



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 18:15-17, 25-27

"Peter and Romans 7"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Let's turn to the Gospel of John, and I want to read for our Scripture reading this morning, John chapter 18, verse 15 through verse 18 and then verse 25 through verse 27. In case you've forgotten we were studying the Gospel of John, and we had just finished the upper room discourse and had begun the study of the 18th chapter. And in the last message seven weeks or so ago, we had taken a look in our stand before Annas, the former high priest. And now this morning we want to take a look at Peter's denial and seek to find some lessons from that.

Remember in this 18th chapter John is really giving us two stories in one, in a sense. He is describing the things that have happened to our Lord now that he's been arrested and he is appearing before Annas and then he will appear before Caiaphas. But at the same time as an underlying second account he's telling us about Peter and his denial. For in the Upper Room discourse the Lord Jesus had said to Peter, "Before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice." And so woven into the story of our Lord's passion is the story of our Lord's dealings with Peter.

And so now we are going to lay stress upon this second one. I think in the last time that I spoke to you I likened it to two stages up front, and one stage is being played the story of our Lord and his passion with the Roman authorities and the Jewish authorities. But over the other stage is

the story of Peter and his denial of the Lord Jesus. So John is telling us both stories at once. And we read in verse 15 of John 18,

"And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. (It has been historically thought by many interpreters that the disciple who was known unto the high priest was John the Apostle, because that would enable him to have some good information about what happened when our Lord appeared before Annas and before Caiaphas. There are some things that might indicate otherwise, and so we just have to leave it as it is. He is an unknown disciple. But at least by virtue of it, Peter was able to enter into the palace.) But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? (Now she words this in such a way as to expect a negative answer. And so we would probably say, "You are not are you, also one of this man's disciples?" And evidently that gave Peter an opening and so he said,) And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. (Now then John inserts the story of our Lord's appearance before Annas. But in verse 25 he picks up the account again. And he says,) And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself (Repeating what he had said at the end of verse 18.). They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? (Again this is said as if to expect a negative answer. You are not, are you, also one of his disciples? And we read,) He denied it, and said, I am not. (Now mind you this is a remarkable thing for an apostle, but not only does he say, "I am not," but in the other accounts of this incident he says, "I don't even know what you're talking about. I don't know what you're saying.") One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? (Now, he words this as if to expect the answer yes. "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?) Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father we approach Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are so grateful Lord for these wonderful stories of the life of the apostles and the Lord, for they so wonderfully tell us of the grace of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ and of the weaknesses of us men. And they make us realize so often how much we need to lean upon Thee that we might be delivered from the denial of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself for us. What a terrible thing it is, Lord, for us to fail to witness to the grace of God and Jesus Christ, what cowards we often become. And O Father, we pray that through the teaching of the word of God, through these passages that the Apostle John has written, we might be strengthened and stirred and stabilized in our fact, and in fact made bold in our faith to give a true testimony to the one who has shed his blood that we might have life.

O God, we pray for each believer in this auditorium that we might be strengthened and encouraged to boldly represent him who is the great high priest who's offered the sacrifice for sinners and now lives to make all of his work effectual. And Lord, we would pray for the saints in other ways and in the midst of their other problems. And we ask that Thou wilt encourage us and strengthen us and in the trials of life give deliverance. We pray especially for the sick. And we pray for all who have trials and difficulties and face important decisions and problems. We commit them to Thee. We are thankful that we're able to turn to Thee and know that Thou dost hear our petitions.

And Father; now we ask Thy blessing upon us in this meeting as we sing. May we sing heartily as unto the Lord. And as we listen to the Scriptures may our own lives be transformed through the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] I am sure that many of you feel as I do, one of the things that I particularly like to do is to read a good biography. But unfortunately biographies frequently do not really portray the hero in a frank and truthful way. Very often the result is a kind of build up of an individual so that the reality of the person's life is lost. Now in recent years I think it is true to say that historians have tended to be more factual and frank and realistic in their portrayal of the heroes of the past and of the present. One of the signs of the inspiration of the Scriptures is its pitiless portrayal of its paladins or its heroes. To believers this unvarnished, undisguised faithfulness to facts is not surprising but it is different from the ways of men. Now, we know that the Scriptures say so far as God is concerned there is no respect of persons with him. And it's rather what we should expect, but it's not what we find in the world

I know that you know that I love to read the biographies of men like Stonewall Jackson. He's one of my favorites because he was not only a great general, a Southerner, but also an outstanding Christian and a Christian who believed very firmly in the sovereignty of God. Professor Burke Davis of one of the universities in Houston some years ago wrote a biography of Stonewall Jackson that was rather popular. It was entitled *They Called Him Stonewall*. When I finished reading I can still remember the sense of hopelessness that I had in ever being able to copy such a courageous Christian man as Jackson was. He once said, "My religious belief is as safe in battle as it is in bed. God has fixed the time of my death." Perhaps that explains why he was the great general that he was. But one felt finishing the biography; well Stonewall Jackson is a step or two above anything that I could ever hope to be.

