

Mark 14:27-31

²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: '*I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.*'"²⁸ "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."²⁹

Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I *will not be.*"³⁰ Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, *even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.*"³¹ But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.

Do you remember our sermon from two weeks ago? Peter and the rest of the disciples were all asking the same question. Is it me? Am I the one who will betray you? We may have thought, at this point, that the disciples were finally cured of their trust in themselves, in their own virtues, in their own moral qualities. They were finally doing some soul searching. They finally saw that they were all capable of betraying Christ.

But lest we give them too much credit, we find just a few minutes after their soul searching they revert back to their default position. "We can do this. We can handle this. We are good people. We can trust ourselves."

I hope we aren't at all shocked when we see this. Because when we look into our heart of hearts we find the same disease. We find the crippling flaw of trusting ourselves. We trust our perceptions. We trust our instincts. We trust our strong emotions. We trust all kinds of things. And when those things are counter to God's Word, God's revelation, too often **we too** resort back to our default position. We go with what we feel. We trust ourselves.

Jesus will use Peter to display for all time and eternity **what happens when we trust ourselves**, when we believe in ourselves, when we think we know ourselves better than God knows us. And it is never pretty.

Along with this comes a very important question. How do you want to be loved? How do you want to be loved?

There are two ways of being loved. We can be loved superficially based on the image we present. Or we can be loved deeply based on who we really are.

I ask this question because most of us instantly and intuitively know that what we really want is to be loved for who we really are. We want someone to love us in all our weakness. We want someone to know our flaws that plague us, and still love us. We want someone who can see what we are, even when we cannot see ourselves clearly, and still love us. We want to be loved when our motives are not pure. We want to be loved when our actions are not right. Because we know—that is what we are. And if someone cannot love us in our flaws, they really can't love us at all. Every person wants this kind of love.

But the answer to the question isn't that simple. We have very **odd ways of displaying** that we want to be loved for who we really are. We all have ugly pride. We all have fears that if someone really knows us they can't possibly love us. So all of us know how to be as fake as \$3 bills. We minimize our flaws. We act like they either don't exist or they really aren't that bad. We act like our sins are not really the kind a person should be damned for. Sometimes we refuse to admit our faults to ourselves. Sometimes we know they are bad but refuse to admit them to others. Both have the same effect. They minimize the love we will experience from others.

Have you ever tried to love someone when they are being fake? No matter how much you want to **offer** comfort or forgiveness or even correction, you can't. Your hands are tied. You are limited to the superficial. Your ministry can't get through. When you tell the disagreeable truth to that person **about themselves** all you get is a firestorm of emotion, or an ignorant denial. There is no truth. We all do this. We all cut off other's ministry to us by the defenses we have carefully arranged due to our pride or our fears. In fact, the irony is that those who most long to be truly loved are often those who do the most things to assure that they will not be loved. If it bothers us that people distance themselves from us, we would do well to ask, what am I doing that is causing this? What image of myself am I presenting that isn't real? What am I doing that keeps people from seeing what I really am?

For sure, not every believer is going to love us. But surely there are some in our lives who are there for that purpose. What are we doing to cut that off? We need to watch Peter this morning to see ourselves. Watch the interaction between Peter and Christ and you will see what you do to impede true love. And without a doubt. God loves you for who you really are. No other human can do that perfectly. But God does.

OK, to our text.

²⁷ **Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.'**

The word for Made to stumble in the greek is skan-dal-id'-zo, which is where we get the word for scandalous. It means **to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey; to cause to fall away** Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.

King James Version says all "shall be offended". Essentially it looks like all the disciples hopes and dreams will suddenly be dashed. They will not have time to process it while it is happening. They will be in a reaction mode. And the real "them" will come out for all to see.

Isn't that what always happens when undesirable things happen to us? The real, often unpleasant, "us" comes out.

