

Peter's Denial: A Warning About Self-Confidence

Scripture: Mark 14:66–72

Code: 41-78

We open to the fourteenth chapter of Mark and a portion of Scripture from verses 66 through 72, that is a fulfilled prophecy. In fact, our Lord predicted that this would happen on several occasions, and, in fact, it did happen, just exactly the way our Lord predicted it would. It is, in fact, the denial of Christ from the lips of the Apostle Peter, Peter's denial.

As we approach this text, perhaps a theological context will be helpful for us. At the foundation of all that Christians believe is the doctrine of radical depravity...radical depravity. Not just that every human being is depraved, or corrupt, or sinful, or fallen, or evil by nature, but that depravity is radical. That is, it extends to every aspect of man's nature and shows up in every feature of his behavior, radical depravity. We are in touch as Christians with our fallenness. We understand that we have been saved, and we have been redeemed, and we have been given a new nature, and we are new creatures in Christ. We understand that. We understand that we have experienced the new birth, and we have been born to walk in newness of life, and we have been ordained to good works, all of that is part of what we understand to be true about salvation.

But we also understand that our newness is incarcerated in fallen flesh that has yet to be redeemed. We are not fully redeemed yet. We have experienced the redemption of the soul, but not the redemption of the body. We still are human. We still are locked in to fallen human flesh. There is then, among Christians, a very, very strong sense of our corruption, a strong sense of our sinfulness, the evil that is in us. We even look at ourselves as wretched, borrowing the words of Paul, "O wretched man that I am. Inwardly I desire holy things, I long for righteous things, but there are other principles operating in me which drag me in the direction of sin."

The Bible teaches us that all men are weak, and fallen, and sinful, and corrupt. And even the best that they can do is before God wicked, corrupt, and evil. When we come to Christ and are born again and regenerated, there is a new nature in us, our desires have changed, our longings, our aspirations, our loves have changed. But we have to fight against the incarcerating fallenness of our own flesh. Every Christian then who has a right understanding of his or her nature understands that we live in a very dangerous place. Not just the world around us, not just the current culture that threatens us, but we live as new creations in a very dangerous, personal situation, for we are contained within our own fallenness. Therein lies the spiritual struggle.

We want to be honest about that. We want to be forthright about that. We cannot trust ourselves. We cannot trust in our own flesh. We certainly have to have a healthy distrust of what we are and what we are capable of.

Why am I saying all of that? Because to fail to have that, is to put yourself in even greater jeopardy. To fail to distrust yourself is to put yourself in a very dangerous place. And that is exactly the experience of Peter. He learned the lesson of the deadly consequence of self-confidence, and we need to learn it as well.

Now against this true understanding of man is the false and deceptive understanding that is propagated in the culture in which we live today. One of the popular lies of our culture, if not the dominating popular lie of our culture, and it's an old one, is that man is basically good and that not only is man good generically, but you as an individual are more than good, you're great. You're more than great, you're wonderful and you need to recognize that because all your power in life resides in your self-esteem and all your influence in life and your ability to achieve great things lies in the power of your self-confidence. And people who fail, and people who struggle are people who lack the power of self-esteem, and the power of self-confidence. Your precious little children from the time they arrive in public school in this country will be taught that...that power resides in them, and goodness resides in them, and greatness resides in them, and achievement is simply a matter of trusting yourself, and loving yourself, and esteeming yourself, and putting confidence in yourself, and not letting anybody diminish that.

People are programmed from early education to believe in their person power, their personal worth, their personal rights, their personal beauty, their personal talent, and to reject the reality that they are corrupt, and fallen, and evil, and sinful, and selfish, and prone to disaster. They are radically depraved. The whole generation now, or perhaps two or three generations, exists of deluded people who when they get out of elementary school and face reality find out that they can't make their world what they've been told they could make their world. And it certainly can't be their fault. So they all become victims, and the rest of the society has to somehow take the blame for these poor victims, these great, wonderful, superior individuals who are unparalleled. Their failures have to be explained by something outside of them. So people live in spite of these ridiculous notions with a perpetuated sense of importance and personal power and blame what's around them for failure to achieve.

