

Regrets - Matthew 26:67-75

Introduction: Tonight, as we come to this portion of Matthew, and in particular, the story of the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ, we're going to shift from a focus on the event itself, to a focus on one of the lessons we can learn. Tonight, we're going to look at what happened to Peter as he did something he deeply regretted, and how he was able to get beyond that regret.

Have you ever done something you regretted? I guess we all have. But there are some things we do that we can immediately regret. Perhaps you cheated on a test, or cut a corner at work and it cost the company money. Or maybe you've blurted out a hateful remark in the heat of an argument. Or maybe you've done this: Someone tells you something, and you react by rolling your eyes, and they catch you! Boy! That can make you feel about an inch tall. Those are the things we wish we could take back, because they can be so hurtful.

That must have been what Peter felt just after he did something he regretted. In our text, we see him denying that he knew Christ not once, but three times. **READ TEXT.**

Just a few weeks ago, we talked about this when Jesus warned Peter in Mt. 26:34, "*I tell you the truth...this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.*" But Peter didn't think he would never do such a thing. Yet here he was, doing exactly what Jesus said he'd do. It had to be one of the darkest, painful and most disappointing moments in Peter's life.

But the good news of the gospel is that the story didn't end there. Peter's story demonstrates the healing power of God's forgiveness. That is a power that is still making a difference in people's lives today.

Tonight, I want to point out some truths about overcoming regrets that we can learn from this episode in Peter's life.

Truth #1: Genuine Forgiveness Follows Repentance

We've already seen in Jesus' crucifixion story that Jesus was all about offering forgiveness. At the Passover meal and the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus offered Judas a chance to repent for what he was about to do. At His arrest, Jesus even offered Judas another opportunity to repent. He offered the Religious leaders who wanted Him dead an opportunity to repent, but they were so hard-hearted, they refused to see Him for who He really was.

So actually there were two betrayals that night, Peter betrayed Jesus in the courtyard and but before that, Judas betrayed Jesus in the garden with a kiss for thirty pieces of silver. In the next chapter, Matthew 27, we'll see that Judas eventually realized what he had done, and he was very sorry. But he would be so overcome with guilt; he'd go out and committed suicide. So, with Judas, there was a great deal of regret, but no repentance.

By contrast, when Peter realized what he had done in disowning Jesus, vs. 75 says, "*He went outside and wept bitterly.*" Now of course, being sorry for something isn't enough to constitute repentance. Many people have made the mistake of thinking that because they cried a little bit at an altar, they are saved. No, tears don't make you a Christian any more than putting on a life jacket makes you a lifeguard.

But we know from observing the rest of Peter's life that these were tears of repentance. He was truly upset with himself and he wanted to make things right. But how do we know these were tears of repentance?

Well, first, we know that:

A. Jesus Reached Out to Him

After Jesus' resurrection, when the three ladies came to the tomb to anoint his body, they discovered He wasn't there. Instead, they found an angel of the Lord sitting in the tomb. This angel told them that Jesus has risen, and then gave them some specific instructions. He said, *"But go, tell his disciples and Peter, He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."* Mark 16:7 (NIV). Once Peter heard that Jesus had risen from the dead he ran to the tomb and was the first one to go in and examine the scene. Obviously, the implication is that Jesus heard Peter's cry of true repentance in those tears, and therefore wanted him to know that He would see Him again.

Secondly, we know that:

B. Jesus Restored Him to Service

Let's read **John 21:15-17** (NIV) This is after the resurrection, and Jesus had already appeared to His disciples two other times.

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

This was Jesus' re-commissioning of Peter to service. Jesus wanted Peter to know that his three denials had been forgiven, so He gave him three direct, and specific commissions – *"Feed my lambs," "Take care of my sheep,"* and *"Feed my sheep."*

Finally, we know that:

C. Peter's Testimony of the Healing Power of Forgiveness – In 1 Peter 2:24 (NIV), Peter wrote, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."* Peter knew first hand that there was true healing and forgiveness in Christ.

There is a world of people out there who have messed up even in their Christian walk. They desperately need to know that there is forgiveness to be found in Jesus Christ. But it is not automatic. They need to understand that healing and forgiveness cannot take place until there is true repentance. So, the first step in healing is repentance – recognizing your need, having a sincere desire to make it right, and then turning your back on the sin, and walking in the direction of the Savior.

It's not enough to feel sorry for the things you have done, Judas felt sorry and he gave up. People must turn from the things they have done and turn to the One who can help them overcome their past failures. Only then can they experience the joy of forgiveness.

2. Genuine Forgiveness Results In a Response

(John 21:15-17) tells us about Jesus' visit with Peter as they sat together on the shore in the days following the Lord's resurrection. Jesus is calling Peter to a life of service for Him.

Notice that He questions Peter 3 times – once for each time Peter denied Christ. That helped Peter understand fully what he had done and allowed him to truly respond to the question that was being asked. And then in humility he says, *"Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."* He says Lord you know my heart, you know my failure, you know my sorrow, and you know I love you.

Once Peter confessed his love to the Lord, Jesus said, "*Feed my sheep,*" in other words he called him to be a shepherd. Now he is fully restored and ready to enter into his role as a leader of the church.

When we have truly experienced forgiveness, it will make a difference in our lives because forgiveness calls for a response. If Christ has forgiven you, how are you demonstrating that in your life?

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged after years of fighting. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father. On Saturday 800 men named Paco showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

People are not perfect. That is why God sent His Son to the earth – to pay the penalty and forgive us of our sins. But forgiveness doesn't stop there; it calls for a response on our part, it calls us to embrace God's forgiveness and be willing to forgive others. Matthew 6:14 NIV, "*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*" The act of forgiveness is not easy, but the bible calls us to set aside our pride and forgive one another.

Is there someone in your life who needs your forgiveness? Is there a family member or a friend who needs to forgive you? Then it is time to make that relationship right.

3. Authentic Forgiveness Is Complete

The night he denied Jesus, Peter was a broken man. He had failed the One he loved, and he wept bitter tears of regret and pain. Yet in 3 days following the resurrection, Jesus reached out to Peter to forgive and restore him to service. Jesus held nothing back.

Now on the day of Pentecost notice who emerges as the primary preacher of the gospel, it's Peter. The one who failed so miserably is now a forgiven man, and that forgiveness has brought new power in his life. That's the good news of the gospel, when Christ forgives us, He doesn't do a partial job. His forgiveness is complete. He restores us, and He empowers us. Micah 7:9, 1 John 1:9, Titus 2:13-14.

Let me ask, is there someone who needs your forgiveness? If so, are you willing to forgive and leave it all behind so that there can be true restoration? We sometimes have a tendency to bring up past failures and hurts but until we learn to forgive and forget they will always have a hold on our life.

Conclusion: There is one from whom we all need forgiveness. Despite our sin and rebellion, Christ offers us complete and utter forgiveness, are you willing to accept His forgiveness? If so, pray this prayer from Psalm 51.