

The Memoirs of Peter
When a Disciple Denies His Lord
Mark 14:66-72
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Well, tonight I want us to return to Mark's Gospel and continue our journey through our Lord's last week, really through His last few hours before the crucifixion. It's really appropriate that we would do that just before Christmas because, as we've been reminded several times, that is really what we celebrate at Christmas. If we stop with the reality that Jesus was born, we've stopped too soon. If we stop at the reality how He was born – to a virgin and in a manger – then we've stopped too soon as well. Christmas is really about why He came. As we were reminded this morning: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law (why?), to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might enjoy the adoption of sons and daughters." And so this is what we celebrate is our Lord's coming to redeem.

Tonight, we come to the denial of the apostle Peter. History is filled with examples of those who profess faith in Christ and yet, when they are faced with the risk of personal danger, they deny Him. They deny that they know Him. They deny that they follow Him. There are a number of examples. One that came to my mind this week is one I read recently in Bob Benson's book *Wide as the Waters* about the history of the English Bible. He writes about Thomas Cranmer, the English Reformer. Listen to his words: "Cranmer was tried in September of 1555. And on February 14th, 1556, in a ceremony full of carefully designed humiliation, he was degraded from his office (as Archbishop of Canterbury) and handed over to the state. The previous October he had witnessed the martyrdom of Latimer and Ridley, and he was now repeatedly pressed by his captors to renounce his faith. Eventually, he wrote several humble recantations in which he repudiated almost the whole of his life's work and, in a desperate appeal to the Queen's mercy, ascribed most of the damage done to the Catholic faith in England to his own heretical pronouncements and acts (trying to save his life at the expense of everything he had lived for). This did not save him however, and on March 21st, 1556 he was led forth to be burned at the stake. The Queen (Bloody Mary) had expected him to make his abjuration public, but with great dignity and self-possession he shocked them by disavowing his recantation completely before a

large crowd. And when the fires were lit, he thrust his right hand (with which he had signed those documents recanting his faith, he thrust his right hand) into the heart of the flames. And there he held it, crying, ‘This hath offended! Oh this unworthy hand!’ until it shriveled up like dried grass.”

Of course, the most famous example of denial and ultimately restoration is one of the Twelve, the chief spokesman for the other Apostles – the Apostle Peter. It’s interesting that all four Gospels record the account of Peter’s denial. But Mark’s account is by far the most vivid, the most heart-wrenching because, remember, Mark wrote his Gospel under the direction and witness of the Apostle Peter. So as we read this paragraph together, I want you to remember that it comes from the eyewitness recollections of a man into whose heart these scenes are forever etched.

Let’s read it together. Mark 14, beginning in 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 (and a rooster crowed). 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.”

Just to remind you of the context, immediately after Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane, the Roman cohort and the temple police had led Him immediately to the home of Annas, the father-in-law of the current high priest Caiaphas. While the members of the Sanhedrin were being hastily assembled at Caiaphas’ home there in the middle of the night, Annas held a brief preliminary hearing. It was supposed to have been Jesus’ arraignment where He was formally accused and indicted on a specific charge. It was instead an illegal fishing expedition looking for something, anything, which Jesus could be accused of. Once at least a quorum of the Sanhedrin had

assembled at the home of Caiaphas, the temple police escorted Jesus across what was probably a shared courtyard between the home of Caiaphas and Annas.

And at this point in the story, Mark steps away from what's happening to Jesus to describe what was happening with Peter. Look back in Verse 54: "Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire." Now at that point, Mark turns his attention after that one verse from Peter back to our Lord. And beginning in Verse 55 and running down through Verse 65, Mark describes the second phase of the Jewish trial. There, Jesus is ultimately convicted of one crime and that is the crime of blasphemy because when He was asked by Caiaphas face to face, "Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am." The high priest tears his robe. He says, "You've heard enough. Do we have any need of further witnesses? What do you say? What's the vote?" He calls for a vote and all of those who are present unanimously say He's worthy of death.