Mark it down, self-esteem, self-confidence, personal pride is sin. It is an evidence of corruption. It is the very arrow point of sin. It's where sin starts, with pride. You can't re-label it as a virtue, without deceiving everyone.

Today, we're going to meet a believer, one of us, and not just one of us but one of the best of us, and certainly one of the most privileged of us who spent three years walking with the Lord and was the leader of the Apostles. We're going to meet our familiar friend Peter and we're going to find out a very, very profound lesson in the danger of self-confidence...the danger of self-confidence. Let's begin at verse 66.

"As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the High Priest came and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you are talking about,' and he went out onto the porch. The servant girl saw him and began once more to say to the bystanders, 'This is one of them.' But again he denied it. And after a little while, the bystanders were again saying to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too.' But he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this man you are talking about.' Immediately a rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, 'Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times,' and he began to weep."

This is colossal. This is Peter who said, "To whom shall we go, You and You alone have the words of eternal life." Who said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is Peter, the great leader, the great preacher. How can this happen? This is a believer. And this is not just a momentary slipup,

his denials if you think they happen in a brief time, you miss it. His denials are strung out over two hours and the first one was a shock and a surprise, but the next two were pre-meditated responses, not just knee-jerk. You might think that it took about as long to do this, in Peter's case, as it did for me to read it, you'd be very wrong. The text is brief but the experience was strung out over those two hours. In fact, the same two hours that Jesus is on trial before Annas and Caiaphas, in the house of Annas and the house of Caiaphas being the same house, the great enclave of the high priestly family, this is a concurrent second-story line, this is a subplot. Jesus on trial for two hours from one to three, Peter denial from one to three, they run concurrently. Christ is seen in glorious triumphant, speaking honestly knowing it will cost Him His life. Peter speaks dishonestly trying to preserve his life.

Now while what Peter did is not necessary, don't have to do this, it does happen. You say, "You mean a natural true believer could do this?" Oh yes, oh, absolutely. And you know that because although you've never stood before a tribunal that threatened to execute you, and you never stood before some court that threatened to put you in prison for the sake of Jesus Christ, you have stood before people and when you knew you should have confessed Christ, you kept your mouth shut, right? So you know what this is like. If not on a colossal level like this, on a smaller level but you know how hard it can be in some circumstances to openly profess Christ because there are negative consequences. You know that you have it in you to do this, even though you love Christ. You're not forfeiting your faith in Him, you're not abandoning your trust in Him, you're not distaining Him where once you loved Him, you're just unwilling to confess Him and admit that you are His, and we've all tasted of that.

So we understand Peter's situation. When you read the history of the church, there are times when believers go before tribunals and profess Christ to their own punishment and their own execution and you know the litany of all of those stories that have been recorded throughout the history of the church. There are also times when people have become cowards and denied Christ verbally while not denying Him in their heart. They've done that to escape imprisonment and death.

I've been reading in the last month the doctoral dissertation on the history of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in Eastern Europe from the initial part of the establishment of the church in the 1800's in Europe. It's a very interesting study because it shows how that in the early years of the establishment of the church in Russia, the Ukraine, Poland, Romania, other places like that, the theology was all Reformed Theology. There was an affirmation of the sovereignty of God, there was an affirmation of radical depravity, there was an affirmation of divine sovereign election, there was an affirmation of the perseverance of the saints, or as we call it eternal security, they believe that. Today, much of the church in eastern Europe will now deny the perseverance of the saints, and they will say, "Well no, we don't believe that anymore, you can lose your salvation. You can lose your salvation."

How did that theology change? The purpose of this doctoral dissertation is to try to figure out what were the influences that caused them to abandon a true doctrine of the believer's perseverance in favor of an untrue doctrine that believers can lose their salvation? And the answer came, at least in one point, because when the persecution of believers began to take place in the twentieth century, there were believers who in the face of imprisonment and isolation and perhaps even death wouldn't confess Christ. They were cowards. They got a name. They were called Lapsed believers. That's actually a technical term, the lapsed.

