

# Communion

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Now I'd like to look at two other men who responded to Christ. Two men who responded to Christ in light of the cross.

The cross is still at the moment of the response. The cross is still in the future. But because of how things have gone, the cross is as real as past.

And how did they look back in their experience? How did they look back in connection with that cross of Christ?

Now these are two men, both failed. Both failed in their following of Jesus. And both looked back.

But one looked back in anger. And the other one, as he looked back, actually looked forward in hope. And I wonder if this response of this twin somehow can help us to understand more of what Christ, not just has done, but what He should be for us.

[ 1 : 1 3 ]     I would like to focus our thoughts this morning before we sit around the Lord's table on these two men of whom we have read in the Gospels.

First, the one that looked back in anger in Matthew 27. We also read about Him in Acts chapter 1.

And I'll read a few verses there. As Peter refers to Him in Acts 1 verse 15. In those days, Peter stood up among the believers, a group numbering about 120, and said, Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.

He was one of our number and shared in this ministry. With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field. There he fell headlong.

His body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this. So they called that field in their language, Akeldama, that is, field of blood.

[ 2 : 3 0 ]     Two men who responded, this one looked back at the cross, which in a sense was still in the future, for Jesus was still in the process of being tried and condemned.

But he knew that the cross was going to be a reality. He was aware that he had been condemned, and that he, Jesus, the man he had been with for a good number of years, the man he had seen, the man he had heard, because he had betrayed him, because he had failed to be a disciple as he should have been.

That man who he knew was innocent, that man was going to be crucified, and that man was going to be dying a cruel death, a death, a type of death we really cannot even imagine.

Now, there is no question about the words spoken by Jesus and about the words of Scripture. It's a mystery that we need to accept in faith, that of God's sovereignty, and how God in His purpose has ordained all things.

And so, Jesus spoke about him saying, For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed. And we read about Judas being referred to as the son of perdition, but there is no question that together with this reality of God's sovereignty, Scripture speaks to us very clearly about man's responsibility and about man's freedom.

[ 4 : 06 ] Man is there, and he is there before Jesus, or Jesus is there before man. And although the reality of God's sovereignty is there, the reality of man's responsibility is there too, and Judas responded to this Jesus betraying him.

But then, in addition to that betrayal, he did something else. As I've mentioned, he looked back in anger.

He was unwilling to deal with the consequences of his actions. This is what comes out clearly in the first verses of chapter 27 in Matthew.

He just wanted to somehow undo what he had done. Of course, he was not going to maybe ask for an exchange with Jesus.

No, he was somehow just wanted to make sure that he didn't have to deal with the consequences of his actions. He wanted to get rid of that money he had received.

[ 5 : 11 ] He wanted to get rid of anything that would tie him with the action that was going to take place with the death of Jesus. He was unwilling to not only take or deal with the consequences of his actions, but he was certainly unwilling to accept responsibility for what he had done.

But especially, although he, in a way, had second thoughts, he was bitter, but he was unrepentant.

Unrepentant. Now, the authorized version puts the end of verse 3, saying that he, or the middle of verse 3, which we read here in the NIV, that he was seized with remorse.

The AV puts it that he repented himself, and the ESV says that he changed his mind. What did that man change his mind about?

That is a crucial question, I think. That is the question that made the difference, or that could have made the difference between him looking back in anger, or looking back in another way.

[ 6 : 28 ] You see, the reality is that when we read what he did, and when we realize even how Peter then later speaks about Judas, we realize that he changed his mind about what he did.

But he did not change his mind about Jesus. You see, for him, Jesus, yes, he was innocent. But for him, Jesus had never been the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The Messiah, the Savior. We don't know exactly why is it that Judas followed Jesus for those years.

It has been conjectured as to whether he followed Jesus because he dealt with the purse, he managed the finances of the group, and he took advantage of it.

That may have been the case, that he did so. But why at the beginning, or why would he have been with Jesus for that time? We cannot be absolutely certain.