Now in Verse 66, Mark picks up the story of Peter where he left off back in Verse 54. And it's important because earlier that night, Jesus had predicted on two separate occasions that Peter would deny Him. Let me remind you of these two predictions. Go back to John 13. John 13:36. This is the first one. It happens while they're in the upper room, while they're at the scene of the Last Supper. Verse 36 of John 13: "Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow Me later' (in other words, this isn't the time but someday you will die, you will give your life for Me). Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.' Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.'" That's the first one in the upper room.

The second prediction of the denial comes back in Mark 14. Go back there now – Mark 14, Verse 29. At this point, you'll notice back up in Verse 26 they have sung a hymn and left for the Mount of Olives. So either on the way to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane or once they arrived more likely at the Garden of Gethsemane, this exchange happens. "Jesus says (Verse 27), 'You will all fall away (and He quotes from the Old Testament as an example of that reality). But after I've been raised (Verse 28), I will go ahead of you to Galilee.' But Peter said

to Him, 'Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.' Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times.' But Peter kept saying insistently, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And they all (all the disciples) were saying the same thing also."

So twice Jesus had said it's going to happen. In both cases, Jesus underscored three basic points: Peter would deny Him, Peter would deny Him three separate times, and this would happen before the rooster crowed twice. Now what's the significance of the rooster crowing twice? Just to remind you, we've looked at this before, but in Roman thinking and in the thinking of the first century, the night was divided into four watches - from dark till 9, from 9 to midnight, from midnight to 3 and from 3 to 6 a.m. The third of those four watches, the period of time from 12 a.m. to 3 a.m., was actually called in the first century cock crowing because typically the cock would crow, the rooster would crow toward the beginning of that window of time and again at the end of that window of time. So by referring to the second cock crowing, Jesus was being very specific. He was saying before about 3 a.m. this morning, you will deny Me three separate times.

Now before we look at the text itself, I need to tell you that there is considerable disagreement among conservative scholars about exactly how many times Peter denied Jesus. They all agree at least three, but one view says that since Jesus predicted Peter would deny Him three times and since each gospel records three denials, there must have been only three and they try to reconcile the evidence to make it only three. Another view argues that the fact that Jesus predicted three denials in no way means that there couldn't have been more. His point was there would be at least three. They would argue that when you combine the narratives of the four gospels and weave the accounts together, it seems that there were four separate denials. Now we're not gonna settle this issue here tonight once and for all, but I will say to you that I lean toward the second and that's the one that I will take with you tonight.

So with that in mind, let's look briefly at these four separate denials that Peter made. The first denial doesn't come here in Mark. It's not presented in Mark's gospel; instead, it's in John 18. Turn over there with me – John 18. And I'll show you why I think this one is a separate one from the others. John 18:13. And again, I wouldn't die on this hill, but I think this is the best approach and again, I'll show you why as we work through this. John 18:12, "So the Roman cohort and

the commander and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus, bound Him (in the Garden), and led Him to Annas first; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple (that's John - so Peter and John rally once everybody scatters, they rally and they begin to follow). "Now that disciple (that is, John, Verse 15) was known to the high priest, and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' And he said, 'I am not.'"

Now John places this denial in the courtyard of Annas before the convening of the Sanhedrin when it's just Annas, right after they arrive at the home of Annas. Matthew, Mark and Luke and John all place the time of the other denials either while the Sanhedrin is meeting or shortly thereafter. So this denial then appears to be the first and it appears to be separate from the other three. As Peter with John having obtained permission for him to come in, as Peter was entering the gate of the private residence of both Annas and Caiaphas, a young slave-girl whose responsibility it was to keep the door thought she recognized Peter. Perhaps she had seen him with Jesus in the temple over the last week. Remember, Jesus had been there teaching publicly in the temple all week. In the Greek text, the way this slave-girl here in John 18 presents her question assumes Peter's answer will be no. We could translate it like this: "I don't think you're one of His followers, are you?" To that, Peter can easily reply, "No, I'm not."

Now as we go along, you're gonna see the progression in Peter's denials. In this first denial, it is a simple lie, a denial about being Jesus' disciple. But as time goes on, it gets worse - lie leads to greater lies and to greater sin. So that's the first denial. It apparently happens as soon as they arrive at the home of Annas before that brief hearing or arraignment as it was supposed to have been as John makes it possible for Peter to come in. The young slave-girl keeping the door confronts Peter, not sure that he's one of Jesus' followers but considering that it's possible.