And in the history, for example, of Russia, when the persecution died down, and the threats weren't so great, some of these lapsed believers wanted back in the church. This caused a problem. There were some who said, "Well we'll let them back in if they make a public confession that they were cowardly and they repent openly before the whole church." And there were others who said, "We don't think they need to do that, it's a sin like any other sin, we'll let them back in without having to make a public confession." And so the church was fractured and there were churches who took them back only on a public confession and churches that existed just for the lapsed believers who didn't want to do that publicly. And there were some who never came back.

The point being, the church has dealt with that in the past. Some of those believers came back. They made an open confession, a public confession. They were true believers, but in the moment of temptation, they fell and they wouldn't confess Christ.

How can that happen? That can happen because while we are new on the inside, we are incarcerated in our fallen flesh and it is still corrupt and sinful and self-protective. And that's what happened to Peter. So we can learn crucial lessons from this experience with Peter, and that's what I want us to see this morning.

First we'll look at the story, then we'll talk about its implications. The story begins with foolish confidence...foolish confidence. Now Peter didn't have the benefit of reading Romans 7, I admit, cause it wasn't written. Peter didn't have the benefit of reading Galatians 5 about the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of the flesh. He didn't have all the information, perhaps. And he had been very, very successful in his life. He had preached with power. He had healed people. He had cast out demons because the Lord had delegated that power to him. He was in touch with the power, he was in touch with the supernatural, that the Lord had delegated to him as an Apostle. What he wasn't in touch with, what he didn't really realize was the remaining weakness of his own fallen condition and he was about to learn that in an unforgettable way.

The story starts with what we'll call foolish confidence...foolish confidence. And the story really begins the night before. This denial occurs between one o'clock and three o'clock in the morning on Friday, at the same time Jesus is having this illegal trial before Annas and Caiaphas. But it was the night before, Thursday night, in the upper room from sunset on to midnight when they were celebrating the Passover, Jesus and the disciples, and when He instituted the Lord's Table, the Communion service, it was in that context, in that upper room that Thursday night, that our Lord looked at Peter and said this, "Simon, Simon," it's not good when they repeat your name twice, it's never good...never good. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat. Satan has asked permission to come after you in the same way he asked permission to go after Job and I'm going to let him go after you because I want to prove as I proved with Job that saving faith can never be broken, no matter what happens. However, this is going to be a great trial for you. I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." Faith can't fail because the Lord intercedes for us. The faith of Job didn't fail, the faith of Peter didn't fail, the faith of Paul when a messenger of Satan was allowed to come after him didn't fail. Faith doesn't fail, that's perseverance.

However, though we don't stop believing, we can fall to a temptation to be cowardly and not confess our faith. But he said to Him, Peter says, "Lord, with you I am ready to go both to prison and to death."

"And Jesus said to him, 'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you've denied Me

three times. In fact, you will deny that you even know Me three times.” That’s the first time Jesus warned Peter of what he was going to face...a satanic temptation, and he would deny Christ and he would do it three times.

Later that night Judas left, later that night the eleven left the upper room and they headed to the Mount of Olives. On the way to the Mount of Olives, we pick up the story in Mark 14. They’re going to the Mount of Olives in verse 26 after they sung their final Passover and Lord’s Table hymn. They go toward the Mount of Olives, Jesus says, “You will all fall away, you will all fall away,” verse 29, Peter said, “Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.” And here’s Peter again saying, “Lord, most of the time You know what You’re talking about, You really do, You’re really good on the Kingdom. You’re great on salvation, You just don’t know how strong I am. You’re right about everything but You’re wrong about me.”

Wow! “Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, this very night before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times.’” He said it again on the walk. Peter kept insistently saying, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You. You’re wrong.”

