

Peter Rejects Christ

by Welcome Detweiler

The sermon explores Peter's denial of Christ as a cautionary tale about spiritual distance and the path to restoration through repentance.

Duration: 34:13

Scripture: Psalm 37:4, Psalm 119:11, Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:35, Luke 22:31-34, Luke 22:54-62, 1 Corinthians 11:30-32

Topics: "Rejecting Christ"

Description

In this sermon, missionary Alexander Clark shares a story about a young man who falls down while carrying groceries and is advised to wait for hyenas to come and get him. Clark uses this story to illustrate the importance of not moving away from God when we fall into sin or distance ourselves from Him. He references the biblical example of Peter, who followed Jesus from a distance and experienced a separation from Him. Clark encourages the audience to examine their own relationship with God and to start their day with Him, emphasizing the importance of reading and meditating on the Bible. He also mentions the trap of materialism and how it can lead to slipping away from God. The sermon concludes with a reminder that if we find ourselves slipping away from God, we should not be content with our current state but should seek to return to Him and be used by Him once again.

Transcript

It's always delightful to meet some visitors that are here from different states. I met some from Columbus, Georgia, from Anderson, South Carolina, and a number of other places, and we appreciate meeting folks that come here for visits and visiting relatives and meeting with us. We appreciate that tremendously.

Our brother Rod Sharp has asked me to mention that the series of messages he is beginning tonight in the book of Nehemiah, he feels may be one of the most important series that he has given since he has been here. I believe that. I believe the book of Nehemiah has a lot of truth in it that will be of help to us in the days that lie ahead, and I urge you to try to get out to all of these services, starting tonight and whenever he speaks in the book of Nehemiah.

You may want to read that book and be ahead of him. Read it, and when you come, you can say, well, I don't think you'll find anything in it that I haven't found myself. Then we need to mention that one week from Tuesday, the coffee hour begins, and he is in the studies of the book of Mark, and he has asked you to read the book of Mark with him, and we ask that you will do that, that you will get the full benefit of the coffee hour.

Then I want to reinforce what Troy has mentioned about the special meetings that are scheduled two weeks from today with David Ward from Mystic, Connecticut. I believe that God is going to bless, and we pray that you're going to ask your neighbors and friends. Perhaps you should make a list of people that you would like to see saved and invite them and tell them about the meetings and give them your consideration, and we pray, our Father, that you will speak to these in your heart, that they may come to you.

Now, before we turn to the scriptures, let's bow in prayer. Our gracious Father, we thank thee for thy goodness to us, for the Holy Spirit that thou didst send into the world, and we thank thee that he is willing and able to use us as thy servants to bring the message that thou hast laid upon our hearts. And we pray, our Father, that Christ shall be exalted in our meeting.

Thou dost know the hearts of all who are bowed in thy presence. There may be some unsaved ones have gathered with us, some that are not sure that they would be in heaven if they should pass out into eternity today. And we pray, our Father, thou wilt bless them as they listen to thy word, and that they may hear what thou hast to say to them, and we may see some of them brought to the Savior.

We pray, too, thou wilt bless thy people and have a portion for each one of them. We pray that Christ shall so be exalted and lifted up that Christ shall be honored and glorified in the salvation of souls and in the upbuilding of thy people. We give thee our thanks and we look to thee for blessing today in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Luke chapter 22, and reading from verse 31. Luke 32, reading from verse 31.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desire to have you, they may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before thou shall thrice deny that thou knowest me.

Now the fulfillment of that prophecy starts in verse 54 of the same chapter. Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house, and Peter followed afar off. And when he had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

And 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 an hour after, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth, this fellow also was with him, for he is a Galilean. 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 shall deny me thrice.

And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. The last time I spoke here, I used as my text verse 31, and I tried to emphasize the fact that the devil's greatest ambition is to take souls with him to a lost eternity. He hates true conversions, and he is busy taking sinners to hell.

If he is to be congratulated for his work, then he deserves congratulations. He is doing an excellent job. He is doing it in the realm of religion.

He is doing it in the realm of education. Ever so many ways he has men under his control, and he is taking them to a lost eternity. However, I was using the scripture in a secondary manner, because in this particular scripture, the Lord is speaking to a Christian, and would remind us that he also is interested in Christians.

He asks, does everything possible to get a Christian to stay from Christ, to remain in his sins, and to be lost for all eternity? But when that person faces up with the facts and believes them and trusts the Savior, the Satan is enraged. He persists in trying to get that person to be in a condition of soul that will bring reproach to the name of Jesus Christ. I suppose that in the area of Satan's work, he is busy today as never before, perhaps just before our Lord comes back again in deceiving men and women.

One of the statements that we hear from men is, misery loves company. If that is true, and I'm not sure if it is, then the devil believes that. He knows that he is going to be doomed.

