

# I do not know him

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[ 0 : 00 ] So Luke 22 from verse 39. Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives and his disciples followed him.

On reaching the place he said to them, pray that you will not fall into temptation. He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.

Yet not my will, but yours be done. An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. Why are you sleeping? he asked them. Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

While he was still speaking, a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus asked him, Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?

[ 1 : 06 ] When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, Lord, should we strike with our swords? And one of them struck, the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, no more of this.

And he touched the man's ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priest, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders who had come for him, Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?

Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour, when darkness reigns. Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest.

Peter followed at a distance, and when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight.

She looked closely at him and said, This man was with him. But he denied it. Woman, I don't know him, he said. A little later, someone else saw him and said, You also are one of them.

[ 2 : 08 ] Man, I am not, Peter replied. About an hour later, another asserted, Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean. Peter replied, Man, I don't know what you're talking about.

Just as he was speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him.

Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times. And he went outside and wept bitterly. The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.

They blindfolded him and demanded, Prophesy, who hit you? And they said, Many other insulting things to him. So here's the question this morning.

How do you go from, Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death, to, Woman, I don't know him, in the space of 24 verses.

[ 3 : 11 ] Sat at the table with Jesus in the upper room, sharing the Lord's Supper, sat at the table with Jesus, Peter is adamant. He's ready for anything. He's confident even if other people fall away, even if other people betray Jesus, he will not.

He's willing to pay the price for loyalty. He's going to be by Jesus' side until the bitter end. You could compare it to Ruth's loyal declaration to Naomi.

Ruth replied, Don't urge me to leave. You ought to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God.

Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me. That's the kind of attitude that Peter is displaying sat there in the upper room.

That's Peter's kind of state of mind. He's thoroughly committed. Sat at the table with Jesus, Peter's ready for prison and death.

[ 4 : 16 ] And then sat around the fire in the high priest's courtyard, Peter is ready for nothing. Three times he denies any association with Jesus.

So as we think about this dramatic change from total commitment to abject failure, as we consider that change, there's both reasons for confidence and reasons for caution.

And I want to spend some time on both of those this morning. We're going to start with a couple of reasons for confidence. Then we have two reasons for caution. And finally, we'll come back to the best possible reason for confidence.

So confidence, caution, and more confidence again. Two reasons for confidence. Specifically, two reasons to be confident in God's Word. Two reasons to trust your Bible.

Maybe that's not where you thought we'd be starting today. But in the context of thinking about confidence and caution, this is worth touching on. Why? Well, because, actually there's a risk that this episode in the life of Jesus, there's a risk that this produces the exact opposite.

[ 5 : 22 ] This could produce a lack of confidence in our Bibles. See, all four of the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all of them include this incident with Peter in the high priest's courtyard.

All four of them describe three questions being put to Jesus by a variety of interrogators around the fire. So far, so good. But the tricky part is, there's differences.

Differences between these different accounts. All four Gospel writers start with a servant girl asking the first question. That's here in verse 56 in Luke's account.

So far, so straightforward. But you come to the second interlocutor, verse 58. Well, Luke's account has Peter responding, man, I am not. But in Mark's account, seems the second denial is another response to the same servant girl.

And Matthew suggests a different servant girl. John suggests a number of different people involved. So we have four slightly different suggestions of what's going on with the second interrogation.

[ 6 : 30 ] In the third denial, there are a similar variety going on. It's not great at first sight, is it?

Not inspiring confidence immediately. But John's account, I think, gives us a really helpful interpretive key. John talks about multiple people being involved.

See, it's entirely possible, isn't it, for multiple people to be involved in producing a second denial from Jesus, for there to be a variety of different people who put that same question or a similar question again and provoke this response from Peter kind of as a collective, as it were.

And whether those people are servant girls, the same or different, men or whoever it might be, well, it's all kind of coming together to produce this reaction.

Leon Morris says, a little reflection shows that in such a situation, a question once posed is likely to have been taken up by others around the fire.

[ 7 : 34 ] So there's nothing unreasonable in supposing that the second denial is produced by questions from the same servant girl again and another servant girl and at least one man to produce a variety of people who then prompt this response.

These minor variations between the different accounts of Jesus' life, they really shouldn't trouble us because it isn't hard to see how that variety can be readily reconciled.

Perhaps as we read each gospel on its own, perhaps these questions don't automatically arise for us. But many of us will find ourselves in situations where people want to attack the validity of God's word, where people will say to us, there are contradictions in the Bible, or you can't trust it.