Boy, the boldness of this guy. Ah, he’s so confident, so foolishly confident, verse 32 says, they finally came to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives and He said to His disciples, “Sit here until I’ve prayed,” and we know from the other writers that He said, “And pray, watch and pray lest you enter into temptation.” This is a time for you to arm yourselves, Peter and the others, against what’s going to come. “And when He went in to pray and came back out, verse 37 says He came and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? You still don’t get it, do you?” This is the sleep of self-confidence. “He went back in and prayed again, came out, they were asleep again. He went back in, came out again, they were still asleep.” This is a disastrous situation.

But Peter will not relent on the fact that he is not going to deny the Lord. He will not do that. And to prove it, in verse 47, when the entourage of up to a thousand people shows up in the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, Peter is the one who draws a sword and whacks off the ear of the servant of the High Priest that John tells us had the name of Malchus. And Peter is trying to prove his profession, to prove his courage. In his mind, he is invincible. In his mind, he will be faithful. He is dangerously overconfident. He is foolishly confident.

Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” First Corinthians 10:12, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall.” Peter is really set up for a fall. His inner man, his love for Christ, his love for the truth, his desire to be obedient, to give honor to Christ, fully functioning. But he fails to understand the power of his remaining flesh. And foolish confidence leads to failing cowardice...failing cowardice. We pick up the story here in verse 66 at this point.

“Peter was below in the courtyard.” Now let me just kind of give you the scene here. They arrest him. They tie him up, Jesus. The disciples scatter. Judas is long gone. But the other eleven scatter as Zechariah 13:7 predicted they would, and they flee. Jesus is taken bound to the house of Annas at one o’clock in the morning. Annas is the former high priest, he’s the patriarch of the priestly family. He had been a high priest years before. The Romans had removed him and he had been replaced by four sons of his in succession, and now Caiaphas was a son-in-law. So he was the brains, he was the power behind this priestly high priestly family.

He lived, we're confident, in the same place that Caiaphas lived because that's what families did. This was a large, very, very wealthy priestly family and they built their house like great rectangles around a massive inner courtyard. So all the families that were part of this Annas entourage would have lived in this enclave with a massive courtyard in the middle.

Matthew and Mark say Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, but John adds in John 18, that He was first taken to Annas. Well that doesn't pose any difficulty because they would have lived in the same estate, the same place. It is in this environment inside the house that belongs to the high priestly families in which Peter's denials take place. It is also inside this house, first in the apartment belonging to Annas and second in the apartment belonging to Caiaphas that Jesus goes through the two aspects of the Jewish trial. There's third kind of for show trial where they repeat their accusations and conclusions in the daylight before the crowd to give it the sense of looking legal cause trials were not allowed to be held at night.

All three denials then occur in the same location, but they occur over a period of two hours. From reading the eighteenth chapter of John, the first one appears to have occurred when Jesus was before Annas, and the latter two when He was shifted over before Caiaphas. In fact, it may be that the first occurred when He was before Annas, the second occurred when He was before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and the third actually occurred just about the time that trial ended and Jesus was walking or being escorted bound back across the courtyard. We'll explain why we say that.

Mark has all three of them in this one passage and puts them where they belong in the courtyard of the house of these high priests. Now as we see Peter, we ask the question...what's he doing there? What's he doing there? Well, he's driven there by his love for the Lord. He's driven there by his desire to be loyal. He's driven there by the fact that he has made these constant protestations that he would ever defect, right? He's just trying to have some integrity. So he finds his way back to this entourage that is moving in the blackness between midnight and one o'clock, after having arrested Jesus in the garden. He finds them and he follows them back to the house of the high priest.

This house would have been entered from a gate, there would have been a great wall at the street, and there would be a gate and a corridor through the section that led into the courtyard and the courtyard would be the unroofed area in the middle. There would probably be at least two floors of houses and apartments. He would have to be admitted by the gate keeper. Why would the gate keeper do that? There's a little interesting answer to that question in the eighteenth chapter of John. They wouldn't let Peter in because he obviously didn't belong in there. He wasn't a part of the entourage, he wasn't anybody official. And the girl who was at the door, and I'm sure there were other soldiers securing the place, but she had the function to open the door. They wouldn't let Peter in, and then John arrived, and according to John 18:16, John was known by the family of the High Priest and John got them to open the door and let Peter in. Unwittingly, John contributed to Peter's terrible, tragic denials.