When we turn to the Bible, however, its greatest heroes are often presented in realistic terms, and Peter is certainly one of them. He was a man of like passions with us, and his victories and his defeats are important lessons for us. His denials of the Lord make an illustration of Paul's great teaching of indwelling sin. And you know the story in Romans chapter 7 in which the Apostle Paul describes how there is indwelling sin in every believers' life and a struggle in constantly going on to do the will of God. And finally the apostle at the end of the chapter says, "Who shall be able to

deliver me from this body of death?" And then adds as a kind of flash of insight from God, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And the apostle makes it very plain that there is no deliverance in independence of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Now, we can sense some of that same thing going on in Peter's life, except in this case it was failure. Let's go back to the beginning and remember that the Lord Jesus had prophesied in the upper room that Peter would deny him. In John chapter 13 in verse 36 through verse 38 we read these words, after Jesus has said, "I'm going to have to go away," Peter spoke up for the eleven and said, "Lord, whither goest thou?" And Jesus had answered him, "Where I am going now you cannot follow me, but you shall follow me afterwards." Then Peter replied, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake." And Jesus answered him and said, "Peter will you lay down your life for my sake? Verily, verily I say unto thee the cock shall not crow until thou hast denied me thrice."

Now when you read the accounts in the gospels it's striking to discover that this prophecy of the denial is not the only prophecy of denial, evidently, that the Lord made concerning Peter, because it is located in the upper room. But later on after the upper room discourse is over and the Lord, with the apostles, is in Gethsemane or just before Gethsemane, or just after, he again makes this same prophecy to Peter, that he would deny him three times. This denial evidently left a profound impression upon the early church, because all four gospels recorded it. Not too many of the things that Jesus did are recorded in all four of the gospels, for example the feeding of the five thousand is one of the signs that our Lord performed that is found in all of them. But most of the others are found in one or two, sometimes three of the gospels but not four. So evidently the fact that all four of the gospels record this indicates that the early church felt that Peter's denial was something that has profound significance. And since he was warned twice, it seems that significance is enhanced. He's loyal. He's undaunted. He's the leader of the eleven. He's as has often been said, *primus inter pares*, or first among equals. But it will prove to be only chaff, this self-confidence of the Apostle Peter at this point.

In fact, it's rather alarming to read of his self-confidence. Let me just pick out a few things that he said in the midst of these denials. He said in Matthew chapter 26 verse 33, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." And then later he said, "Thou I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee." And "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee into prison and into death." And, "If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise." And then he says, "I will lay down my life for Thy sake."

Now Paul gives us some very important counsel in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 12, for the apostle says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Let me repeat it. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." How important that is even for apostles. And it's certainly important for preachers. And it's important for elders. And it's important for deacons. And it's important for any Christian who thinks that he can get along without the constant companionship and strengthening of the Holy Spirit from the Lord.

I love Chrysostom's comment, after listing some of these things he says, "What sayest thou, O Peter?" Imagine a man saying this who was an apostle. "What sayest thou, O Peter?" "I will lay down my life for thy sake." Oh the self confidence that we have. One Scottish interpreter has said, "The day that a saint falls is the day that he ceases to fear to fall." And that's something that we all should feel, even those of us who are just young Christians. If we think that we can get along in our Christian life without a constant dependence on the Lord, we're going to be sadly surprised as Peter was.

Now, there's a bit of a problem here, because if you've read the New Testament you'll know that Mark doesn't say precisely the same thing that John and Matthew say. John and Matthew say that Jesus said, "Peter before the cock crows you will deny me three times." But Mark says, "Before the cock crows twice you shall deny me three times." Liberals have indulged in some crowing over this cock crowing. And more than once or twice, too, because they like to think of this as one of the many evidences of fallibility in the Scriptures, because is it not obvious that we have something that is wrong here. Perhaps it is not important, but at least it shows that the Scriptures do contain errors.