We'll be in those situations and it's helpful for us to have some sense of, well, what actually is going on? How can we resolve what seem to be discrepancies?

In the vast majority of cases, it takes this kind of level of thought to think, well, how could both descriptions have come about and be valid? Most of the contradictions are really quite easily resolved.

[ 8 : 46 ] We can be confident in God's word. We can be confident. And by that, I mean we go beyond saying that this shouldn't trouble us. Actually, this variety should be a reassurance.

It should produce confidence. Why is that? Well, because small variations in the descriptions are exactly what you expect when you have multiple accounts from multiple witnesses. That's what happens. Detectives and lawyers will tell you. If the stories are too identical, well, that's actually a red flag. That suggests collusion. That suggests people have compared notes in advance and gone and decided what to say.

Small variations are what you expect from multiple witnesses. Here we have these four different accounts that are clearly not perfectly identical. They haven't just copied one another's notes. Four different angles on the same thing. God, in his wisdom, ordained that there would be four canonical gospels. They have different emphases that recount different events in the life of Jesus that offer us different angles on the same things.

[ 9 : 54 ] And all of that means that our understanding is enriched. And all of that means we can be more confident that these things really did happen. Because see, you and I, we don't have the opportunity to go and interview the eyewitnesses.

We can't, you know, travel back to first century Jerusalem and go around and talk to people who saw these things happen. We don't have that opportunity. But what we have instead is the written evidence that multiple people have reported on what happened that night.

Confidence, therefore, that this is what happened. That's one reason for confidence in our Bibles. The other reason for confidence, the other kind of angle on why we trust our Bibles because of this account specifically, is maybe even more fundamental than this idea of multiple witnesses.

We trust our Bibles. We trust the accuracy of what's written down for us. We trust God because this is here at all. I mean, think about it for a moment. Put yourself into the mindset of being, you know, one of the early apostles.

And in this hypothetical scenario where you've decided to create a new religion. You know, people will say that Christianity is just kind of made up by people after Jesus kind of wanting to have authority, wanting an easy life themselves, whatever it might be.

[ 11 : 18 ] So you're setting out to make this new religion or maybe just radically reform and renew Judaism. If that's your objective, how are you going to go about that? Well, it seems to me if you're setting up a new religion, then one of the fundamental things that you want is you want people to trust those who founded that religion.

So wouldn't it be logical in that scenario when you're putting together your accounts that you're going to say are the basis for the new movement? Well, you paint the key people in the best possible light, don't you?

You present things that make these founders, these apostles, that make them look good. But this is anything but. Peter does not come out of this looking good, does he?

If you're wanting to make Peter one of the pillars of your new movement, you don't make him look this way. Peter's abandoned his allegiance to Jesus at the first sign of trouble, faced with this hardly exactly terrifying possibility of a question from a servant girl of all people.

He crumples like a cheap suit. He's fallen at the first hurdle. You wouldn't make this up, would you? Actually, the fact that the Gospels so often paint the disciples in an unflattering light, as slow to understand and quick to head off in the wrong direction, as fickle and faithless, as unable to, you know, even stay awake to pray at the end of Jesus' life.

[ 12 : 51 ] Surely this shows us this is not hagiography. This isn't painting people as perfect saints. This makes no sense as a fabrication. The only reason you would include events like this is because they're not made up, but are a record of what actually happened.

So we can have confidence in our Bibles because they don't make sense as fabrications designed to set up a new religion. And because the variety of witnesses show us that people like Luke really have gone and spoken to the eyewitnesses.

haven't just blindly copied one another, but have gone back to the sources, just as Luke says in the opening verses of his gospel. Reasons for confidence.

But when we think about Peter's behavior here, we really do have to be cautious, don't we? There really are serious reasons for caution in our own lives.

Confident in God's word, but cautious about ourselves. God doesn't give us any grounds at all for self-confidence, does he? And passages like this teach us the exact opposite of self-confidence.

[ 14 : 01 ] Teach us to doubt our own abilities. Teach us to be cautious. Teach us to be on the alert. And again, there's a couple of different dimensions to this caution. First angle to consider.

Think about who it is who fails so dramatically here. As Luke records it in chapter 5 of his gospel, Simon Peter is the first disciple to be called.

Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid from now on, you will fish for people. So he pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him. In other words, Simon, Peter, whatever you're calling him at the given moment, Peter's there from the beginning.

He hears all of Jesus' teaching. He sees all the miracles. He has every possible opportunity for faith. He sees with his very own eyes who Jesus is, what Jesus is capable of, sees Jesus' character set before him.