Now Peter's on the inside. He's not right next to Jesus. In fact, when it says in verse 66 Peter was below in the courtyard, we want to add to that that it tells us in Luke 22:54 that Peter was following at a distance. He let Jesus get in, everybody else get in, he shows up later. Matthew says he was afar off. He was keeping his distance. He was caught between fear and faith. He was caught between love and terror, between courage and cowardice. And he was there, to find out the end, where was this going to go, what were they going to do with Jesus, to see the outcome of the trials. It is in that

situation that he is exposed. He's in the courtyard and one of the servant girls in verse 66 who served the High Priest came.

This is going to be a shock. This is the one he didn't plan for. This is the one that caught him completely off guard. He's just there. He is warming himself, verse 67 says, so he is around a fire, and also around that fire we know from the other gospel writers are the Roman soldiers and the temple police who arrested and brought Jesus there. They're the strong arms. And they're warming themselves. And there are other people around there who function some way in the High Priest's place. And there's this servant girl, this maiden, this... John says, "The girl who opened the door, the gate, to let Peter in." And she sees Peter warming himself, verse 67.

"In the flickering of the fire light, in the middle of the night, she sees him there." And it says, "She looked at him." Luke 22:56, Luke's account says, "She stared at him." It's not a glance, she's looking to see if this isn't somebody that she recognized.

Now obviously she was letting him in because John, who was known to the high priestly family said, "Let him in," whether she knew he belonged in the group that followed Jesus or not, we don't know, but it's likely that she did and that's why she was looking at him. Remember now, Jesus for that whole week had been pretty much in the temple surrounded by His disciples and everybody associated with the High Priest and his family knew about them and where they were because they were...they were tearing into their temple system from Monday through Wednesday. So perhaps she had seen him and she was checking it out to make sure he was the one she thought. "She looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Nazarene,'" meaning that he had come from the town of Nazareth.

This setting is very natural and I want you to get this picture. This is a very natural setting. There are three incidents, not four, not two, but three as the Lord predicted, three separate incidents in which Peter betrays our Lord. But in each incident we don't assume the cryptic nature of this record here is all there was. The questions might be spoken two or three ways, others might chime in and add their nuances to the question and that would explain why as you compare the answers in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, sometimes there's more than one answer. In fact, in this case it says Peter denied it and said one thing. If you read Luke, Luke says He said "I am not," which means there was a different question for which "I am not" was his answer. So there are clusters of people around who confront him on three occasions and on three occasions he denies the Lord.

I think this was the shock. I think this was the *paraptoma*, I think this was the trip up. I think this...didn't expect this to be coming. This is where his flesh is really vulnerable because he doesn't expect this. Maybe, just maybe if he had been arrested by the soldiers and they had dragged him into a room and sat him down in that room and said, "You're going to have to stay here because somebody is going to come in and interrogate you because we have suspicions about you," maybe in sitting in that room if he had been there, let's say, for a half an hour or 45 minutes or whatever, he might have thought to himself, "You know, Jesus said this was going to happen. He said last night in the upper room that we were going to be persecuted, we were going to be brought before the authorities, we were going to be...we were essentially going to be dragged before courts and our Lord said, 'Don't worry about what you're going to say because in that hour the Holy Spirit is going to tell you what to say.'"

You know, maybe he would have processed all of that. Maybe he had thought, "Now look at all the

confessions I made. Look, I said the Lord was wrong, I would never deny Him, and maybe he would have been ready.” But he didn’t have that opportunity and this is very important, folks, the strategies of Satan are not long, drawn-out revelations, they are fast-paced trip-ups when least expected. He was ready maybe for the big thing, and he would have been probably better off if he had gone all the way across the courtyard and said, “I want to stand with Jesus during this trial.” And then in proximity to Christ, he probably would have felt that if Jesus needed to, He’d knock them all down again like He had done in the Garden.