Because one gospel says, "Before the cock crows thou shalt deny me thrice." And another gospel says, "Before the cock crows twice thou shalt deny me thrice."

Now, I think that it is possible to harmonize these two things. One of the ancient Roman naturalists was a man by the name of Pliny. I'm sure that most of you have heard of Pliny the Elder. He wrote a *Historia Naturalis* which was a natural history, and it had about 37 volumes to it. And in the midst of Pliny's comments and writings he has some information that I think bears right on this. He speaks about the watches of the night, and he calls the fourth watch of the night, from the third hour in the morning to the sixth hour in the morning. That brings back memories to me. I arrived yesterday afternoon after seven weeks on six or seven hours difference in time. Now most of you that know me know that I don't go to bed until about one o'clock at night. And usually I sleep as late as I possibly can. On Sunday morning, of course, I have to get up early. But if I can sleep a little later I'm happy to do it, because my time clock is the other way around. Well, I stayed up as long as I could last night; of course it was about six hours difference. And so when we came to ten o'clock it was four o'clock London time. So finally I went to bed and slept about three hours and awakened at two in the morning and couldn't go back to sleep. So I want you to know I broke my recent record, I got up when it was 5:45 this morning, and I felt just bright and chipper because I was still living by Belgium time [Laughter] and not our time. Well anyway, that watch, I want you to know that I got up this morning during the fourth watch, from three to six in the morning.

Now, Pliny writes about the fourth watch. And he talks about the cock crowing during that time. And it's very interesting, is it not; he calls it a *secundum gallicinium*. For those of you who remember Latin, of course, *secundum* is the adjective for second. And *gallicinium* is the cock crowing. So the second cock crowing was from three to six in the morning. And then, of course, he goes on to explain that usually around midnight there is some crowing of the cock. Now, all of you who grew up in the country or near some chickens, I know this is laboring a point that you know all about. But us city folks we don't know things like this. And there were really two cock crowings, one which was not the important one. But the second one was when cocks ought to crow. And that

was the real one, and that's the later one. I've often illustrated it by my experiences at theological seminary. And theological seminary our classes began right on the hour, and then we went fifty minutes, ten minutes to the hour. And then we were off. And in anticipation of the next class, a warning bell would ring three minutes before the hour and then final bell, which started the class, on the hour.

Now, if you saw a student hastening across the ground around the seminary, he might say to someone, "Has the bell rung?" And if the three minute bell had rung but the other bell had not, the chances are the reply would be, "No the bell has not rung yet," because the important thing is the final ringing of the bell, the second ringing of the bell, the really important one. Well, I think that is what we have in the New Testament here. And just like the two bells for the class, so there were two cock crowings. And there is no contradiction between the two if we understand that. Mark writes from the standpoint of both of the times that the cocks crowed, whereas the other gospels speak of one.

Well now, let's take a look at the performance of this denial as John describes it in verse 15 of chapter 18 of John. And we read, "And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not." This first denial is very interesting because it begins rather innocently. She says, "You're not really one of him are you?" And so since she gave him a little leeway he took advantage of it, and he said, "No, I'm not." He was hedging. And then in verse 25 we read, "And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself." And the men looked over at him and they said, "You're not one of his disciples also are you?" And he denied it and again he said, "I'm not." Except this time he adds, "I don't really know what you're talking about." He wants to make it sure that they don't identify him with the Lord Jesus Christ.



In fact, Matthew says after he said, "I don't know what you're talking about," evidently they prodded him a bit and he said, "I don't know the man." Now that is striking because it's not too long before this that remember the Lord Jesus had said near Caesarea Philippi to the apostles, "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" Well, someone said, "Some say you're Elijah. Some say you're Jeremiah. Some say you're one of the prophets." But Jesus said, "But who say ye that I am?" And Peter replies, enlightened by God the Holy Spirit, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Now, here is the same man who has said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," saying, "I don't know." Not only, "I don't know the Christ" or "I don't know Jesus," but "I don't know the man." In other words, he's just a man so far as Peter is concerned at this point.