Now that brings us back to Mark's Gospel and the second denial. Go back to Mark Verse 66. Mark 14:66, "As Peter was below in the courtyard..." Stop there for a moment. Now just to

remind you, in the typical upper class first century Jerusalem home, it would have been essentially this structure. Typically, a wealthy home in the first century – either a Roman villa or an upper class home in Jerusalem – was designed in the same way. The entire home was built around a central open courtyard or atrium. There would have been a single gate off of the main street through which you would have entered the home. The courtyard would have been surrounded by a series of first and second floor rooms. On that Passover night, the members of the Sanhedrin apparently gathered in a large room on the second story because it says Peter is below in the courtyard. This all-purpose room is typically referred to as the upper room. Jesus and His disciples met in the upper room of a wealthy home in that same area of the city earlier that night. It was a room that could be a guest quarters or it was a place where you could hold large dinners or meetings. John may have been in that upper room actually in the proceedings, watching the proceedings against Jesus; we don't know, we're not told. But we do know that Peter was below in the open courtyard. John, in his gospel, describes it this way: "Now the slaves and the officers were standing there (in that open courtyard), having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold (April nights in, in Jerusalem at twenty-five hundred feet above sea level can be quite cold) and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself." So he comes in. At the, at the gate, he's confronted. He denies it. And then he gathers around this charcoal fire, first standing but, but then they all sit down. Luke tells us after they had kindled the fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together. Peter was sitting among them. So that's the context.

Now go back to Verse 66: "As Peter was below in the courtyard (around the fire sitting there warming himself), 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.'" Now a large and important home like that of the high priest would have had a number of servants. Peter has already been confronted by one servant-girl at the gate and now he's accosted by another. Luke tells us that she caught glimpses of Peter, she caught a glimpse of Peter in the light cast by the firelight. Mark tells us that she first glanced at Peter (that's the idea of that first word) and thought she recognized them. And then she looked at him and the Greek word there has the idea of gazing intently. You get the picture. She's walking through the courtyard. There are men gathered there sitting by the fire. She glances over and sees someone she thinks she recognizes and then she turns and looks intently.

Apparently, her comments were primarily directed to Peter himself and maybe even privately. Notice what she says to him: “You too were with Jesus the Nazarene.” Now this slave-girl is confident that Peter is one of Jesus’ followers. She doesn’t ask a question. She makes a statement. It’s interesting because the English text here doesn’t exactly pick up the sort of dripping sarcasm in her comment. You see, to be from Galilee was to be looked down upon; to be from Nazareth was worse. But at this point, to be connected to Jesus was the worst of all. No doubt, this slave-girl was reflecting the attitude that she had overheard from her master and his guests for the last three years as they’ve considered what to do about Jesus. To catch her attitude, let me translate it for you pretty much as it appears in the Greek text: “You too were with this Nazarene, this Jesus.”

Verse 68: “But he denied it, saying, ‘I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.’” Again Peter lies. He denies her accusation. He has not been with this Nazarene, this Jesus. But this time, Peter goes even farther. Literally he says: “Nothing I know, nothing I understand about what you are talking about.” If it weren’t so tragic, it would almost be funny. The Apostle Peter here sounds like Sergeant Schultz on Hogan’s Heroes: “I know nothing. I see nothing.” In this second denial, Peter not only denies being a follower of Jesus; he even denies having any knowledge of who He is.

And then he changes venue. Notice Verse 68 goes on to say: “And he went out onto the porch.” Peter, remember, had been first standing and then sitting around this fire in the open courtyard with some of the men even who arrested Jesus in the Garden. Now he’s been identified as being one of Jesus’ disciples. There’s quite a bit of humor here actually. A moment ago, Peter was too cold, but now things have gotten too hot. So he gets up from the fire and he heads back to that arched smaller area by the gate. It’s a kind of open foyer in a first century upper class home - the locked gate to the street on one side and the courtyard on the other, and in between this sort of open foyer but a little quieter, a little more secluded and away from the open fire.