He knows that his destruction is mentioned in the Bible, and he is trying to get away from that by being comforted by having people that go with him. Some years ago I was talking to a young people's group, and I asked them what is the worst thing that could ever happen to a person. They rather quickly agreed with me that the greatest loss a person could have is what you have in Mark 8, verse 36.

What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What shall it profit a man? It's very evident that the greatest possible loss that a person can suffer on earth is to be lost for all eternity. Then I asked that group, I said, what is the second greatest loss that a person can suffer while here on earth? And there was a bit of difficulty in coming to a conclusion. Some said, well, losing your physical life would probably be second worst thing.

But they finally agreed that perhaps the second greatest loss is the privilege of glorifying God on the earth for a Christian, to miss that opportunity, and to be deceived by the devil, and to be undevoted to him, and to live a life that is not pleasing to him. Observation of conversions has led me to believe that there are many, many different kinds of conversions. Some are real, some must be questioned.

I suppose that some of them start real good and go on straight right to the end. I guess the apostle Paul would be considered by the devil as his greatest possible loss. He is the one who has probably caused the devil more headaches than anyone else.

However, not all conversions, and I think perhaps a very few, the percentage would be rather low of people who, after conversion, go straight, dedicated to the Lord, and are used by him. Some others start very poor, flounder around, and never really get off the ground, never get started, never seem to make any progress or any growth. I suppose that Lot would be a good example of that one.

Then there are some who have a good start and go on for a little while, and then are caught in Satan's trap and are awakened to the fact that they have been living without knowing the dedication that Christ appreciates of them. A number of them. I know a man in Pennsylvania who was a plasterer.

He built a lovely house, and one of the earliest ones that were saved in that group that were saved in Bucks County. He floundered around for three or four years, and after recognizing what he was doing, he said, I have recognized that I am slipping. And he awakened, and from then on, he went straight for the

gold.

There are a few Christians who have a poor start and who keep on going, and eventually find that there is nothing satisfactory in this earth apart from Jesus Christ, and live for him, and can say with the Apostle Paul, for to me to live is Christ. There are some who have a poor start and who keep in that condition the rest of their lives, never seem to find their way of going the way that Christ would have them go. There are those that are tripped by Satan and who make no progress.

While I was in New Orleans, I met a man who knew Bob Harrington, and I said, tell me about Bob Harrington. I haven't heard of him lately. He said, you won't.

You won't hear from him for a long, long time. He left his wife, ran off with his secretary, and he is an unknown figure. He's gone into hiding.

Some of you remember hearing him perhaps a few years ago, and he is an example of one that Satan caught in his trap, and he is perhaps one of those that are waiting for the devil to take him to a miserable life on this earth. I can think of nothing better in this world than to have a good start and to go on straight for the Lord. The devil is out to look for every person who is saved and trying to trip them and trying to ensnare them and trying to get them off the track and be a poor witness for him.

I think of Peter being in this class. He was tripped by Satan. His problem was self-confidence.

He did not hear the Lord say, without me you can do nothing. He did not hear Paul say, when I am weak, then am I strong. But he simply lived for himself, and when the Lord said, thou shalt deny me thrice, Peter didn't believe it.

In another gospel he says, though all forsake thee, yet will not I forsake thee. Peter was self-confident. Now we have the story in verse 54 through 62 of how it happened.

It happened gradually. Sometimes when Christians are taken in a fault, it happens like a landslide all at once. It was so in David's case.

But in many cases it is something that comes very gradually, and with Peter it was that way. In verse 54 I read, And Peter followed afar off. A distance came between him and his Savior.

I want to ask us this last Sunday of the old year, if you are aware of a distance creeping in between you and your Savior. There was a day when you lived close to him, when you enjoyed his presence, when you enjoyed the Lord's people. But those days are gone, and you no longer are in happy fellowship with him.

You are walking afar off. The second thing that I noticed is that they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and Peter sat down among them, enjoying the presence of unsaved people more than the presence of the Lord's people. It is possible for a Christian to get to that place where he will realize, I enjoy sinners better than Christians because Christians annoy me because I am living at a distance from the Lord.

As you go down, you will see the three people who spoke to Peter and identified him as being one of those who were with him. And each time Peter emphatically denied that he knew his Lord. One of the great things regarding Peter is that in verse 61, "...and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.

And Peter remembered the words of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cockcrow thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly." I want you to get this picture of a big, rugged

fisherman who probably hasn't cried since he was an adult. Perhaps his childhood days he had his share of crying, but not since he's grown up.

Fishermen, rough men, don't cry. Here is a man who is weeping bitterly. Is it true that tears are an evidence of weakness, or is it true that this is an evidence of greatness? Peter went out and wept bitterly.