So it doesn't actually come as a great surprise in the upper room that Peter is utterly committed to the cause. His confidence that he's going to be with Jesus to the very end and beyond, well, it seems plausible.

[15:09] He's been with Jesus from the beginning. It seems very believable that he'll continue. If anyone's going to, Peter would. And yet he falls.

He doesn't stand firm here in the face of this trial. So how does that happen? Tom Wright invites us to step into this scene for a few moments and ponder what's at stake, what it all means.

So think of the fireside. On a chilly April night. And his loyalty to Jesus has brought Peter this far, has brought him following along after from the mountain.

But as the night wears on, tiredness saps his resolve. It's a familiar problem, isn't it? Sometimes strikes in the middle of the night, more often perhaps strikes in the middle of someone's life, strikes in the middle of a great project.

We sign on to follow Jesus and we really mean it. And we start work on our vocation and have every intention of accomplishing it. Because the beginning is always exciting.

[16:22] Maybe daunting. But the midday heat or the midnight weariness, that drains away our intentions, our energy, our enthusiasm.

few, if any, Christians could look at Peter and despise him for how he acts here. Most, if not all of us, look at him and think, yes, that's what it's like.

That's what happens. Our resolve fails. If we're honest, we know this is all too plausible, don't we? There's nobody, nobody who stands so firm in themselves, who stands so high as to be above the possibility of falling just like this.

Folks, if Peter's confidence was misplaced, well, what of you and I? Paul writes to the Corinthians, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

We have no grounds for self-confidence. And as we seek to take that care that we not fall, there's another angle on this incident that's worth considering.

[17:37] So we've taken first, you know, how high Peter is, how well-equipped he is, and yet that he falls. The other angle, as we wonder at this change in a few short hours, the other angle is to see that actually the steps are there.

The steps are there for us to see, and each of them small, each of them believable, but together, step by step, they lead down this path. They lead to this point of denial.

And J.C. Ryle, he lays out this path really clearly. The first step for Peter, step one, proud self-confidence. Peter says, though all men might deny Christ, he never will.

he's ready to go with Jesus to prison and to death. That's his confident assertion, his proud assertion. Second step, indolent neglect of prayer.

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus told him to pray lest he should enter into temptation, and he gave way to drowsiness and fell asleep. step three, vacillating indecision.

[18:55] So the enemies of Christ come, and Peter flails around not knowing what to do. First he fights, then he runs away, then he turns around again, then he finally follows from far off.

He doesn't know what he's doing. Step four, he mingles with bad company. He went into the high priest's house, sat among the servants by the fire, trying to conceal his religion.

Hearing and seeing all manner of evil. And then the fifth and last step, the natural consequence of the preceding four. He was overwhelmed with fear when suddenly charged with being a disciple, and the snare was already around his neck.

He couldn't escape. He plunged deeper into error than ever. He denied his blessed master three times. The mischief, be it remembered, had been done before.

The denial was only the disease coming to a head. These small steps. Such a gradual process.

[ 19 : 59 ] None of those former sins and failures, none of them really all that terrible in the scheme of things. Some of them even perhaps were debatable whether it's sin at all. And yet here is where they lead, to this awful denial.

Folks, we would do well to consider the example of Peter not just in guarding against thinking that we stand lest we fall, but also in considering the things that we might initially think inconsequential without wondering where they will lead.

what is the natural result of this path? Maybe you think it's a small thing, an insignificant thing to be absent from church one week.

But how quickly that builds to become a habit and before you know it you've lost the benefit of hearing God's word proclaimed and you've lost the strengthening impact of the fellowship around you. Hebrews 10 urges us, let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Well what about do you consider carefully the company that you keep? The people who you surround yourself with? How quickly we can be led astray by the subtle corrosion of the implicit attitudes and beliefs of our peers?

[ 21 : 31 ] Psalm 1 verse 1 blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. The company you keep is perhaps in itself a small thing but where will it lead?

Be cautious. Maybe you tell yourself that your gossiping isn't really hurting anyone. How many little things that lead us step by little step away from our Savior down these dangerous paths?

Folks Peter did not set out to deny his Lord and yet here he is. There are abundant reasons for caution.

So we should be cautious about ourselves. We should avoid self-confidence but I do want to end by returning to confidence. Why can we be confident?

Because it doesn't depend on you and me. it is not ultimately our strength our resilience that is at issue. So where's Jesus?