I have encountered a lot of problems in the Windows 10 conversions I have been doing. I have hated Microsoft and the makers of our agency software system often. And the later this process went into the night the more ugly I got. This situation did not put that into me. The situation simply brought it out. I didn't know that situation would arise. But when it did it displayed my human flaws in all their ugliness. That is what our lives are like. That is what hard times are for. They show us and others what we really are. Sometimes it displays amazing things that God has done. Sometimes it is a glaring example of the work God intends to do in us.

Now Jesus is telling the 11 that every one of them is going to fail the test this evening. Every single one of them. And Jesus, looking at the greatest trial of His life, knows it. How easy it would have been for Christ to give up on them, and ultimately on us. But He doesn't. It is interesting that in Jesus's prayer for the disciples, that will come shortly after this interaction, Jesus says with certainty that the disciples "were yours".

John 17:6-7

⁶ "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷

Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.

Look at what Jesus is saying. My first response is, was he saying that about the disciples? That ragtag bunch of on again off again followers? But yes, with certainty that is who He was talking about. He was saying these statements about the guys who at least **appeared** to be loyal to Christ. That seemed like the one virtue they might really possess. But this night would test that virtue and even **it** would fail. And Christ says "**they have kept your word**". Christ is not referring to post-pentecost disciples. He is talking about them in their present state. Oh what encouragement we can find this morning. It is clear that a person can be identified as **a person who keeps God's Word** without being a person who has a **perfect record** of always obeying it. It is obviously a state of heart that Christ is referring to. It is a state of heart that keeps one coming back to God's word and keeps one living each new day faithfully attempting to do what pleases God. If you are anything like me, that is a huge encouragement.

So Jesus didn't give up on the disciples, even though they would fail Him.

Our text quotes a prophesy from Zechariah 13:7

'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.'

This foretold what the disciples would do. God always knows us better than we know ourselves. And He always loves us according to **who we are**, not according

to **who we think we are**. The sheep were going to scatter. It didn't matter how much they thought their virtues would never allow such a thing. It was going to happen.

We do well never to think there is a sin we could be tempted to do that we would not do. Because usually, when we think we would not do that sin, we think we would not do it because we are **too moral** to do such a thing. We would all be shocked to find just how wicked we could act if God removed His protection and allowed us to be tempted without it. And his protection is often provided to us in the leadership he has provided to us, those pesky people who tell us what to do. Shepherds are for our good and often keep us from dangers we aren't even aware of.

Then Jesus said this:

²⁸ **"But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."**

This statement probably received very little consideration when it was given. First, based on how they responded to Christ's death, they really didn't expect that He would die. Then based on how they responded to His resurrection they did not expect Him to rise. The fact they remembered He said this **at all** was probably a miracle caused by the Holy Spirit bringing to remembrance what Christ said.

This statement, like many truths in scripture, should have been a great encouragement to the disciples. But scriptures only encourage us when we believe them.

We move on in our text.

²⁹ **Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."**

Now, when Jesus talked about something these disciples were not going to fail in, the failure Judas would display, they all asked- is it me? Now he tells them what they will **surely fail at**. And how do they respond? **It couldn't be me Lord**. No. I would never do such a thing.

We would hope for better in these guys. But they are way too much like us. They had not yet been cured from self trust. But they will be.

Now, look at what Peter says. **"Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."**

How do you think the other 10 disciples felt about this? What would possess Peter to say such a thing? One thing is for certain. Peter thought His loyalty to Christ was superior to everyone else's. Peter saw himself as the **"loyalty" champion**. He compared himself to the others and he saw himself as better than they were. And of course that comes out when he speaks. Things like that always do sooner or later. Peter did not see how weak and frail he was. He saw everyone else's moral flaws, but he could not see his own. He was blind to his true self. It had to be proven to him.

What a lesson we have to learn here. How much better it is that we believe what the bible says about us because the bible says it. That is so much better than making God prove it to us. We see from Peter's example, **proving our flaws is so terribly easy**. All Christ needs to do is let us go.