How strange that people should be awakened to their lack of spiritual progress and get into this condition where he would weep bitterly. The question that I want to ask at this moment is, what would have happened to Peter if he had had a heart attack at that particular moment? The moment the third time he denies that he knows his Lord, what would have happened to him? I remember a lady coming to me some 30 years ago and saying to me, I have enjoyed learning the security of the believer. Many days I went to bed at night and I said, I wonder if I have confessed everything that I have done today.

I wonder if I have told the Lord that I have failed Him here and there and this. It was my impression that between the time that you sin against the Lord and you confess, you are lost again. So you have to confess continually.

That is not true from the word of God. Peter would have gone straight to heaven if he had died at that particular moment. The Bible makes clear that when a person has eternal life, he has eternal life.

In Romans 10, verse 9, you will read, If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead. If you have to believe from the heart to be saved, you have to deny from the heart to be lost. And I ask you, did Peter deny his Lord from the heart? And you know that he didn't.

If I had had the opportunity of creeping up to Peter at that moment and say, Peter, do you mean what you are saying? Do you mean that you don't know the Savior? Peter would have said, no, but I'm scared. I'm scared. I'm worried because my life is at stake.

I can't identify myself with Him. And for that reason, he goes out and he weeps bitterly. This is the secret of his conversion or his restoration, is the fact that he wept bitterly.

He might have gone on for a long time justifying himself. He might have gone into hiding, but he didn't. He gave evidence of his conversion by weeping bitterly.

It is possible for a person to be in like circumstances and to go on for years in that condition and not being restored to the Lord. Remember, the dedicated Christians are Satan's greatest headaches, and he wants each one of us to be trapped and to live at a distance from him. The tears that he shed are the evidence of his recovery.

But then some of you are going to say, I am not in that condition. I am not overconfident, as was Peter. Remember that Satan doesn't use the same tactics in every person.

There are some people who have problems with morality. While I mention that, you can think for a moment of a number of people that you know that have fallen because of this particular sin. Men who once were servants of the Lord who are no longer in his work.

Those who are trapped by this are many, many people in the world today. Then there are some who are trapped by materialism. I remember speaking on a subject similar to this in Atlanta, Georgia, some years

ago, and a young man came to me and said, I have just learned that the devil is getting the best of me.

I have a wonderful job, and my boss wants me to live and think nothing but my job. And he said, I've been doing that, and I've been slipping, and I want to stop it immediately. The things that he has offered to me are tremendous, the raises he's given to me, and I know that I am in the devil's hands and he is trying to get me to slip.

For those who fall into the temptation of the devil, there are three stages that they usually go through. First of all is the slipping stage. If you are living at a distance from the Lord, you're not supposed to know it.

If someone were to come up to you and ask you, are you as happy as you used to be? Are you devoted to Jesus Christ as much as you used to be? You are supposed to be able to say, yes, as far as I know, I am. And then usually the pattern is that from the slipping stage you get to the snobbing stage. There will always be interested Christians who will notice when you are slipping and will want to help you.

And the very fact that they offer to help you perhaps will give to you the idea that they are trying to indicate that you are living at a distance from the Lord. And they reach the snobbing stage and they start to say, who are you that you should investigate my life? Who are you that you should take care of my life? What about some of the things that you are doing? These are some of the questions that come up and usually lead to a long pathway of a snobbing stage with himself. I think of those who have recovered from these stages.

Some of them perhaps have suffered a lot of loss. For when we are at a distance from the Lord, there is the possibility that we are inviting chastening. You read Hebrews chapter 12 and you will read that whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.

That means believers. He will use his rod. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, which was read at our first service this morning, there is a section that says, for this cause many are sickly among you and many sleep.

Which means that some are sick because they are living at a distance from the Lord. And there are some who have gone on to be with the Lord, who have been taken in death because of their waveredness, their backsliding. In this section, the Lord says, I have taken you, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Satan hath desire to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. The purpose that God has in mind in allowing us to go through these terrible times is that he may take the valuable things out of our life, the wheat, and to get rid of the chaff. I suppose that each one of us would have to admit that there are some things in our life that are not pleasing to him and that should be removed.

I wonder at the end of this year if you are satisfied with the way you have been living in this past year. I remember Mr. Alexander Clark, who was a missionary to the Belgian Congo, passed through here many, many years ago, had some health problems and came to Duke University for some treatments. And while he was speaking, he gave us the condition of some of the Africans that he is dealing with, and he mentioned one who had fallen into sin, and he said he came to me broken-hearted, and he said, I quit.

Don't count on me anymore. I'm through. I'm finished.

And in a very unique way, this missionary, Alexander Clark, said to him, he said, let me talk to you. He said, when you come down to over the hills to get your groceries once a week, and you go your way up

with a bag on your back with a weak supply of groceries, the pathway becomes slippery and your feet go out from under you and you fall down. When that happens, let me give you some advice.