Now that brings us to the third denial. Luke tells us that this third denial happened, in his words, “a little later.” We don’t know exactly how long it was, but it wasn’t immediate. Verse 69: “The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, ‘This is one of them!’” Now you’ll notice the wording here in Verse 69 implies that this girl was one of the girls in the first

two denials. The use of the definite article ‘the slave-girl’ and the expression ‘began once more to say’ lead us to conclude that this is one of the first two. So either the girl who had been the gatekeeper when Peter first entered the courtyard or the girl who had come up to him at the fire now singles him out yet again. But this time, it’s not privately. Notice Verse 69 says: “she began once more to say (but this time) to the bystanders... (It’s getting worse. Now she has pointed Peter out to the others and said), ‘This is one of them.’”

Verse 70: “But again he denied it.” Now the tense of the Greek verb there has the idea that Peter didn’t just say once that’s not true, but he denied it again and again and again. Matthew tells us in Matthew 26:72, “And again he denied it with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’” You see the progression? Peter began with a simple lie, denying that he was a follower of Jesus. Then he denied that he even knew anything about Jesus. And now he adds an oath to his denial.

There’s one final denial, the fourth denial in Verse 70: “And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too.’” Now Luke tells us that about an hour had passed at this point, an hour between the third denial and this fourth denial. As the men who are gathered around the fire have heard Peter respond to the accusations against him, it has become obvious to them that Peter’s not from around there. He’s a Galilean. Now what gave Peter away? Well, Matthew tells us. Matthew writes: “Surely you too are one of them; for the way you talk gives you away.” Historians tell us that the people in Galilee had trouble with some of the guttural sounds in Aramaic. We understand this, don’t we? I mean, we all speak English in the U.S., but it doesn’t take long to distinguish by the accent of a person where they’re from. I mean, it doesn’t take you long to distinguish someone who’s from Mississippi from someone who’s from New Jersey or someone who’s from New Hampshire. The same was true in the first century. Peter’s accent gave him away.

But the situation gets even worse for Peter because John adds this in John 18:26 in this denial: “One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off (in the Garden just a short time before), said, ‘Did I not see you in the garden with Him?’” Uh oh. This isn’t good. Notice Peter’s response, Verse 71: “But he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know this man you are talking about!’” Now in this final denial, Peter lies about Jesus with cursing and swearing. Notice how Peter refuses even to pronounce Jesus’s name. Instead, he refers to Him as

‘this man you are talking about.’ Remember folks, this is the same disciple who a few months earlier said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And now he says, “I don’t even know who this guy is you’re talking about.”

The Greek word translated ‘curse’ here in Verse 71 means to pronounce a curse. It’s not profanity. It means to pronounce a curse. It’s not exactly clear on whom Peter is pronouncing a curse. He may have been pronouncing a curse on himself: “May God curse me if I’m not telling you the truth.” That’s possible. He may have been pronouncing a curse on those who were accusing him of being connected with Jesus. He may have said something like: “God curse you for making such a false accusation against me.” But there’s another possibility that’s even hard to contemplate. He may have been pronouncing a curse on Jesus: “I do not know this cursed man, this man who deserves God’s damnation.” We don’t know, but he lied with a curse.

Mark also tells us that in addition to cursing, he swore. This word ‘to swear’ means that Peter took an oath to confirm his word in a way that’s typically done in court. He would have said perhaps something like this: “I swear to you by everything that’s holy that I’m telling you the truth.” Peter is doing everything he can to distance himself entirely from the One he has called his Lord.

Verse 72: “Immediately a rooster crowed a second time.” The second crowing of the rooster – this would have marked the end of the third watch of the night so this would probably have been somewhere around 2:30 or 3 a.m. And the rooster typically doesn’t crow once at that time of morning; instead, there’s a prolonged period of time lasting anywhere from three to five minutes. That meant Peter heard this rooster crow again and again and again. Verse 72 goes on to say,

“And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, ‘Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.’” Just a few hours before, both at the Last Supper and then in Gethsemane, our Lord had warned Peter of his coming denial. And now as he hears the rooster crow, he’s reminded of his Lord’s words over and over and over again as the rooster crows.

