionally prophesies Jesus' death now John mentions it again because it's the lens through which he wants us to see Peter's denial and Jesus' death back in chapter 11 you can see that John intends us to understand Caiaphas' prediction of Jesus' death in terms of sacrifice and substitution Jesus dying in the place like a sacrificial lamb of those he came to save see in terms of sacrifice from chapter 12 Jesus has John has been dripping in this idea of sacrifice since chapter 12 he's been talking about us to about the cross in terms of what happens at Passover Passover was that festival that celebrated when God rescued his people from Egypt with the final plague on the firstborn where the Israelites were only safe from death if a lamb died in their place from the start

God was teaching that sin deserves death and that the only way out was through a substitute and the language of substitution is what we find on Jesus' lips he uses sacrificial language to describe himself as the good shepherd laying down his life for his sheep Jesus is going to die as a sacrificial substitute for who?

well John says here that candidate number one is Peter a disciple who denies verse 14 is John telling us that Christ came to die in the place of Peter and disciples like him we've already established that Peter's denial isn't a very flattering picture but actually if we zoom out we see that it's part of a beautiful portrait of redemption in fact the uglier Peter's denial is the more we should be left in awe at the wonder of Jesus who is standing there who is knowing what's going on and still is setting his face at the cross as he knows that Peter is denying him he's determined to die for him dying in someone's place is something I imagine we're pretty familiar with from books or TV or films here are just a few examples of things that I thought of dying in someone's place is quite an important theme running through the Harry Potter series

[ 17 : 51 ] I won't give any spoilers though there are numerous films where people take a bullet for the president or something like that and if you like Disney you'll know that there's lots of Disney films that involve one person dying for the other but they normally involve them also magically coming back to life in the end or something like that if you've been forced to watch Frozen a hundred times you'll know that as well on most of these examples though the person sacrifices themselves for a good person you don't get James Bond jumping in the way of a bullet to save evil henchman number three well thankfully how good we are isn't Jesus' criteria for whether he dies for us the apostle Paul famously writes that though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners

Christ died for us and that could be the tagline to describe Peter and Jesus while Peter was still a sinner Christ died for him Peter's denial didn't put off Jesus from going to the cross it showed its necessity because only by going to the cross could Peter have any hope only by Jesus dying is there any hope for us you might be listening as someone who's never put your trust in Jesus maybe you have come to realise though that you are a mess that you are a mess you've seen your life you've looked at how you live and you think I want a change maybe you spent your whole life ignoring God maybe you spent your whole life rejecting Jesus you might think forget denying Christ I'm more like those religious leaders who want him dead well if you think you're unworthy if you think that you're too bad for Christ to want you if you think that you're the last person you'd want to have in his kingdom take heart because while you were still a sinner

Christ died for you if you will put your trust in him so put your trust in him accept his death on your behalf Jesus died as a substitute for sinners that is good news for everyone but as I said at the start it continues to be good news for those who trust in Jesus and are his disciples because that death was also for saints who stumble and sin it's something that we still need to hear again and again for Peter for you for me for Peter it wasn't three strikes and you're out and it's the same for us as those who have believed in Jesus and our children of God there is nothing that can separate us from him you might be feeling very convicted today over the past few days about something you said or done this week maybe in being ashamed of Christ before the world maybe in stumbling in sin really badly maybe over the past few weeks or months there's a sin that you haven't been trying to put to death something you feel addicted to maybe over the past months or years you've been drifting away from

Christ maybe you're only watching this live stream because you feel scarred and burned by Christians or church and you want nothing to do with them and you're only listening because something prompted you to listen tonight well however far you feel like you've drifted you're not beyond Christ's reach the devil would probably love to tell us that wherever we're at in the spectrum of feeling ashamed that our sin devil would love to tell us that our sin puts us beyond the pale he would love to leave you convicted from this passage that you'd love to leave you convicted but to rob you from the comfort that the gospel offers don't let that happen there is no stain of sin too dark that Christ blood can't wash it away no denial too bad that you can't be restored remember that this is the story of

Peter this isn't the story of Judas Judas fell away Judas never repented Peter stumbled he stumbled just about as badly as you can but he repented and he was restored to Jesus Jesus brought him back to him you can just see that for yourself let's flick over to John chapter 21 if you've got it in your Bible so I can just read it for you though as well chapter 21 from verse 15 you can just scan it three times Peter denied Jesus and so three times Jesus asks him do you love me do you love me do you love me and each time Peter says yes Lord you know that I love you each time feeling more and more hurt by the comment each time Peter says you know that I love you and so

[ 23 : 34 ] Jesus wonderfully lovingly forgives him and he reinstates him and gives him the mission that will define the rest of the church's life feed my sheep and follow me Jesus died for sinners he died for saints who stumble that's good news that is a gospel that we need to hear again and again we do stumble every day we'll continue to stumble every day until Christ takes us to be with him or until he comes again and so we need to be reminded of the cross every day so that we might have the comfort and hope that Christ brings that hope of restoration that as shortly as Peter stumbled and Christ died for him so too has Christ died for all of us even when we stumble for trusting in him it's wonderful news we can rejoice in pray that it guards our hearts through the rest of this week when we as we face sin and we face temptation that we'll always be called back to the cross that we'll be calling one another back to the cross pointing each other to this story to Christ death on our behalf to Christ determination to go to the cross for sinners well that's all for me so let's come to

God in prayer and ask him to bed this truth in for us it is good that one man should die for the people heavenly father it is good it is more wonderful than we can understand or express that Christ would willingly go to the cross to save sinners such as ourselves Lord we marvel at your love that while we are still sinners Christ died for us thank you that he took the wrath he took the death that we deserve as he stood in our place Lord we're more grateful that even in this new life you give us that even while we stumble in sin that we can still come back to you that our sin doesn't disqualify us we're not saved just until the start of the Christian life we're saved once and for all Lord we thank you the blood of Christ cleanses all sin Father may there never be a day when we forget the gospel please guard us from stumbling we pray but when we stumble call us back find this gracious good news on our hearts this week as we go into this world make us a people who know that we are redeemed and in that confidence continue to follow you we pray this we ask all this in Jesus name amen and these you you