

Message #57

Mark 14:66-72

I have been reading an old book from the 1884 on Pastoral Theology. The book was written by Dr. James Hoppin, who was a Professor at Yale, when Yale was a solid school. In this book Dr. Hoppin says—To accomplish all that a perfect minister should accomplish, he would need to be a perfect man who is filled with the Spirit of God every second. Where will you find such a man, since there has never been but one such man. The truth is ministry is committed to imperfect men (*Pastoral Theology*, p. 127). It has always been that way and always will be that way.

It does not matter how great the minister or how strong a believer you may be or how much you have developed in your relationship with Jesus Christ, sooner or later you will fail. There will come a moment when you will not measure up to your own expectations. You will face the reality that you are defective.

I thank God for this text. I thank God for Peter. Peter is a great man of God, make no mistake about that. He loved Jesus Christ. He would fight for Jesus Christ. In the end he would die for Jesus Christ. When we get to heaven Peter will be a highly honored man.

I love the words of Dr. William Hendriksen: “Let no one say that Peter was a man completely lacking in courage. On the contrary, a careful examination of the Gospels indicates that among all the disciples he was one of the most daring. Was it not Peter who said, ‘Lord, if it be thou, bid me to come to thee on the water’ (Matt. 14:28)? Was it not he also who boldly declared ‘Thou art the Christ’ (Mark 8:29)? Was it not he who, all by himself taking on the entire mob that had come to Gethsemane to capture Jesus, had drawn his sword and had struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear (Mrk. 14:47; cf. Lk. 22:50; Jn. 18:10)? ... Yes Peter was definitely a man of great courage” (*The Gospel of Mark*, p. 616).

But Peter was a human and there is this episode in which we all get to see that. I am thankful for that because this passage is one that you can turn to when it is your turn to blow it. It will give you comfort; it will give you a sense of God’s grace and it will give you the stamina to get back up and get going again. We need this text.

The theme is easy to see:

JUST HOURS BEFORE CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED, PETER DENIED HIM THREE TIMES; BUT HIS FAILURE BROKE HIM AND IN THE END GOD GREATLY USED HIM BECAUSE HE HAD A TRUE SORROW FOR HIS FAILURE TO HONESTLY FACE IT.

What makes this account in Mark even more touching is the fact that Peter is probably the one telling him the story. He is totally and completely honest about the facts and about his own failure.

Now I do not think every time we fail, we need to tell everyone; however, we do need to tell God, which is precisely why this story shows up in His inspired Word. **Peter saw the need to tell Mark this story because it shows that God can restore and use one who deals honestly with his sin.** When you are tested and fail, there is still hope.

Make no mistake about this fact, this is a major failure. To deny Jesus Christ was the greatest sin any disciple could have committed that night. To deny Him three times makes it even worse.

Had Peter gone to a bar and got drunk or had he done something immoral that night does not begin to compare to this. These sins have been around for a long time, but this failure could only be committed at this time on this night.

Jesus Christ was physically here on earth and He was going through horrible things all alone. He could have used someone to be on His side; but there was no one. All of His disciples fled, and Peter not only fled, He denied Christ three times and began to curse and swear. This sin could only be committed the night of Christ's trials.

Now what is amazing about this is that Jesus Christ predicted that Peter would be instrumental in Christ building His church (Matt. 16:18). Peter knew who Christ was and his Christological grasp of this would be critical to the church. But could God still use one who has cracked and failed? Can God use such a flawed human to accomplish His sovereign purposes? Can God use us when we have not hit the mark? This passage answers that question.

There are three episodes that make up this story that Peter told Mark.

EPISODE #1 – The first confrontation with the servant girl. 14:66-68

While Jesus was up in the room of the high priest being spit on and punched, Peter was down below in a courtyard, warming himself by a fire. It must have been a chilly night because two times in this chapter we learn that Peter was by the fire getting warm (14:54, 67).

Since there was a trial taking place late at night, one of the servant girls of the high priest was down by the fire. Perhaps since there was a trial, she was taking a break from her responsibilities or perhaps she was off duty. But this servant girl was obviously out by the fire with the others. The word “servant girl” (paidiskh) indicates that this girl was a young female slave.

Now we know from **verse 54** that there were some officers sitting by this fire. So there are some high-ranking leaders, people of authority sitting by this fire.

According to verse 67, the servant girl saw Peter and she was staring at Peter. She saw him by the fire and she was staring at him. The verb “looked” is in the intensive form in Greek, which would indicate her eyes were intensely fixed on him. The reason she was staring at him is because she recognized him.

We do not know where she had seen him before. Since she was a servant girl to the high priest, it may have been in some of the Temple appearances of Jesus Christ. The text doesn't say.

But in any case, she said to Peter in **verse 67** that he was with Jesus the Nazarene. She said in front of everybody that Peter had been with Jesus the Nazareth Galilean. Now the Jews did not like the Galileans and they actually said can any good thing come out of Nazareth.

So this servant girl is just repeating what she has heard that Jesus is from Nazareth and she is claiming Peter had been with Him. She is saying this around the fire with some officers sitting right there.

Now when Peter heard this, according to **verse 68**, he denied it. **He basically said I have not been with Jesus and I don't even know what you are talking about. In fact, I don't even know or understand what you are saying.** People who get caught in a lie often say that—I haven't done wrong; I don't know what you are talking about. He knew exactly what she was talking about.