But he follows from a distance and the Lord is not there and he’s not prepared and he’s not dragged before some tribunal where he can muster up all his courage and make a great defense, he’s confronted by a girl who takes care of the door and a bunch of underlings, the word *huperete* is used, underlings who are nobodies in a legal sense, or an authoritative sense, and he’s caught off guard and he denied it. In fact, Matthew adds he denied it before all of them. Which means that she made her declaration so that everybody around there could hear, all the bystanders, the temple police, the Roman soldiers, whoever was around the fire. And he says, “I neither know or understand what you are talking about.” It’s John actually who adds, he said, “I am not.” So perhaps the question came a second way, “You’re one of His disciples.”

No sooner did he say that than what you read in verse 68, it says, “I neither know nor understand what you’re talking about.” But if you have a New King James or an old King James, you will read this, “And he went out onto the porch and the rooster crowed.” Some ancient manuscripts put the first crowing of the rooster here...here.

What was Peter doing? Trying to get away. He went out onto the porch. What’s...what’s...what’s the porch? That’s the vestibule might be kind of an old archaic word, it’s the corridor...it’s the corridor that leads back out to the street. It’s dark. It’s out of the flickering fire, away from the people, into the corridor, into the hallway that leads out. He’s got to get away. It may have dawned on him the first time he heard that crowing of the rooster that he was on schedule to do exactly what the Lord said he would do. So he ducks into the corridor and some time passes clearly, verse 69 says, “The servant girl saw him.” Matthew says, “Another servant girl.” This is the servant girl that...a different one. Luke says, “Another.” So we assume that this is another servant girl. But Luke uses a masculine pronoun for “another.” So it’s kind of generic.

What we assume is, there were other people in the corridor. There were people milling around in this setting. And so he, trying to escape, hiding in the shadows, doesn’t do very well getting away from what verse 69 and 70 calls the bystanders. And he’s confronted another time. And perhaps on this occasion, there was again more than one question directed at him by more than one person. But the servant girl who saw him began once more to say to the bystanders, “This is one of them. This is one of them hiding here in the corridor.”

But again he denied it. Verse 70, again he denied it. And Matthew says he denied it before all of them. He denied it again. And if you read Luke, Luke says he said, “I am not one of his followers.” Matthew says, “I do not know what you’re talking about.” His second denial maybe is even a more fierce denial. And now he’s had some time to think about it, but he’s really caught. The second denial is not a *paraptoma*, it’s not a trip-up, it’s premeditated now. He’s deep into this, really deep into it. Matthew says that this accuser, one of the accusers on this second go-around said, “This fellow WAS with Jesus the Nazarene.” And Matthew says, “Peter with an oath denied it...with an oath. I swear it’s the truth. I vow it’s the truth.”

You'd think now he's probably get out of there, but he doesn't. He hangs around. And verse 70, look at it, "After a little while...after a little while." Luke says "About an hour, another hour goes by." He's still milling around in the night, wanting to see the end, wanting to see the way it turns out. And maybe he's heard the screams of blasphemy that have been hurled from the mouths of the Sanhedrin against Jesus. But he's still there. And the bystanders, this is the third time, verse 70, were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too."

How did they know he was a Galilean? Did he have a nametag? No, Matthew 26:73 says, "Your speech betrays you." He had a Galilean accent. They picked up his accent. "You are a Galilean."

And by the way, the person who said that, "Surely you are one of them," John 18:26 says, "was a relative of Malchus, who lost his ear and got a new one." And now Peter has to ramp it up even more. So in verse 71 he began to curse and swear. "I don't know this man you're talking about." Curse and swear, continuous cursing coming out of his mouth. What do you mean cursing? Pronouncing a curse on himself if he's lying. He literally pulls down the hand of God on his own head if he's lying. I mean, this is pretty much how humans behave, isn't it, when they're trying to convince somebody they're telling the truth. "I promise you I'm telling you...I swear I'm telling...I swear on a stack of Bibles I'm telling you the truth." And the more likely they are lying, the more they pile up the things on which they're willing to swear.