[ 7 : 40 ] But the reality is that, yes, he changed his mind. He was filled with remorse. He realized he had betrayed a man who was innocent. That man was going to be executed.

Maybe he still expected that Jesus would do something, something striking to get rid of the people. He had not been tried eventually and not be crucified.

He had seen Jesus doing quite amazing things at different times when people had gone to arrest Jesus. Jesus had just walked through the midst of the people, and they had not been able to seize him.

Maybe he still expected that Jesus would do something that he had done before. But the reality is that I think we can affirm that he did not change his mind as to who Jesus was.

He was not ready to turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Verse 5 tells us that he threw away the money. He went away and hung himself.

[ 8 : 49 ] Yet he knew. Remember that Judas was with them. That's what Peter says. He was with us.

He was with us. He was part of our number. He shared in this ministry. And Judas had seen how Jesus had dealt with sinners.

Judas had seen how Jesus had dealt with them, with the disciples, when they were filled with fear or with doubt. He had heard him speak about the purpose of his death and how he was to die for the salvation of sinners.

And he had seen all those things. And yet he just looked back at what he had done and hung himself, never looked to Jesus for forgiveness.

Now, I know that it's speculation. And we shouldn't speculate too much, at least. But would have Judas looked at Jesus with a prayer of forgiveness?

[ 10 : 02 ] His story might have been different from the human perspective. But he never did that. He looked back in anger.

He failed. But because his view of who Jesus was was never in agreement of what Jesus had said about himself, he could do nothing but look at the failure of his life and look back in bitterness and desire for its end.

And then there is another man of whom we have read in Luke 22. A man who also failed.

A man who failed miserably. A man who failed after saying he wouldn't. As we come to Luke 22, especially in verse 54, we read that the disciples, or we read in the narratives of the Gospels, that when Jesus was arrested, the disciples left.

They all left in fear. But somehow Peter followed. Peter followed. And maybe the reason that Peter followed is that actually he believed that he was stronger than what Jesus said he actually was.

[ 11 : 27 ] Because if you go back in this very same chapter, Luke 22, at verse 31, we read these words from Peter, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you a sweet.

But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. But he replied, Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.

Jesus answered, I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me. And maybe Peter said, no, he must be wrong. I mean, he'd done this with Jesus before.

You remember that occasion when Jesus began speaking to them about what kind of death he was to die. And Peter took him aside and said, now, Jesus, shut up.

Don't speak like that. That's not the way of speaking for a Messiah. Maybe Peter thought, no, no, I'm stronger. The reality is that this may be what Jesus thinks about me.

[ 12 : 34 ] The reality is that this may be what Jesus thinks I could do, but no, I won't. I know my strength. I know my faith. I was the one that confessed you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, when you asked us about it.

I am the one who took the sword to defend you. And so I will follow you. I will not fail.

And so as we go on in that passage, in that chapter 22, we find out that Peter's denial followed exactly the pattern Jesus had predicted.

We've read verse 32 just now. And in verse 56, we find that exactly his denial from verses 56 to 60, we have read earlier.

We find that his denial followed exactly the pattern that Jesus had established. You see, we read that he, that things happened exactly, and not only that things happened exactly, but what we read is that Peter was made aware immediately that things had actually happened like Jesus said they would.

[ 14 : 03 ] You see, Peter knew, Jesus, I'm sorry, knew that Peter would deny him. but yet, Jesus was still willing to assure Peter that he had called him.

You see, in verse 32 of chapter 22 of Luke, we read Peter, we read Jesus say, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

You see, Peter, he would also, like Judas, he would leave we also read about Peter weeping bitterly, but there was a difference.

We will look at it. Peter's denial led him to have actually a proper view of himself. The reality is that because his denial followed exactly the pattern that Jesus had predicted.

Peter's denial allowed him, Peter himself, to have a proper view of himself. Without a doubt, Peter must have felt a failure.

[ 15 : 14 ] He had done just exactly what he thought he would never do, deny his Savior. He had just done what he thought he could never do.