So he equivocates, he hedges, he denies, and finally we read in verse 26 that one of the servants of the high priest, he was a little more concerned because his kinsman was Malchus and Malchus had his right ear cut off by Peter, remember. And you might have thought that he would surely recognize Peter, but remember it was nighttime. Torches were being held by various ones. And is often the case in night and lights from torches flashing he caught, evidently, a look at Peter's face but not long enough to be absolutely certain. So he said, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" And then we read, I'm putting together what the other gospel writers say, Peter, not only denied, but he denied with oaths and curses. Can you imagine, an apostle now not simply saying, "I don't know the man," but adding a whole range of expletives in order to make absolutely certain that they understood exactly what he was saying. What a fall for an apostle. And even Peter realized afterwards, because we read in the Matthean account, that he went out and he wept bitterly, because the cock crowed.

Now, you know, as I look at this there is one thing that comes home to my mind, and particularly since this past month I've been going through the Epistle to the Hebrews again. And there is a man in the Epistle to the Hebrews who illustrates the other side of this. And that man's name is Esau. Do you remember Esau? Esau was the person who sold his birthright to Jacob. Now, the birthright not only meant that Jacob had certain privileges as firstborn, certain privileges of

inheritance, but also with it went the right to be the priest, the with whom God dealt. And so it involved a spiritual blessing. No doubt Jacob would have gotten that blessing, but later on they deceived Isaac and Esau again, and Isaac blessed Jacob thinking that he was Esau. And we read in the Scriptures that Esau came in afterwards and he discovered what had happened, and he was tremendously upset over it. And in Genesis chapter 27 we have something of that. And Esau comes in and he said, "Is he not rightly called Jacob? He supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright. Behold now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, "Behold I've made him thy Lord and all his brethren have I given to him for servants. With corn and wine have I sustained him? What shall I do now unto thee, my son?" And Esau said unto his father, "Hast thou but one blessing my father. Bless me even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, writing about this incident, you might think that that was an instance of true repentance. The writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews sees it quite differently. He writes to these professing Hebrew believers who are, it seems, in the case of some in danger of turning away from their profession. He says, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." And immediately, of course, Esau comes to mind, because Esau lifted up his voice with an exceedingly bitter cry, so Genesis says. "Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected for he found no place of change of mind, though he sought it," probably the blessing, "though he sought it carefully with tears."

Now the tendency of us as we read something like this is to feel terribly sorry for Esau. And of course there is a sense in which that is perfectly right. We should have compassion for a man like Esau who has made an irrevocable decision. He's lost his birthright. He's lost his blessing. And he sought the blessing with an exceedingly bitter cry, with tears. But even then there was a difference between Esau and Jacob. For when Isaac says, "There is nothing that I can do," we read, "Esau

hated Jacob," and he said, "As soon as the opportunity comes, I will kill him." There is a man, you see, who has only remorse. But not remorse because he's lost the spirituality of the blessing, not remorse because he's disobeyed God, not true repentance for what he had done, but only because he's not getting what he hoped he would get.

He's like Judas. He's like Judas who said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood." The Scriptures, when they say, "He repented himself," say literally, "He regretted." He regretted not that he had turned away in heart from the Lord, but he regretted what was happening to him now because he had betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ. What a difference there is between a Peter and a Judas. Both of them are sifted, but one is all chaff, Judas. And one is wheat and chaff, that's Peter. But he is wheat, for Jesus had just said, "Peter, Satan has desired to sift you as wheat, but I've prayed for you that your faith fail not." Esau was a man who was all chaff. Peter is wheat and chaff. But he's wheat, essentially by virtue of the new life that God had given to him.

The Apostle Paul writing in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 puts it this way, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death." That was the sorrow of an Esau. That was the sorrow of a Judas. But the sorrow of Peter was different. He went out and he wept bitterly, as a believer. And there is always hope for a believer who weeps bitterly over the sins that he has committed.

Now, let me just, in the few moments we have, just state some of the obvious lessons that flow out of Peter's denial of Jesus Christ. First of all, one notices the power and the powerlessness of Satan. He often takes us at our strong point. Peter's strong point was his courage and his zeal for the Lord Jesus Christ. But he took him at his strong point, and Peter turns out to be a spiritual coward. Moses, the meekest man on the face of the earth, but he lost his temper. Elijah, what a bold, fearless prophet, and yet after his great victory on Mount Carmel, contending with the priests and the prophets of Baal, it's a woman's voice who causes him to flee off into the distance, and then, of course, the willingness and yet the weakness of man.