That's Peter. He's lying, he knows he's lying, but he pronounces curses upon himself if he's lying. And he swears by everything that you could swear by. So first, the single lie to a girl. Then, ramped up lies to several people, another girl and another in a masculine form, meaning perhaps a couple and bystanders. And now a flurry of curses and a flurry of swearing, he has really hit rock bottom. "I do not know this man you're talking about." How could he say that?

Immediately verse 72 says, "A rooster crowed a second time. And all that the Lord had told him had come to pass." The Lord didn't make it happen, the Lord knew it would happen and it happened because Peter wasn't ready, he wasn't prepared, didn't have to happen but the Lord knew it would happen because Peter was unprepared, brash overconfidence, foolish confidence led to failing cowardice.

By the way, one of the most interesting statements in this account and in the life of Peter at this point comes from Luke 22 verse 61, listen to this. "The cock, or the rooster, crowed second time," and Luke 22:61 says, "and the Lord turned and looked at Peter." The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Straight into Peter's eyes went the gaze of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps his trial had just ended and He was coming back across the courtyard, headed to prison where he'd be kept for a few hours until the dawn, fake trial, scourging, crucifixion in the morning. His face covered with spit, black and blue puffy from being punched in the face and slapped. His garments covered with sweaty blood that had oozed out of His sweat glands in the agonies in the garden. And as He's bound, is taken through the courtyard. He looks right into the eyes of Peter. I'm pretty sure that's a look that Peter never, ever, ever forgot.

And while you and I have never had the eyes of Jesus look at us in that way, believe it, the eyes of Jesus are on us all the time. And the same gaze sees us in our sin that saw Peter in his. What a painful moment. It's like the collapse of Peter is crystalized, captured and frozen at that moment

when their eyes meet.

How does this happen? How does this happen? What leads to this? Let me give you the lessons, okay? Number one, he boasted too much...he boasted too much. Self-confidence. He was strong. He was the man. He could handle anything, follow Christ anywhere. And he had that bolstered by warm affectionate feelings toward Christ. He boasted too much. Too much confidence in his strength. Too much confidence in his flesh.

Secondly, he listened too little...he listened too little. Jesus told him and told him and told him. This is great danger waiting for you, Satan wants to sift you. You will deny Me. And he spurned all those warnings. He did not take the word of the Lord seriously. He ignored the word of Christ. He rejected warnings and reproof, dangerous. He boasted too much. He listened too little.

And thirdly, he prayed too little. He slept through the prayer meeting. The Lord said in the garden, "Watch and pray unless you enter into temptation." He had taught him in the disciples prayer, "Pray this way, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." He should have been awake and praying that, instead of sleeping. He prayed too little. He omitted the spiritual duty. He omitted the drawing on divine power and a downward impulse of his own flesh dragged him into the pit of cowardice. Boasted too much, listened too little, prayed too little, fourthly, he acted too fast. He reacted on his own without considering the Lord's will, grabbed a sword, started swinging it around. He was out of sync with the plan of God, he was out of sync with the purpose of God. He was driven by his own fleshly impulses. He wanted to make a hero out of himself. He wanted to increase his reputation. He wanted to affirm his self-confidence.

This is just more of his pride. He boasted too much. He listened too little, prayed too little, acted too fast, and he followed too far. He would have been a lot better off if he had gone all the way across the courtyard and stood right with the Lord. That was always the safest place to be. He fled with the rest. He followed far off. He is curious but not courageous. He is a compromiser. He's mingled around the fire and now he's stuck. He mingled long enough, he sat with the men at the fire wanting to blend in so nobody would know who he was. And it was his desire to blend in that was the compromise. He followed too far.

