



## ***St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)***

**Worship Address :** Cerritos High School Auditorium  
12500 E. 183<sup>rd</sup> St., Cerritos, CA 90703  
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

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May 17, 2009

**Theme: The Spirit Is Willing but the Flesh Is Weak**

**Text: Matthew 26:69-75**

Our passage today tells the story of one of the best-known events of the Gospel message—Peter's denial of Jesus. He was the leader of the Twelve who had boasted, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." He was in fact the bravest of the Twelve because he followed the party that had arrested Jesus right up to the courtyard of the high priest where he sat down among the guards. But Peter's bravery is a false bravery for two reasons: (1) He had pride in his heart. He had bragged that he would never disown Jesus. (2) He tried to be brave in human power alone. Jesus had urged him to pray at Gethsemane saying, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Peter's denial of Jesus was the most serious sin he could commit next to handing him over to the authorities. His denial put him in great spiritual danger. Jesus had said earlier in this Gospel, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven." Peter failed to do this. But not only so, Peter actually disowned Jesus in the presence of people. This is a serious offense in light of Jesus words, "But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father." So we can see that Peter put himself in serious spiritual danger.

Peter's first denial comes in response to the fact that a female servant of Caiaphas said to Peter, "You too were with Jesus of Galilee." Peter's first denial is not a direct denial. He doesn't come right out and say, "Well, you're just wrong! I don't know Jesus of Galilee." Instead, he simply says, "I don't know what you are talking about." Although it was a servant girl who had made the accusation, Peter was sitting with the guards. If he had identified himself with Jesus, there was a very real possibility that he might be arrested also. This makes the story ironic because Peter had bragged that he was ready to do just that—to go to prison for Jesus. But he has failed the first test. He has been presented with an opportunity to acknowledge that he is one of Jesus' disciples; but he does not.

Peter then leaves the company of the guards, perhaps to avoid the possibility of being arrested. He is presented with an opportunity to redeem himself. This time another girl tells the people who were present that Peter was with Jesus of Nazareth. This time Peter's response is more serious. This time he swears an oath. In other words, he calls upon God as his witness that what he is about to say is true. This is serious. This time Peter's denial is more serious and direct also. He says directly that he does not know Jesus. He calls upon God as a witness to the fact that he doesn't know Jesus.

If we look at the three confrontations in order, we can see that each one is more intense than the previous one. First, a single girl accuses Peter in the presence of others. Then,



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another girl accuses Peter to others. Finally, the crowd itself accuses Peter of being a disciple on the basis of his Galilean accent. If the confrontations have grown more intense, so does Peter's response. He is in serious danger now, of being arrested himself. The New King James Bible says that Peter began to curse and swear. But we should not conclude that Peter began to use profanity. The NIV is more accurate here when it says, "Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!'" This is as low as he can go. Peter has now fulfilled Jesus prophecy. His words sound very much like Jesus' words to false disciples: "I never knew you!"

A rooster crows immediately after Peter's third denial. In light of Jesus' words about acknowledging Him or disowning Him in the presence of people, Peter has committed a serious sin. What makes him different from Judas? After all, Matthew will tell us that Judas was seized with remorse. The difference between Peter and Judas is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Paul wrote about this in his second letter to the Corinthians. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. Worldly sorrow brings death."

When Peter recognized what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly. When Judas recognized what he had done he committed suicide. We know from the Gospel accounts that Peter sought out his fellow disciples following the crucifixion. Judas isolated himself. In the final analysis, however, we may observe that Luke and John both tell us that Judas had in some way surrendered himself to Satan. Luke tells us that "Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, being one of the Twelve." Peter was tested by Satan and failed the test; but Judas became indwelt by Satan and defected completely.