

# Peter Reached Back

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—Jesus Christ said: "Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

Who committed the greater sin: Peter or Judas?

## **Behavior of Judas**

Judas betrayed Jesus while giving Him a sign of friendship (Luke 22:48). Jesus called him a son of perdition (John 17:12) and said it would have been better for him had he not been born (Matthew 26:24).

Jesus compares him to the devil himself (John 6:70), and the name Judas has come down to us a synonym for a traitor, one whose treachery exceeds that of a Brutus or a Benedict Arnold.

## **Behavior of Peter**

Peter denied his Lord three times, each time with a denial more emphatic than the last (Luke 22:54-60).

Worse, his third denial (according to the accounts of Mark and Matthew) was a blasphemous declaration. "He began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this Man of whom you speak!' " (Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:71).

The Greek implies that the "cursing" and "swearing" would sound something like this: "I swear to God! May He strike me dead and throw me into the lake of fire if I'm lying about this."

Remember that it was Jesus Himself who warned that "whoever denies Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father, who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

That's quite a condemnation, and Peter called that curse directly upon himself.

## **Through the lens of Luke**

Is it fair to say that both Peter and Judas were equally culpable before God? I believe it is fair to say that, but with one big qualification. Let's take a look at Peter's denial through the lens of Luke's Gospel.

Luke's account tracks with the other Gospel writers in many particulars, but he adds a colorful detail the others do not.

It appears that the abuse Jesus was suffering at the hands of the soldiers took place in a public venue in the full view of Peter and those around him, and it was at the same time as his third denial.

Luke writes, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord . . ." (Luke 22:61).

Imagine that. Just a few hours before, Peter in a fit of bravado proclaims his undying loyalty to Jesus. "The others may abandon you, but not me, Lord," whereupon Jesus says, "Is that so, Peter? Before morning, you'll disown Me three times."

As we know, Peter did exactly what he said he wouldn't do and what Jesus told him he would do.

And, in the middle of that brutal beating in the public square, Jesus locks a gaze upon Peter and holds that gaze with Peter. And Peter's heart is convicted.

Jesus' warning rang in his head: "Whoever denies Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father, who is in heaven."

Peter not only denied his Messiah, he called down damnation on his own head.

### **A major difference**

Is it not rational to believe that Peter's sin and Judas' sin were equally egregious? Yet the subsequent events of the lives of Peter and of Judas could not have been more different.

The divergent paths that these two men chose are a testimony to the offer of Jesus' mercy and a lesson in how we must respond to it.

■ I have written elsewhere about how Jesus reached out time and time again to Judas, warning him, offering object lessons and parables, even calling him "friend" to the last (Matthew 26:50). But Judas refused to reach back.

■ But, when Jesus gave Peter that look in the public square, Peter fell to his knees in regret and repentance. Peter changed his life and his attitude, and, as the Book of Acts shows (Acts 4, among other places), he was willing to suffer greatly for what he knew to be the truth.

Peter's sin was as great as Judas's, but Peter accepted the rescue that Jesus offered. Jesus reached out, and Peter reached back.