Well the practical implications of that are so important. You want to follow close. You want to stay close. Boasted too much, listened too little, prayed too little, acted too fast, followed too far, and as a result, he fell too low. Darkest hour in human history, hell's hour, Jesus on trial about to be executed, and Peter is no match for the forces of hell. He reached the top, called by Christ, commissioned by Christ, set apart by Christ, loved by Christ, taught by Christ, given the keys to the Kingdom, granted, delegated, miraculous power to heal the sick and cast out demons, leader of the Twelve, privileged preacher and here he lands in the pit of profanity, denying the very Lord he confessed.

You know, we might understand if he was another Judas and just went out and hanged himself in disillusioned cowardice. But this is not a Judas. Judas from the start was a devil. This is a believer, his faith will not fail. His confession failed, his courage failed, his faith did not fail because it says Peter remembered, verse 72, how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times, and he began to weep."

Judas felt remorse and killed himself. Peter felt remorse and his faith didn't fail. He showed up at the

tomb on Sunday, didn't he? And in the upper room. This is the way back, folks, to remember. He remembered what the Lord had said. He remembered his foolish words. Matthew and Luke tell us he went out, he left that place, that house of the high priestly family for a solitary place. He went somewhere to be alone to remember the words of the Lord and his foolish self-confidence. And he began to weep. And Matthew and Luke both say he wept bitterly, he sobbed bitterly. He had discovered the corruption of his own flesh even in the face of his best intentions. I think he believed in himself, that's the problem. That's the problem.

He doesn't believe in himself any more. He knows what he is capable of. This is a profound lesson and Jesus said to him, "When you are converted, when you turn around from this, you will be able to strengthen the brethren because you will be able to teach them the lesson you learned about the weakness of the most resolute, self-confident, believer. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." That's what Jesus told him that very night.

He was restored. The end of the story is in John 21. Just briefly, "After the resurrection, Jesus meets the disciples in Galilee. And they have breakfast. Jesus made breakfast the way He always makes breakfast..breakfast. There was none and then there was breakfast. They ate breakfast. Jesus said to Simon Peter, "All right, Peter, Peter's been there all along, he was there. 'Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?' he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.'" Remember, he had said, "If all...if they forsake You, if all of those people forsake...I'll never forsake You.'

"Do you love Me more than these?" "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You." "He said, 'Tend My lambs. Be My shepherd.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because he said to Him the third time, 'So you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

He gave him an opportunity to confess his love for every time he denied Christ, three times for three times. That's the restoration of Peter.

Was he able to be restored? Oh yeah. Feed My sheep, tend My lambs, feed My sheep, be My shepherd. He's the great preacher of the first section of the book of Acts. Restored. Remember our Lord said in Luke 22:32, "Your faith will not fail," and it did not fail. And he stood up on the Day of Pentecost and preached a great sermon and three thousand were converted and he preached again and again and tens of thousands were being converted in Jerusalem. And then he sat down and wrote 1 Peter 1 and he wrote about how trials that are fiery trials, 1 Peter 1:6-9, prove your faith. When you go through the worst collapse of cowardice in your spiritual life, and your faith doesn't fail, it's the proof that your faith is the kind of faith that will remain until Christ appears. That's what Peter said.

It's a great lesson for us to learn. Not to be overconfident, but to understand the weakness of our flesh and steal ourselves against the kind of cowardice that broke the heart of Peter and grieved the heart of his Lord.

Father, we thank You for the time that we've been able to look into this account. There's much more

that's here as we think about spiritual issues, spiritual life. But, Lord, here's a lesson that we have to learn, that while the longings of the inner man, the regenerate man are strong and holy and pure and righteous, we still have the body of death attached to us and our flesh is weak and powerfully drawn to corruption. May we learn to steal ourselves against these kinds of experiences by listening carefully to Your Word and taking it in and believing it and embracing it, and by praying for divine strength as we face the temptations. May we learn from Peter that when we go through difficult trials and come out the other side with our faith intact, it's an evidence that this is the faith that God gives His own that cannot die, that cannot be destroyed, the kind of faith that will take us at last into Your presence. May we be faithful to confess You boldly before men, we pray in Your Son's name, O God. Amen.

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