So what does Christ say to Peter's pledge of loyalty? The same thing that God often would say to us when we pledge all our goodness to His service.

³⁰ **Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."**

Brothers and sisters- **Our God knows what our pledges of flesh are worth.**

Nothing. Because they are based on nothing. We do not possess spiritual virtues naturally. They don't spring from our genetics or our training. Spiritual virtues are miracles that are granted to us by God. And as such, they display themselves as we walk by faith in God. When we depart from faith, they are not available to us. So for us to exhibit any kind of faith in our own virtues is utter foolishness.

We are not good by birth. And flesh will never produce anything of lasting value. We are wise to never depend upon it.

Christ told Peter something about Peter that Peter did not know, but Christ did. Peter's flesh would never aid Peter's service to Christ. Peter could not serve Christ while Peter depended upon himself. He had to be weaned of that. But first he had to be **convinced** that it was worthless. Peter had to learn that he could no longer live by the **school of Peter**. He had to live by the **school of Christ**.

It is interesting that the circumstances Peter was about to face would be perfect to show Peter himself. We can confidently assume that God arranged these human encounters in such a way to portray Peter to himself in such a way that he could never again deny it or forget it. These life situations would be used to pierce Peter's heart forever.

Have you ever considered what a blessing your terrible failures have been? Odds are that you could not have served Christ without them. You had to see yourself. You had to be convinced that you had no good in you. You had to be convinced that you were no moral champion in any area of your life. And if you find the same failures keep happening over and over again, it may be because you refuse to learn the lesson. You cannot trust your flesh. You must surrender to the will of God and the word of God. Your flesh and your heart will fail. But God will never fail.

Peter was going to fail three times. The thing he swears by his flesh that he will never do, he will do three times before he realizes that he has done it once. This is the ultimate shrine to human achievement. This is the alter that the world worships at. Human potential, human achievement, human virtue. And what is it worth to God? What will it accomplish for eternity? Nothing. Not one thing. This is what God has to say about our world's humanistic worship.

Romans 1:18-23

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰

For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Romans 1:28-32

²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, ³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Our world is experiencing the natural unavoidable consequences of the worship of flesh. We know that the problem is not laws or guns or politicians or poverty or injustice. Those are the symptoms. The problem is worship. Our world is addicted to the worship of flesh. So the results of that worship are what they are stuck with. And they still have the gall to ask, if God is good, why is there so much suffering?

Let's take a look at a few other parallel passages on Christ's prediction of Peter's denial.

Luke 22:31-34

³¹ And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." ³⁴

Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Remember our friend Job. He was simply living his life oblivious to what was going on in the spiritual realms. He had no way of knowing the conversations satan and God were having. But suddenly he experienced the natural

manifestations of those spiritual discussions. And he had to face the hardships without knowing why.

Here Peter is told what Job was not. Jesus calls Peter by his original fleshly name. Simon the man, Satan wants to sift you. He wants to sift and shake you in a sieve. He wants to agitate you inwardly to try your faith to the point of its overthrow. Christ lets Peter know that what is about to happen to him is very spiritual in nature. It has a spiritual source and a spiritual purpose. Satan intends to use it for Peter's undoing. And God gave permission for Satan to do so. Why? Because God had work for the devil to do. God's kingdom had work for God's servant to do. That is how to best understand the relationship of the Devil to God. Even the Devil serves God's purposes, even though he desires to do nothing of the kind. We should keep this in mind in our own lives. We do not always know why things happen the way they do. If Satan had a hand in them, he intends it for our undoing. But if we are a believer, God will use it for our building up. Look what Christ said about what part Christ will play in this endeavor.