Listen to the steps in Peter's fall. They explain themselves. First of all he disregarded the first warning. Jesus said in the upper room discourse, "Peter, you're going to deny me before the cock crows. You're going to do it three times." He didn't pay any attention. He was sleeping in Gethsemane, not watching in the garden as he should have. And then when the soldiers come he fights when he should have kept quiet. And then as the Lord Jesus is arrested and is taken toward the palace, it's Peter now who has withdrawn from the Lord, and he's following, the Scriptures say, afar off. Here's the one, mind you, that confessed him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

And then a second warning is given. Evidently our Lord said again, "Before the cock crows you're going to deny me three times Peter." He didn't pay any attention to that warning. And so he comes in and he manages to make his way into the palace itself. And he's standing by the fire warming himself. What a picture of an apostle warming himself with the world. Now his companions are not the apostle and our Lord, his companions are the world. So he's warming himself by the side of the enemies of Christ, and off in the distance one can hear a cock crowing. And even that first cock crowing doesn't bring Peter to his senses. Until finally amidst the inquiries of those that are around that fire, he finally denies the Lord Jesus and adds oaths and curses to it. I like the remark of the Scotswoman who said, "He had nay business there among the flunkies." [Laughter] But you see, his business there among the flunkies was because he had failed all along to pay attention to the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the last thing I'd like to close with is this, oh the power of the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Peter, Satan has desired you to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. And Peter, when you are converted, strengthen your brethren." Sometimes Christians wonder why the Lord Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the Father, ever living to make intercession for us. Why do we need any intercession by the great High Priest, if we already have the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of everlasting life? Ah, but you see, our Lord Jesus as the mediator has not finished his work. Oh, the basis is laid and the sacrifice. And the sacrifice having been accomplished is the judicial ground of our forgiveness and positionally we stand cleared forever, justified and

righteous before God. But there is a further work of conformation of the believers to the image of Christ. As Paul puts it in Galatians, "Oh my Galatian believers, of whom I travail in birth until Christ be formed in you." And the Son of God is at the right hand of the Father, praying that Christ may be formed within his believers. And so he prays and he prays, and he prays at this very moment for every believer, that we may be ultimately conformed to him. He's still carrying out aspects of his mediatorial work. And the most glorious fact about it is that it will never fail. It is effectual. He ever lives to make intercession for us. "Wherefore he is able to save us to the uttermost." And as long as we are living in the flesh, having believed in the Lord Jesus we have the great High Priest, who lives to finish his work in us.

And so Peter, he went out and wept bitterly because through the ministry of the great High Priest, he had come to realize what he actually had done. And he could hardly bear it. And then the Lord Jesus spoke through the angel to the disciples and said, "Go tell his disciples," this is in the resurrection days, "Go tell his disciples." And then we read, "And Peter." Peter is singled out from the rest for special attention. It was the Lord's comforting ministry to the disciple who no doubt had a broken heart over what had happened. That was his private restoration. For later we read that the Lord appeared to Peter, especially for him. And the public restoration comes in John chapter 21. Well, Jesus said, "Peter, when you are converted," that is when you've been brought back into fellowship with me, "strengthen the brethren." What kind of strength does Peter give us? Ah, the strength of his epistles, for example. And Peter says in his first epistle, "Be sober, you Christians, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour." And if he were with us today, that is what he would say, "Be sober, be vigilant, your adversary the devil is going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." And he'd love to devour all of us, and he'd love to devour you. And he'd love to make an end of us. But he can never make an end of us because of the High Priest at the right hand of the Father.

And Peter also says in his second epistle, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." For if you do these things we shall never fall. Yes, we believe it

is essential as those who have been brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there flow out of our conversion experience certain responses to the divine revelation. Not for salvation, but as the result of what has happened to us. May God help us so to respond. May the lesson of Peter's denial come home to us.

If you're here this morning and you've never believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, you have no high priest. You have no great high priest who ever lives to make intercession for you. You have no high priest whose sacrifice has been made the basis of your salvation at this point. May God help you to come to him. He's offered a sacrifice for sinners. If by the grace of God you've seen that you are a sinner, then his sacrifice is for you. Come to Christ, and in coming to him have the ministry of one who's offered a perfect, effectual sacrifice, and who lives to be sure that all of the benefits ultimately become ours.

[Prayer] Father, how grateful we are for these magnificent stories of the gospel accounts, which are so instructive for us. O may we heed the great apostle's exhortation. "Be sober, be vigilant," and Lord, deliver us from the indifference and the lethargy and the accompanying with the world that so weakens us that we become candidates for falling and even denying the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who's loved us and...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]