So Peter got up and went out onto the porch, which would be closer to some exit if he needed to run. He had been by the fire, but things were getting really hot there and he needed to move away from it.

Now the porch was probably near some entryway just inside the courtyard. He could get away fast from that spot.

EPISODE #2 – The second confrontation with the servant girl. 14:69-70a

Now when Peter moved away from the fire, that would certainly make all those there all the more suspicious. There was another servant girl who was also there and she apparently kept watching Peter (Matt. 26:71). Now this time instead of the servant girl speaking to Peter, she started pointing him out to bystanders.

This was happening late at night, so probably most of the bystanders are guards, soldiers and officers. More than likely some of these guys had probably been involved in arresting Christ and bringing him to the High Priest. They are warming themselves by the fire.

So when this servant girl saw Peter moving toward the gate, she said to these bystanders “this is one of them.”

Once again Peter denied that he knew Christ. It is interesting that in **verse 68**, the verb tense is aorist which refers to one denial, but in **verse 70**, it is imperfect tense which indicates an emphatic repeated denial. So Peter is in a full verbal denial mode.

EPISODE #3 – The third confrontation with the bystanders. 14:70b-71

Now the bystanders had taken a real interest in Peter by this point. According to **verse 70** a little while had passed, but the bystanders were apparently looking at Peter and thinking about this.

Apparently several of them went to Peter and said, “Truthfully or surely” you are one out of them for you are also a Galilean. How in the world did they know he was a Galilean? According to Matthew 26:73, apparently he spoke like a Galilean. Something about the way he talked led them to conclude he was a Galilean. He didn’t speak like they did.

We can tell when people are from the east or the south and they can tell we are from the Midwest. We may all use the same words and speak the English language, but there are speech and inflection differences and that was true in Christ’s day.

Now when they said that to Peter, he began to curse and swear. The verb “curse” means to declare something to be destructive and anathema or to call down a curse on something (*Ibid.*, p. 29). The verb “swear” means to swear some oath (*Ibid.*, p. 316). Peter was cursing and swearing. As Dr. Ironside said, he was reverting “back to the language of his unconverted days” (*Mark*, p. 225). He is swearing that he does not know Jesus Christ and actually making some curse in the process.

One question is who is Peter cursing? There have been three views on this question:

- 1) Is he cursing himself by saying if I am lying, may I be destroyed?
- 2) Is he cursing Jesus, by saying I don’t know Him and He is anathema to me?
Pliny, in a letter to the Emperor Trajan, said that when he questioned Christians he would ask them to prove they weren’t by cursing Jesus Christ. He claimed that those who were Christians could not be made to do it (*Epistles* 10.96.3, 10.96.5) Polycarp was asked to curse Christ and refused to do so.
- 3) Is he cursing those who are alleging that he is with Jesus, by saying I swear I do not know the man and may you be destroyed for saying I do?

Dr. Ironside said, “To what depths may the believer fall if he gets out of fellowship with his Lord!”

Mr. Miles used to teach that any believer who gets out of fellowship with Christ is capable of anything.

If an Apostle like Peter can deny Christ, let’s not kid ourselves, so can we. Pressure from peers and others can cause even the strongest to fail.

Just as Peter was saying he did not know Christ. He was cursing and swearing and saying he did not know what they were talking about; **verse 72** says the rooster crowed for the second time for Peter to hear.

When Peter heard that he remembered what Jesus had said to him, before the rooster crows twice you will deny Me three times.

We may remember that when Jesus and His disciples had been with Him on the Mt. of Olives, Peter had made the claim that he would follow the Lord to the death no matter what the other disciples did and Jesus told him you will deny Me three times before the rooster crows twice (Mark 14:26-31).

Jesus is all knowing. He knows roosters. He knows where roosters will be and when they will crow.

As soon as that rooster crowed, **verse 72** says that Peter began to weep. As Dr. Strauss said, “Peter, the rock, here reaches rock bottom” (*Mark*, p. 666). He just started crying and weeping. Notice what caused this—“he remembered.” He remembered the Word of God and he analyzed himself and his actions in light of Scripture and he wept.

The verb “weep” is imperfect tense which indicates he started weeping and crying and he could not stop. He is weeping with a godly sorrow of true repentance. Spurgeon said this kind of repentance is always a gift of God and work of the Holy Spirit in the soul.

Judas felt remorse for what he had done (Matt. 27:3-5), but Peter wept over his own sin. This is the real issue of true repentance.

We will never be greatly used by God like Peter was until we have these kinds of honest moments with God. Great servants of God have had moments of great failure. There have been private moments when they hit rock bottom.

To love God at the highest level, to be used of God at the highest level you must be honest about your vulnerability and failure.

Peter says to all of us that there can be restoration. If Peter could be restored and greatly used after this lapse, so can the rest of us. Peter’s tears were the beginning of his restoration.

When we fail, we cut ourselves from the well spring of life. We will be dry and thirsty and the Spirit of God will not use us to bear any fruit. Paul said in I Timothy 4:16 that a minister must take heed to himself and his doctrine.

If God would forgive Peter and greatly use Peter, he will forgive you and greatly use you. But here is the key, you must hate your sin, admit your sin and confess your sin. You follow the pattern of Peter and you will experience the full blessings of God.