³² **But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."**

Christ prayed for Peter. Christ already prayed for what Peter had not yet encountered. Isn't that wonderful? God never reacts. He always acts. Christ had already done the spiritual preparations for Peter's ultimate victory. Even before the **storm**, Christ had arranged the **sunshine**. That is the kind of God we serve. Even when we feel that we are being shaken to pieces, God has made the preparations for us to be victorious, for us to be of greater service, for us to be qualified to minister in ways we may have never dreamed. The **worst things** in our lives are often the preparations for the **best things** in our lives. Oh the amazing goodness and wisdom of the plans of God. Oh that we would trust Him when it is darkest. That we would claim by faith His goodness in every trial we face. That we would give Him glory even before He comes through with His rescue.

It might be good for us to think about Peter's trial a little here. Peter's sifting did not happen when he denied Christ. Peter was not even aware of his sin when he committed it. He is so much like us. He is just living life, doing what he feels he needs to do to survive. He is simply trying to meet his emotional and physical needs. He is making whatever fleshly decisions he feels need made at the time. No, the gut wrenching pain did not happen when he committed the sin. It happened when that rooster crowed and the Holy Spirit brought into Peter's awareness what he had done.

Sometimes when we face a terrible loss, our trial comes **in the response** to that great pain. Sometimes that happens. But often we face trials upon seeing ourselves as we truly are. The trial is **the insight**. It can be hours, days or even

years after we actually committed the sins. We suddenly realize that our failure is far more serious, has far reaching consequences, and shows us something about ourselves that we would prefer to never see. These things can shake us to the core. We think, how can I claim to be a Christian? Look what I did. Surely no Christian would do such a thing. I am such an awful person. How can I even go to God to ask forgiveness? How could God ever love me after such a thing?

These trials threaten **to make us or break us**. It is at this point we begin to really understand the terms of salvation. We are forced to admit and understand that this salvation offered by Christ really is nothing of me, nothing I can earn or deserve. It truly is me in need of a savior. I truly do not have a single thing to offer Christ on my behalf. Our pride is stabbed in the heart by the decisions we have made. And now we either humbly accept the terms and accept Christ's salvation by grace alone by faith alone, or we choose another path.

Peter's monument to Peter was torn down this day. It had to happen, just like it has to happen to us. There are none of us worth saving. None. But it is just like God to save us anyway.

And all of our lives are just like Peter's. We have all done those things that shocked ourselves with our own evil. And God used those things to showcase His grace to a needy savior. And after doing so, **after** God impressed us with just how much grace it took to save a sinner like us, **we began to understand** the ministry that **everyone** else needs. We begin to be ready to feed the sheep with the food they so desperately need. The food of grace.

Now, let's go back to how Peter responded to what Christ said. Christ just told Peter that Peter would deny Christ 3 times and that Christ had already made arrangements.

³¹ **But Peter spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.**

Now, when Peter said this, who of us thinks he was lying? I don't. I think he was as sincere as the driven snow. He simply believed things about himself that weren't true.

Here is what happens when real love encounters unreal people. Fireworks. We can almost imagine Peter here saying, Christ, how dare you insult me by saying that I will fail you. I am better than that. I cannot imagine how you could think so little of me. You should know me better than that. You are insulting me by believing I have this moral flaw. You insult me by not **believing about me** what I **believe about myself**. Which would be the same as saying that you insult me by not believing the lies that I believe about myself.

Peter was sincere. But he didn't have a true estimation of himself. He thought committing a sin that he knew to be a sin was beneath him. Especially when it

involved a quality he valued so highly. He thought he would never knowingly do such a thing. But he did.

What we have is Christ making a true statement. Peter counters. Christ enforces his statement with facts. Peter's argument becomes more heated, more combative, more resistant to reason. Argument over. Ministry not accomplished. Who here has never **encountered** this kind of response? Who here has never **given** it?