But Luke tells us there was something else that happened at that exact moment that also brought the weight of Peter's sin to bear on his soul. I want you to turn there – look at Luke 22. Luke 22:60. Here's the denial. "But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about (and he did so with cursing and swearing).' Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed (Verse 61). The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.'"

Either Jesus could see the courtyard from the upper room where His trial was being heard and at that moment as the rooster crowed He looks down and catches the eye of Peter, or possibly at that moment Jesus was being transported from the upper room where that second Jewish trial had occurred to a holding cell where He'd be held until daylight there in Caiaphas' home. But either way, at the moment of Peter's final denial and at the moment the rooster crowed, Peter's eyes met the eyes of Jesus. By this time based on what we've already studied, Jesus had already endured significant suffering. His face would have been already black and blue from the beating that He has endured at the hands of the servants of the Sanhedrin and possibly the Sanhedrin members themselves. His face and His hair would have been covered with human spit. He had already begun to suffer in the place of sinners.

Now what does this look from Jesus mean? We're not told exactly. I think two points are obvious. One is that it was a gentle rebuke and a confrontation coming exactly at the moment of the rooster's crowing. It was a reminder of everything He had told Peter and of Peter's boasts of his loyalty to Jesus in spite of the possibility of death. But I think there's more than that. I think it was also a look that communicated His eternal love and care for one of His own. Because remember, He'd told Peter, "Peter, I've prayed for you, that your faith fail not; when you turn (when you return), strengthen your brothers." It was a look I think at the same time of both pain and pardon because Jesus was about to lay down His life to pay the penalty for Peter's denials. Peter had heard Jesus say many times that He came to give His life as a ransom in the place of many, and that included Peter.

It's not surprising that Mark writes, notice Verse 72: "And he began to weep." The phrase that Mark uses in the Greek text is somewhat difficult to translate and there's a lot of debate in the commentaries about it, but probably the best way to understand it is this: he broke down and began to weep. He broke down and began to weep. Both Matthew and Luke tell us that Peter

went out; that is, he left the courtyard and home of Caiaphas and Annas, and he wept bitterly. He sobbed his heart out.

That's the story of Peter's denials. But the question is, what are the lessons in this for us? Why do all four Gospels include the story of Peter's denials? As I've thought about it and meditated on it this week, there are several I think profound lessons for us that grow out of this record of Peter's denials. First of all, it reminds us of the seriousness of denying our Lord. Why is it that people end up denying their Lord, whether it's in a monumental way like Peter or in an everyday way like we'll talk about in a moment? Why do we do that? It really comes down to only two reasons. There are only two. One of them is pride. We want to be thought well of by others who are not followers of Jesus Christ. The other reason is fear. We are afraid of the consequences of owning Jesus as Lord. That was the case in Peter's circumstance.

But how exactly do we as Christians deny our Lord? It doesn't have to be as, as far-reaching as Peter's. It doesn't have to be the way his circumstances unfolded. The truth is there are many ways I think Biblically we deny our Lord. I think we deny Him by remaining silent when God or His truth is being attacked. You see this in Galatians 2, right, even with Peter again. The gospel is on the line and Peter, because he wants to be thought well of in this case, won't speak up, won't confront the false gospel of the Judaizers. I think another way – and, and by the way I should say that that includes us. We do the same thing. When we remain silent when God or His truth is being attacked, we for all intents and purposes are denying our Lord.

A second way I think that we deny Him is by living in a way that denies our profession. In Titus 1, it speaks of those who profess to know God but by their works, by their deeds, they deny Him. When you and I say, "I'm a Christian, I'm a follower of Jesus" and then we engage in a life of unrepentant sin, we deny our Lord.

I think there's a third way that we deny Him and that's by hiding the fact that we're Christians from the people around us, by simply not being willing to name Him as Lord. We deny Him by our silence. James Edwards writes: "Peter's example is a warning to disciples then and now that faithful witness to Jesus is most important and most easily betrayed in simple and ordinary actions and words. It is in everyday matters that disciples are true martyrs or witnesses" (and it is in everyday matters I could add that disciples deny Him).