How could I disown my Savior in this way? He must have certainly felt sadness. He realized he wasn't the kind of person he was.

Maybe Peter thought of himself that he was some kind of a super-duper spiritual Christian. You see, I'm the man. I am the model for disciples. But yet, he failed, and he failed so dramatically that he must have been filled with sadness as he realized, I am not, I am not the kind of person I thought I was.

Without a doubt, he must have felt a measure of fear and insecurity. Would he now be left out? Would Jesus now deny him?

For without a doubt, this is what Jesus had said, you see, those who deny me, I will deny. No one who begins to follow me and looks back is worthy.

[ 16 : 35 ] And I think that there must have been in Peter's mind as he was weeping bitterly, whoa, what now?

What now? I've done, now, you see, it's not that I have sinned, but I have prepared it, I've carried it out, I've enjoyed it, and I've done it three times.

It's not just that oops, I didn't realize, it's that with all, with all consciousness, consciousness, I have denied Jesus once.

I could have left, I still wanted to see, I've denied him twice, I could have still left, I've denied him three times.

The last one, the gospel tells us even cursing. Without a doubt, he must have felt a great deal of shame.

[ 17 : 49 ] He was guilty, guilty as charged, guilty as Jesus had said, and so he goes out. In a sense, he does the same as Judas did.

He went out, but the difference is that on his side, he wept bitterly. There was this sense of deep remorse, this sense of deep conviction, this sense of deep need, this sense of complete loss, this sense of needing the Christ.

The reality is that I think what gives me at least great comfort and encouragement is that the difference is not so much in what Peter did.

You see, the difference is in what Jesus had already done. I have prayed for you. You see, that made the whole difference.

Jesus had prayed for Peter. Peter was one of those that honestly trusted Jesus, honestly believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior.

[ 19 : 23 ] And Jesus had prayed for him. I have prayed for you. Now, it's very interesting that we could, you see, there are mysteries in God's Word and in God's dealings with us that are, in a sense, difficult to understand and we must take in faith and trust that somehow, in a way even, we can't understand.

It's for our good, for our best. But you see, the prayer of Jesus is not, I have prayed for you that you may not fail. The prayer would have been fulfilled too.

Now, it probably would have not taught Peter what he needed to learn. But Jesus' prayer is, I've prayed that your faith may not fail.

You see, in your stumbling and in your falling and in your denying and in your betraying the Christ, something will not happen.

You will not be deprived of faith. For you see, faith, which as Calvin said, is the principal work of the Holy Spirit and God's gift will not be taken from you.

[ 20 : 44 ] This is what Jesus has prayed for all his followers as we read in chapter 17 of the Gospel according to John. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me.

I have guarded them and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction that the scripture might be fulfilled. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

I do not ask for these only. He didn't stop there. You see, I also ask for those who will believe in me through their word. Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

you see, what matters to me, I've got to be very honest now with you, what matters to me is not that Jesus prayed for you. I'm very happy if you're one of Christ's followers, that you are here sitting, being one for whom Jesus prayed, but you see, what I'm very happy is that he prayed for me.

And as he was praying then, Marcos Florid was in his mind, and because I was in his mind, my faith will not fail.

[ 22 : 16 ] I'll deny him once and twice and three times and maybe many more. I'll deny him maybe not with my lips. I'll deny him with my actions, with my thoughts, with my attitudes, but my faith will not fail.

Why? Is it because my faith is stronger than anyone else's faith? No. Because he prayed for me.

He prayed for me. I was there. In his mind. Reality is that Peter's denial also helps us to have a proper view of Jesus.

Look at verse 61. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.

Peter. Now, what did Jesus see? What was that look for? Was it, now, now, Peter, I told you, nah, that's not the Jesus I see in the Gospels.

[ 23 : 37 ] You see, what did Jesus see as he looked at Peter? Peter, I don't think he saw primarily one who had denied him.

I think that what Jesus saw was one who honestly wanted to follow him, but was weak to do so. I think that what Jesus saw is one who he knew would in time help others through his own experience.

