

[John 13:21](#), [John 13:37-38](#), [1 Peter 2:24](#)

A Betrayal, A Denial, The Cross

Introduction

On the night before the Lord Jesus went to the cross, something bitter and painful happened. He was betrayed by Judas, one of His disciples. Another disciple, Peter, denied knowing Jesus. In fact, all of the disciples left Him that night and fled ([Matthew 26:56](#)). These were the very men that Jesus deeply loved; He had chosen them to be His own ([John 13:1](#)).

Despite the disciples' failures and mistakes, the power of God was displayed in their weakness. The cross made all the difference. Indeed, immeasurable love was displayed to the disciples, and to us, in the cross. Now, we're not talking about the wooden frame shaped like a cross. No, we're alluding to the gospel, the Word of the cross. The gospel is the good news message that Jesus' blood was shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. That's why Good Friday is good. What man meant for evil, God meant for good.

So, in order to apprehend the staggering magnitude of Jesus' love displayed in the cross, we need to take a look at three (3) things that happened during the last days of Passion Week. They are as follows:

- Bitter betrayal - Judas
- Painful denial – Peter
- Immeasurable love – Jesus and the Cross

Bitter Betrayal - Judas

Let's picture in our minds the Last Supper. All of the disciples were gathered at the table. This would be the last meal the Lord would eat with His disciples, the Twelve, before His death on the cross. Jesus had challenged them at an earlier time whether they would continue to follow Him because many of His disciples had turned away. He had chosen them, yet one of them would betray Him. Take a look at [John 6:70-71](#).

⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, “**Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.**” ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.
[John 6:70-71](#) (ESV)

According to the Bible, Judas shared in Jesus' ministry along with the other disciples ([Acts 1:17](#)). Everything appeared to be okay. Judas participated in Jesus' ministry. He was even appointed the keeper of the money bag, the proceeds of which was used to help the poor. But in the end, Judas turned away from Jesus and rejected the grace of God ([John 13:30](#), [Acts 1:25](#)).

In reality, Judas was following a path of destruction ([John 17:12](#), [Matthew 27:3-5](#)). When he realized what he had done in betraying the Lord, Judas experienced a worldly grief, which Scripture states produces death ([2 Corinthians 7:10](#)). In fact, Judas hanged himself

once he realized Jesus was condemned to die. Indeed, that night of the Lord's betrayal was bitter. However, a painful denial would occur by one of Jesus' other disciples, in fact one of His closest disciples, Peter.

Painful Denial - Peter

Much like Judas, Peter was also at the Last Supper. His feet had been washed by Jesus just like the rest of the disciples. Who would have thought Peter would deny knowing the Lord, not once, but three times? After all, Peter had been a close companion with Jesus from the very beginning of the Lord's ministry. He was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane that very evening when the Lord's agony was manifested by His sweat becoming like great drops of blood ([Matthew 26:37](#) and [Luke 22:44](#)). Here was the man who boldly stated that he would die with Jesus. Yet, the Lord revealed the truth as indicated in [Luke 22:33-34](#).

³³ Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."³⁴ Jesus said, **"I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."**
[Luke 22:33-34](#) (ESV)

When Peter denied he knew Jesus three times, the account in the book of Luke states that the Lord turned and looked at Peter ([Luke 22:61](#)). I believe Jesus' face would have communicated compassion instead of condemnation; His look would have shown exceeding love instead of exasperation; His glance would have been one of tenderness instead of frustration.

Jesus' look must have communicated to Peter "I love you so" instead of "I told you so." Even so, Peter must have felt excruciating guilt and shame. Perhaps the pain of his denial was too much to bear. That's probably why Peter wept bitterly. His faith in the Lord faltered. Yet, after Jesus' resurrection, He encouraged Peter when the Lord affirmed his faith at the breakfast on the beach ([John 21:1-18](#)). You see, God's faithfulness remains steadfast and true, even when we're faithless ([2 Timothy 2:13](#)). That's the good news message of the gospel. That's the immeasurable love of Christ displayed in the cross.

Immeasurable Love – Jesus and the Cross

Indeed, the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, humbled Himself and despised the shame of the cross. As a result, sin and death were defeated. Here's Jesus, the Son of God, sinless and perfect in every way. Yet, He was hanged on a cross. And for all who receive Him by faith, He became a criminal and a curse for us ([Galatians 3:13](#)). He willingly received punishment for our sin, as appointed by God ([Isaiah 53:4-10](#)). His humility and obedience were evident in His suffering to the point of death, even death on a cross ([Philippians 2:8](#)).

Recently, one of the men at our men's ministry meeting made a profound statement: "The cross put me to death." In other words, for those in Christ, we've died to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds we've been healed ([1 Peter 2:24](#)). We've been crucified with Christ and we live by faith in Him because He loved us and gave Himself up for us ([Galatians 2:20](#)).

Whatever the sin, whether betrayal or denial, the cross reveals it all and heals it all. Yes, Jesus' immeasurable love is displayed in the cross. The breadth, length, height and depth of His love surpasses knowledge ([Ephesians 3:17-19](#)). Jesus' love for His disciples, and for us, is perfect and complete. Here's what [John 13:1](#) says about that.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

[John 13:1](#) (ESV)

The word "end" in this context can be defined as perfect and complete; it doesn't have a temporal or spatial connotation. Jesus' love is perfect and complete today, tomorrow and for eternity. The Lord Jesus has that kind of love for you and me. All we have to do is accept this gift of God's love in Christ. Judas rejected Jesus' love; Peter received it.

What about you? Have you made seemingly insurmountable mistakes? I know I have. Both Peter and Judas did. They both served with Jesus, listened to him preach, indeed longed for his kingdom to come. But there was a difference. When the bottom gave out and their sin overcame them, one gave up and one reached out. Maybe you've rejected or are pretending to have received the grace and mercy of God displayed in the cross. If so, repent and believe. Turn away from sin and turn toward Jesus. There's room at the cross for the vilest offender. Believe me; I'm living proof.

And what about those of us who are followers of Christ, perhaps for decades? Much like Peter and Judas, we're prone to mistakes and failure. And like Peter, by God's grace we've been adopted into His family. We are declared by God as a new creation in Christ. We have the assurance that all of our sin, past, present and future, has been forgiven and forgotten. That's one of the reasons why we celebrate and remember the Lord Jesus with the bread and cup at the Table of the Lord. No need to wallow in our sin, but every reason to rejoice in His grace and mercy.

Conclusion

Jesus chose His betrayer and the one who would deny knowing Him. He loved them perfectly and completely. In the end, Judas died *in* sin; Peter died *to* sin; Jesus died *for* sin. In Peter's case, the cross made all the difference. Even though he had denied knowing Jesus, Peter went on to preach and teach in the powerful name of Jesus. According to Scripture, God uses the lowly so that His power is made perfect in weakness ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). Your preacher is a living example. How about you?

So, here's a final question for all of us: How will you; how will I; how will we as the failure-ridden, mistake-laden church display God's power in our weakness so that a dying and chaotic world will see the immeasurable love of Christ displayed in the cross? It won't be easy, but God's grace and mercy is sufficient. Jesus is victorious! The cross is proof! Hallelujah! What a Savior! Amen.