I think there's one other way that we tend to deny our Lord and that's by being unwilling to speak for Christ and the gospel out of fear for what others will think of us. We're all tempted to do that, aren't we? We're all tempted to keep our mouth shut when Christ needs to be heard of and the gospel needs to be championed.

So I think this reminds us of the seriousness of denying our Lord. I think there's a second lesson though and that is this is to encourage those who would deny their Lord in the future. You see, many who lived in the Roman Empire in the first century and who read the four Gospels were facing (what?) extreme persecution. And in the face of that persecution, there were professing Christians, genuine Christians, who, under the duress of the moment like Thomas Cranmer and many others, denied their Lord. The gospel writers wanted them to know and he wanted us to know as well that even in the face of a public denial of Jesus, there can be forgiveness and restoration and even future service in ministry. You see that in the case of Peter. I love it when in the last chapter of this Gospel, look over in Mark 16. Mark 16 - the angel says in Verse 7 to the ladies who are at the empty tomb, "Go tell His disciples and Peter, 'He's going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'"

In John 21, you remember the story of Jesus' restoration of Peter where three times He asks Him if he loves Him and He says, 'Go feed My sheep.' And that's exactly what Peter spent the rest of his life doing. And eventually, this one who denied his Lord ends up dying as a martyr - as legend has it, crucified upside down because he didn't deserve to be crucified the way his Lord was. There's hope for us who deny our Lord. We can repent and be restored and serve Him faithfully.

I think there's a third lesson in this and this is to illustrate God's willingness to forgive any sin when there's repentance. I think the lesson here is larger than the sin of denying Christ. I think the lesson is the sin of forgiveness whenever there's repentance and this is encouraging to us all because we all sin against our Lord in various ways. How our Lord treats Peter is an example of how He will treat us if we turn to Him in true repentance. He always receives the penitent.

There's a fourth lesson and that is to demonstrate the perseverance of the saints through the keeping power of Jesus. Peter didn't ultimately desert his Lord. What was the difference between Judas' ultimate betrayal and Peter's temporary denial? Let me show it to you. Look at Luke 22.

Here's the difference. It wasn't Peter, let me just give you a hint. Luke 22:31: "Jesus said, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat (he wants to destroy you); but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'" There is in the denials of Peter and his ultimate preservation through them his ultimate faithfulness – a wonderful reminder that because Peter was a true disciple, his faith could not ultimately fail. He would be restored. He would turn again (why?) because Jesus prayed for him that his faith would not fail. Jesus interceded on his behalf. Listen. Christian, if you're in Christ, if you're His follower, your faith ultimately will not fail. You may sin. You may, as Peter did, deny your Lord in a moment of fear or pride when you are looking to protect yourself or to elevate yourself, but your faith will remain because Jesus has prayed for you. He has interceded for you that your faith fail not. Peter's life and Peter's denial and restoration is an example of the perseverance of the saints – not through their own power, but through the keeping power of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a fifth lesson for us. I think this story illustrates a very basic principle of the Christian life. Listen carefully to me. I, I think this is foundational to our Christian life and experience. Think about Peter for a moment. Peter was not a man who ultimately lacked courage. Listen to 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 the one most daring." Think about that for a moment. Who got out of the boat and walked on the water? Who was always speaking up? Who in the Garden pulled out his sword with a cohort of Roman soldiers and temple police, at least two hundred? Peter pulls out his sword and starts hacking away. It wasn't that Peter lacked courage. Listen to Hendriksen: "But when Peter forgot for a moment that the exercise of this gift was entirely dependent upon God, even Peter failed. When he looked away from Jesus, he was no longer the man of courage."

You see, there are only two sources of spiritual strength. Either self-confidence, that is, trust in one's own strength – this is where Peter's confidence was. You go back and reread his assertions: "I will not desert You. I will lay down my life for You. I will remain faithful to the death. No matter what happens, no matter what the rest of these yahoos do, I'm gonna be faithful to You." You also see Peter's self-confidence in his prayerlessness in the Garden.