[ 22 : 42 ] Where's Jesus in these hours? He's faded into the background a little bit hasn't he? We've focused for a while on Peter but Jesus is not absent. Verse 60 Peter's third denial he replied man I don't know what you're talking about.

Just as he was speaking the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter and Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him. Before the cock crows today you will disown me three times.

And Peter went outside and wept bitterly. Jesus is not absent. Either Jesus is being guarded in the courtyard throughout this time in which case how deep the wounds for him of hearing Peter's denials.

Or if not that then he's kind of passing through the courtyard on his way from being interrogated by one priest or another. We don't know the precise comings and goings of Jesus at this point.

That's not what's at issue. But in any case Jesus hears this third denial and hears the cock crow and he looks at Peter.

[ 23 : 48 ] what did Peter see in that look from Jesus? Sadness?

Disappointment? Grief? Anger? Compassion? Well whatever it was it was the beginning of Peter's recovery wasn't it?

I mean it doesn't quite seem that way at first. The recovery is not obvious from the get go. Peter goes outside and weeps bitterly. But folks we know Peter does recover.

We know he repents. We know he is restored. And this this is surely the turning point. Back at the start of the account you've got that serving girl who looks closely at Peter to make sure of her accusation well now Jesus looks straight at him.

And of course the immediate reaction to that look is that Peter feels the weight of his sin. He goes and weeps bitterly. And therefore I think well my first instinct reading this account my instinct is to suppose that this is a look of anger, of dismay, of despair.

[ 25 : 09 ] My first instinct is to read condemnation from Jesus in this look. But that's not right is it? Think about what Jesus said to Peter back in the upper room a few verses ago.

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat but I have prayed for you Simon that your faith may not fail and when you have turned back strengthen your brothers.

And Peter responds to that with his rash offer to accompany Jesus to prison or death. That's an unfortunate response but it doesn't invalidate Jesus' declaration does it? Jesus knew this was coming. Clearly that's what he's referring to and he chose to offer Simon reassurance. So now when it arrives well surely we can't read condemnation now in the moment. Sadness yes by all means but not just sadness not just those sort of negative emotions there's love in this look isn't there?

[ 26 : 19 ] And hearing the cock crow and seeing Jesus look at him Peter remembers all too well this prophecy of his threefold denial but surely also seeing Jesus turn surely there's also part of him that remembers that promise that he would turn back.

So for Peter the path is open for him to return. In this time of extremity Jesus' compassion has not failed. As Jesus is in the worst night of his life he has compassion on Peter.

Surely his compassion will not fail when it comes to you and to me. See it's true that Peter's tears are bitter but that's a good thing. It is to Peter's profit to recognize the reality of what he's done.

Folks it's good for us to see the seriousness of our sin because only when we know that we failed only then we will see how profoundly we are in need of a saviour.

Folks let's pray that we might weep bitter tears over our wrongdoing as Peter did. J.C. Ryle again is very helpful. He says sorrow like this let us remember is an inseparable companion of true repentance.

[ 27 : 46 ] Here lies the grand distinction between repentance unto salvation and unavailing remorse. A complete waste of time.

Remorse can make a man miserable like Judas Iscariot but it can't do more than that. it doesn't lead him to God. Repentance makes a man's heart soft and his conscience tender and shows itself in real turning to a father in heaven.

The falls of a graceless professor that is somebody who declares themselves to be a believer but without the reality behind it. Someone who hasn't actually tasted of God's grace. The falls of such are falls from which there is no rising again.

But the falls of a true saint like Peter here always end in deep contrition self-abasement and amendment of life. So folks let's pray that we will hear the cautions the warnings of this incident in the life of Peter.

Let us pray that we will not fall into temptation. Let us take heed lest we fall. But let's hear too the comfort of our Saviour's compassion towards Peter and to us.

[ 29 : 05 ] And turn therefore in true repentance repentance unto salvation not mere bitter remorse. Let's pray. Lord we we see the danger of self-confidence.

We know that in ourselves we are insufficient. if our salvation if our eternal life if our happiness in this world if any of it depended upon us we would be lost hopeless.

So guard us against self-reliance. Guard us against putting our confidence in the wrong place.

Guard us against depending on foundations that will crumble and fall.

And keep us dependent only on you our rock. The one upon whom we may build our lives. The one whose compassion is never ending. The one to whom we can always come in repentance and faith. The one who offers salvation. salvation. You have the words of eternal life. So keep us dependent on that from you and nowhere else we ask.

[ 30 : 21 ] Amen.