We could call this passage Peter's school on how to reject real love. Remember we began this morning with the question of how you would like to be loved. Well we will close with that same topic. Jesus loved Peter as Peter really was. But there was a problem. Peter was not yet humble enough to be truly loved. Peter felt that he had to bring something to the picnic. He had to have some virtues that were lovable. He was not willing to be loved on Christ's terms. So when Christ offered **real love** at the **deepest level**, Peter's pride would not allow him to receive it. The truth is, Peter had not yet sinned enough to receive real love. Or at least he didn't **recognize his sin** enough to receive real love.

How did Peter display this? He was defensive. He was offended and hurt. He was displaying all the things that break our hearts when we are trying to love someone and we know that we cannot get through. About the best I can think of here is that at least Peter didn't use the typical red herrings. He didn't try to divert the conversation by bringing in items that have nothing to do with the conversation but are sure to divert the topic.

Do you really **want to be loved** for who **you really are**? Are you sure? Because being loved for who you really are means that **who you really are** comes out on the table. And that requires a vast amount of humility. You have got to love truth like crazy for you to still love it when it stabs you in the heart like it did Peter. Sinners loving each other is sometimes **as brutal** as it is **life giving**. If what two people want more than anything else is to please Christ, there is no reason for those two people not to have a deep lasting loving friendship. It will be hard. It will hurt. It will at times leave you wanting to run for cover. But it will result in a taste of heaven on earth.

Do you want to **maximize** the benefits of the love of God and **His love extended through others**? Extreme humility will be required. Humility is the quality of seeing one's self as one truly is. **Humility is the truth. Pride is a distortion** of the truth. Pride exaggerates the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses.

There is a lot of truth that you can dodge in your relationship with God and others. We have all seen it in ourselves and in others. How sad it is when we know we are barking up the right tree in our ministry to another person but the person we are trying to love refuses to admit the truth. And when the shoe is on the other foot, we might feel we must evade the truth because the truth is too

hard to bear, or we will lose too much if the truth comes out. But we hurt ourselves and we hurt our fellowship when we successfully get the posse off our trail.

Let me ask you, what topic about your life instantly hits the fight or flight button? What is undiscussable? Ask those around you. They are likely to know if they think about it a little. What topics have we trained those around us to avoid at any cost if they hope to have a civil environment? Odds are there is truth that we don't want to deal with at those spots. And the better we get at keeping people away from those spots, the greater hold the lies get in our lives. When you win the battle at keeping people off that topic, you really lose. And the body of Christ suffers. It can't be helped because we are all in this together.

I want to make a caveat here. There are some topics that are not worth talking about. There are some things we need to approach by forgetting what is behind and pressing on toward that which is ahead, like Paul. But those are only things that are not currently affecting your life in a negative way. On the other hand, if something about us, even our pasts, is causing us to live unfaithfully, we have got to be careful not to protect those things from those who God has sent to help us. Look at what happened to Peter. He got Christ off his tail by his vehement denials of his weakness. He served notice to Christ that he was not who Christ said he was. But to what effect? Utter failure. He let Christ down. He let himself down. And he let down all of those who looked to him for leadership.

If you want to please Christ **and** you want to keep yourself hidden, the depth of relationship you desire will never happen in this life. It can't. We all know when we are encountering fake. We sense relationally when we are being lied to. We know when people are trying to keep us away from the spots that most need dealt with. And finding that out is always a source of profound sadness. Even Christ did not get through that boundary until Peter's heart was crushed and He was willing to admit to Himself what Christ already knew about him. Christ Himself could not finish the conversation until Peter was ready for it. But to be loved for who you really are is still the best thing this life has to offer. It is as close to heaven as we will get in this life. It is worth the risk. It is worth the pain of self-realization. We would do well to look hard and long at the pride and the fears that hold us back from really loving and being loved by those we have learned to trust. Giving and receiving real Christian love here is the best preparation that can be had for the eternity Christ has prepared for us. Peter at first said in his pride, I would never be such a jerk. But when he finally realized and admitted that he was that jerk, the world of love opened up to him. And the first thing that Christ did when He saw Peter again was to administer true love to a true Simon Peter.