

Denying Eyes

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Eyes on Jesus / Denial; Forgiveness; Sheep; A Shepherd / Mark 14:26–31; Mark 14:66–72

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.

Two weeks ago, we looked at and through the betraying eyes of Judas and recognized our own betrayals of the Lord. Last week, we saw the disciples' sleepy eyes in the Garden of Gethsemane and identified the times we have fallen asleep as Christians. This week, we examine other way sinful eyes can fail as we examine the denying eyes of Peter, of the other apostles, and even of all of us.

Back in the Upper Room, the eleven apostles and Jesus had sung a post-communion hymn and then headed for the Mount of Olives. There were only eleven with Jesus because Judas had already departed to get staged for his betrayal. Jesus told the group they would all fall away, in fulfillment of Zechariah 13:7, "Strike the shepherd, and sheep will be scattered." Their proud spokesmen, Peter, thought he was exempt from this, saying to Jesus, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." But Peter said emphatically, "If I must deny with You, I will not deny You." They all said the same!

"They all said the same." Not just Peter, but they all tried to exempt themselves from His saying and denied that they would fall away from Jesus, which was very foolish: they were denying the words from the lips of Jesus and the inspired and inerrant Word of God recorded by the prophet.

You've probably heard the song "Lyn' Eyes" by the Eagles. Even though you try and disguised your intent with a smile, the song writer tells us, it is not enough to hide lying eyes. If our eyes give away lies to one another, then how much more

can the omniscient Lord Jesus see lying and denying eyes of His disciples of all times and places.

What was in the eyes of the apostles as they looked upon Jesus predicting their falling away from Him? Perhaps first a look of horror at such an awful prospect; then a look of disbelief as they processed His saying and began to form their defense; and then that slightly crazed look of a religious fanatic who thinks he can keep his vows to God simply by fervor, by his own force of will.

Yes, the eyes of the apostles weren't really seeing Jesus and letting the truth of His words sink into their ears; they were blinded by their own strong delusions; they were lying to themselves as they were denying their Lord's words; they were focused on their own perceptions and plans; they had their minds on things of men rather than on things of God.

So the other ten apostles would go on to deny Jesus by falling away, in spite of their strident protests to the contrary, and we see Peter verbally deny Jesus in dramatic fashion during his cross examination by a little servant girl and some bystanders. But as we saw last week with Jesus alone staying awake while the others slept, it had to be this way: He had to be the last one standing, the only one making "the good confession", the one who would never deny the will of His Father but humbly submitted to suffering and death, for us and for our salvation.

When Jesus had quoted the prophecy of Zechariah, He had actually added a couple of words to it that I left out earlier. He said, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter." This is a quote from the Lord God of Israel Himself: "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, against the Man who stands next to Me," declares the Lord of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

Who is the Man who stands next to Yahweh? Jesus! He is the One against whom the Father bids the sword awaken. "I will strike the shepherd," says the Father. It's just like we heard a couple weeks ago, that the one who ultimately handed Jesus over wasn't Judas, but the Father Himself. Or as we heard last week, it was the Father's will that Jesus drink the cup of His wrath in full, emptying its last drop. That takes us back to Isaiah 53 and the Father's will to crush the Messiah so that the masses would be accounted righteous in the Father's sight:

4 Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.

“I will strike the shepherd,” said the Father, and Jesus was stricken with all of that, for you.

But that’s not all! Earlier, I focused on Jesus’ words about the disciples falling away and denying Jesus, but I left out the Gospel! Jesus told them that they would all fall away, but then He said, “But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” His Words about their falling away and denial did prove true, but even better, so did His prediction of the resurrection and His subsequent appearing to the Apostles. To those denying and doubting apostles, Jesus entrusted the teaching and baptizing that would go out to all nations and turn deniers of God into confessors, into followers of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And what about Peter, who had fallen in so spectacular a fashion, who had denied that he even knew Jesus? First, I should point out that he seems to have been only one with the courage to get even close to Jesus’ trial, so there’s really no room for Peter-bashing here. Second, we think we would never do such a thing, but how many times have we stood silently when someone spoke words contradicting our Lord’s Word? How many opportunities to confess the Gospel to others have we passed up for fear of giving offense? And finally, we should recognize in Peter an example to follow in the way he expressed his contrition over what he had done. Unlike Judas, who did have a change of heart but tried to deal with his guilt on his own, Peter had true, godly sorrow over his sin, which prepared him for the Absolution he would receive on Easter, when Jesus

appeared to the apostles, showed them His hands and side, and spoke the forgiving, "Peace be with you."

And later, in Galilee, Peter got a special singling-out that left no doubt that he was restored from being a denier into the office of confessor. At the Sea of Tiberias (The Sea of Galilee), Jesus showed up for a breakfast on the beach with some of the disciples, including Peter. Jesus gave Peter a threefold admonition to feed His sheep, which negates Peter's threefold denial, and then, "Follow Me," Jesus said to the restored Peter. And now He says the same to you and to me, "If anyone would come after Me," Jesus says, "let Him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me! For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

Through your Baptism into Christ, you have been given a gift greater than the whole world. You have lost your life in this world for the sake of Christ and have now found your life in Him and His kingdom, where you are saved from sin, death, and hell. You now look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. "Come, Follow Me," Jesus says. Come, for it is a truly joyful journey.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.