The other source of spiritual strength is humble dependence, trust in God's strength. And you see this, don't you, in Christ's example. Again, it's not by accident that the, the gospel writers are juxtaposing throughout that night Peter and Jesus, Peter and Jesus. Because in Christ's example, you see His humble dependence in God and trust in God's strength. It's no coincidence that three times in Gethsemane Jesus prayed for strength to face His passion and then three Jewish trials and three Roman trials later, He still stands faithful. On the other hand, three times Peter slept rather than prayed. He was completely confident of himself and in his resolve to follow Christ. And in response to that, three times, even four, he denied his Lord.

Listen. If you rely on your own resolve, your own promises, your own commitment, your own strength, your own self-confidence to follow Christ, to obey Him, to honor Him, to live a life that pleases Him, you will not, you cannot remain faithful to your Lord because you are depending in yourself. Instead, you must place your sole confidence in His strength, in His keeping power. Paul in II Corinthians 4:7 says: "We have this treasure (the treasure of the gospel) in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God, not of ourselves."

Look at II Corinthians 12, II Corinthians 12 as Paul recounts the source of his strength. It's not himself. II Corinthians 12:9, in response to a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan that was sent, to torment him from Satan's perspective, from God's perspective to keep Paul from exalting himself, he asked the Lord three times that it might leave him. There's a lot of debate about what it was. That's a different discussion for a different time, but I want you to see his response: "'My grace (He said to me, Paul says) My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' So, Paul says, 'Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.'"

How exactly do we express our humble dependence, our trust in God's strength? Well, go back to what Jesus told Peter in the Garden. He said, "This is a dangerous hour. You better stay alert, and you better pray." That's how we express our dependence on God, and it's how Peter didn't and it's how our Lord did. Kent Hughes, writing of Jesus' amazing faithfulness through all of this, says: "How did Jesus remain unmoved? How did He do this as a man, considering the

weakness of human flesh? The answer is Jesus stood rocklike before the Sanhedrin, then Pilate, and then the cross because He did not rely on His flesh but on God the Father. Thus He became the perfect example for all who seek to live out their faith in a hostile culture. How else can a man or a woman live out a consistent Christian life except through the renunciation of self-dependence and the cultivation of conscious dependence upon God. It has always been the same.”

If you and I want to be men and women of courage, men and women who speak up for our Lord, we must cultivate a constant sense of humble dependence on God’s strength. It’s not a matter of will power and resolve and determination: “The next time, I’m gonna speak up for Christ.” It’s a matter of saying, “Lord, my decisions are smoke and vapor, but in Your strength, You can enable me to do what You called me to do and to speak up with my knees shaking and represent Christ. Give me the courage to do that.”

There’s one final lesson I think in this passage and that is it’s about Jesus. It shows His amazing faithfulness and it contrasts His faithfulness with Peter’s unfaithfulness. Think about it for a moment. Think about the contrast, the intentional sort of sandwich approach that the gospel writers use. It contrasts Jesus taking an oath, speaking the truth about His Messiahship and His Deity before the high priest, while at the same time down in the courtyard Peter is denying his Lord in the face of the onslaught of a slave, young slave-girl. There’s a reason the two accounts are woven together. There is this intentional contrast between Jesus’ faithfulness and Peter’s lack of faithfulness. Peter’s unfaithfulness in the face of the slightest hint of danger is sandwiched between Jesus’ complete loyalty to the Father when He’s facing certain torture and death. Jesus rock solid, faithful to His Father to the end.

And here’s the good news. He did that in our place. He was faithful as we are supposed to be faithful. And then a few hours later, He will lay Himself down on a Roman cross. He will take the nails for us and He will suffer the penalty for our unfaithfulness to the Father. That’s what this story is about. It’s not about Peter ultimately; it’s about Christ laying down His life for us who are unfaithful to Him and to the Father. What a Savior. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for the honesty of this passage. Thank You for allowing us this glimpse into the weakness of a man who appears to be so strong, so courageous, so bold. Father, thank You

for the encouragement it is to us. Ultimately, remind us that we must remain totally dependent on You. You're the only one who can make us strong, who can make us faithful, who can give us the courage to speak up. And Father, I pray that You would help us to cultivate that sense before You. But Father, we thank You most of all that our Lord was faithful to You to the end in our place. And then He died in our place for our many acts of disloyalty and unfaithfulness to You. We bless you, O God, for our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.