I want you to stay there. Don't move. Wait for the hyenas to come and get you.

And the young man said, what do you mean by that statement? I mean that's what you ought to do. And he said, I think I'm getting to know what you're trying to say. I think you mean that when I slip like that, the best thing to do is to brush off my clothes, to start again, to gather my groceries in the bag, and start over again.

And that's exactly what Peter did. After the weeping period is over, Peter again is used of God in a mighty way. I suppose that one of the reasons for us to slip into sin is we do not start our day out with the Lord.

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. I wonder if you would be embarrassed if I ask you, what part of the Bible are you reading right now? What book are you reading right now? Would you have to say, I just read spasmodically. I read the Bible when I come to the services.

I do not read regularly. Perhaps that's the reason that leaves us open to be trapped for Satan to catch us. I'm sure that each one of us, if we realize the importance of reading the word of God.

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. I'm thinking now of the possibility of our Lord Jesus Christ coming again during this next year. It's possible, and I think that no company of people that lived on the face of the earth have more reason to expect the Lord to come than have we.

Suppose he does come this coming year. If he should come, do you want him to find you in the condition of soul that you are in? I think of you who are perhaps living in a life that is pleasing to yourself and to your neighbors and friends. You have perhaps accepted the responsibility of living for the Savior as you have looked at others around about you.

If I were to ask you, are you in fellowship with the Lord? Are you enjoying his presence each day? You would have to say perhaps as much as the average Christian. That's not very much, is it? As much as the average Christian. I don't want to be an outstanding Christian.

I want to be just like the rest of them. It's so easy for us to mold our lives, to use as a background for our lives what other Christians are doing, and that is not our goal. Our ambition should be to serve the Lord who died for us.

He is our example. I want to speak for a moment now to you who may not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, for when I was speaking about Peter, he wept bitterly. I want to think of what the Bible has to say about those who have never trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

Weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Is this something that lies ahead of you? Is there any good reason why you should remain in that unsaved condition? Is there any reason why you should still be in that condition of soul where you have never trusted the Savior and you're outside for all eternity? There is bitter weeping ahead. Would you like to be a dedicated Christian today? It may be that some change should be made as you enter into the new year.

It may be that some difficulty between you and another brother ought to be removed before we start into another year. And if that is the case, then perhaps this morning there should be the opportunity for you to

make things right with your fellow brother and your sister. I trust that God has spoken to your heart through this message and that you will realize that Satan has a drawer full of arrows marked.

And if he can't get you by one arrow, he'll get you by another one. And I trust that God will speak to your heart regarding your spiritual need, whether you are unsaved or whether you are a Christian, that God will speak to your heart and that you will trust this wonderful Savior today. Let's bow for prayer.

And before I close in prayer, I wonder if there should be some examination made in your life as to what you should do regarding the transfer of the old year into the new year. I think of some of you who are attending the services one hour of an entire week, 168 hours in the week, and you give him one hour. That's down to the status of unsaved people.

They go once a week, one hour of the week. They dedicate to the Lord and feel sufficient. That may be fine for unsaved people, but it's not for Christians.

I wonder if you have a problem with that. I wonder if you have a problem regarding how many services you should attend during the coming year. I wonder if you've lost interest in coming to the Lord's Supper and admitting your devotion to the Lord in that service.

I ask you to search your heart and ask you during this time that you will speak to the Lord and make things right regarding the attendance of the services. Then I wonder if I can ask some of the men who are here who have a problem with not taking part in the services where you have the opportunity of being a believer priest. I ask you, do you have a problem with that? Was there a time when you were able to speak to the Lord and to voice the praise of the Savior because you were in touch with him and now you have difficulty in expressing that? Do you want to go to heaven and say, I kept from worshiping the Lord audibly during all those years and I'm proud of it? I'm sure that the Lord would love to hear you say and to confess that to him and to see if not something can be done to make that right.

Our gracious Father, we pray our Father that thou wilt bless each one in our service this morning, thou wilt watch over each one, and we pray our Father that Satan may not be able to have us, that he may sift us as wheat. We pray our Father that thou wilt bless thy word and grant our Father that things may be made right and that souls may be blessed as thy word goes forth today. We thank thee again for each one who has come to hear thy word and we ask thy blessing on each one in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask our Father for unsaved people who may be in the service who have never opened their heart to the Lord Jesus. We pray our Father that thou wilt bless them, thou wilt use this message to bring them to our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask to thy blessing on those who need to make things right before thee as we begin another year.

We ask thou will bless Rod's messages on the book of Nehemiah and thou wilt use him in blessing in the days that lie ahead. We give thee our thanks and look to thee for thy blessing in Jesus' name. Amen.

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