I think that what Jesus saw was one whose sin had caused him to deny the Savior, but who in his mind, as Paul writes, delighted in God's law.

But you know what I think Jesus saw above anything else? He saw one for whom he was about to die. You're all right, Peter.

I'll die for you. In a few hours, my blood will be shed for you, and your sin will be covered, and your experience, and your hope, and your affirmation will be the same as Micah can make, could make, in the reading we had, who is a God like you.

[ 25 : 04 ] you are the God who hurls our iniquities to the depths of the sea, not to remember them again.

You see, Peter's denial helps us, I think, to have a proper view of Jesus, that Jesus is standing there, who looks at his friend, and who still loves him.

He has failed, but he's the object of his eternal unfailing love. But of course, the way that Jesus dealt with Peter, which comes especially out so clearly in John chapter 21, we can't read the whole chapter now.

You do it later, remember that passage. When Jesus, after the resurrection, goes and meets the disciples, and as Jesus meets the disciples, he asks Peter again and again as to whether Peter loves Jesus, and we won't go in detail into that passage, but you see, one of the occasions when Jesus asks Peter, Peter, do you love me?

Peter answers, well, Jesus, you know all things. you know I love you. You knew I would fail you, but you see, Jesus, you know this, when you called me to follow you.

[ 26 : 47 ] You called me to follow you just as I am, without anything I can bring before you, but my hope in you, my trust in you, the peace I get from your forgiveness, from your mercy.

And so Peter heard from Jesus those words, feed my lambs, feed my sheep, strengthen others, encourage others.

For me, I'm the denier. I'm the denier, yes. But you see, Peter, you finally learned, it's not about you, it's about me.

It's about what I have done. It's about how I call you. As you are, yes, you'll change, you'll grow in your Christian experience, you'll grow in the grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it's not about you.

It is all about me. That is why Peter could look back at his failure in a sense, although it may sound contradictory, he could look back, he could look back looking forward in hope.

[ 28 : 19 ] And I've got to ask, each one here, this morning, how do you look back at your failure?

For in your heart, you know that you have failed God. I don't even need to read you the Ten Commandments. For you see, even if you are here this day in the hope of denying that you are not debtor to God.

In your heart, you know the truth. In your heart, because God has written eternity in your heart, and you can't deny it.

Because God has written his law in your heart, God, and you can't deny it. In your awareness of the reality of a holy God, in your awareness of the reality of God's judgment, we are all here with the certainty in our hearts that we have failed.

how do we look back at our failure? There are two ways. One way is Judas' way.

[ 29 : 45 ] You can look back in anger and be bitter and upset, maybe thinking I should have done better and I'll prove that I'll do better from now on.

or you can look back at your failure in the hope of Jesus Christ and trust in him, acknowledging that he died for you, that his blood was shed to cleanse you from sin and that he prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

and it is in this way that we come around the Lord's table. We don't come around the Lord's table because we have examined ourselves and we have come to the conclusion that we are all right.

We have dealt with every sin and we it's okay. We've been all right maybe for the last two or three days. we've examined ourselves and we say okay we I know that there are some things there that I shouldn't know.

We come to the Lord's table in this faith that we see there the broken body of Christ. We see there the shed blood of the Savior and it's there in the life of Jesus that we find our life, that we find our hope, that we find our peace.

[ 31 : 32 ] And so as we prepare to come to the Lord's table, as it was mentioned before, it is for those that trust in Jesus to come to the table, for any who are members of a Christian church.

Because as we sit around the Lord's table, one of the things we are doing is to say I belong to him, there is nothing I can bring but Jesus Christ for me.

And so we come to the Lord's table as those who come in great need, but also as those who come, that food is there, that food is ready for us in the life of Jesus Christ.

Christ. So as we, as those who are not yet at the table, want to come forward to it, as I've said, any who are members of a Christian church, whatever denomination, are invited gladly to the Lord's table, for it is his table, not ours.

Let us sing. Let us sing.