

The Weakness of the Flesh

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bible to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14, beginning at verse 26.

! I'm sure all of us who have served the Lord for any reasonable period of time, have had an experience of sinning in a way, that we never thought we would or even could.

Perhaps we told someone, I would never do that. Or we told ourselves, I could never do that. Only to find out in time that we did exactly that.

We overestimated our ability to overcome temptation, and to live for Christ. But the reality is that what we have experienced has happened to the best of Christ's disciples.

And this morning, as we resume our extended sermon series of the Gospel of Mark, after taking a seven-week break, I want us to consider the experience of Christ's disciples as they were faced with a situation where they overestimated their ability to stand with Christ as he approached the most difficult moments he faced on this earth.

[1 : 37] So please follow along as I read from Mark, chapter 14, beginning at verse 26.

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

And Jesus said to them, Peter said, Jesus said to him, even though they all fall away, I will not.

Jesus said to him, truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.

But he said emphatically, if I must die with you, I will not deny you. And they all said the same.

[2 : 53] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, this is your word. And we who have trusted in Christ are your people.

Would you speak to our hearts for our good and would you speak in the preaching of your word this morning for your eternal glory.

It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. This morning, I believe that we have come to what is one of the most sobering reminders of the weakness of the flesh that's found in the pages of scripture.

And here's what I want us to see this morning. I pray that we will see that our flesh is so weak that it cannot carry out even the best desires of our spirit.

So I want us to see this morning. I want us to leave here convinced that our flesh is so weak that it cannot carry out even the best, most noble desires of our spirit.

[4 : 27] And in our very limited time this morning, I want us to consider why this is so. And I have two simple points. First, the desire of the spirit expressed.

And by the spirit, I don't mean the Holy Spirit. I mean our own spirit. I'm referring to the human spirit which is the core of who we are living in this shell of our bodies.

Here in verses 27 and 28, knowing that the hour of his betrayal and his arrest was soon upon him, Jesus tells his disciples what's going to happen to him and how it's going to affect them.

We read, And Jesus said to them, You will all fall away. For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. And then in his classic manner, Peter seeks to correct Jesus. Verse 29, Peter said to him, Even though they all fall away, I will not.

[5 : 40] And from what Peter says and the words we see here, it seems like he is pointing at the other disciples. Even though they all fall away, I will not.

He's essentially saying to Jesus, Jesus, you don't understand. You're not talking about me. They may fall away, but not me. I will not fall away.

And here Peter is expressing the desire of his heart to remain faithful to Jesus, even in the midst of danger and even death.

And he's so convinced that he is able to do what he has expressed, that he seeks to correct Jesus, the one who cannot lie.

But Jesus knows better. And so he solely says to Peter in verse 30, truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.

[6 : 47] Now you would think after Jesus said that to Peter with such specificity about when and how he was going to deny him, Peter would pause and maybe fall on his face and say, Lord, you have never lied to us and you're telling me that I'm going to do this.

I believe you helped me. You would think that Peter would see the danger he was in. But he doesn't. You'd also think that maybe the other disciples would also correct Peter and say, hey, Peter, catch yourself.

Come to your senses. But that didn't happen either. Mark tells us in verse 31, but he said emphatically, if I must die with you, I will not deny you.

And they all said the same. Now I don't think that Peter and the other disciples were being arrogant. I don't think they were being arrogant when they said, we will die with you before we deny you.

I think what they were doing was they were expressing to Jesus the genuine and sincere desire in their heart to be faithful to him even in the face of death.

[8 : 10] It was the deep desire of their soul that they were expressing to Jesus. Not just being arrogant or being flippant. their commitments to Jesus demonstrated that they were ignorant of the weakness of the flesh and its inability to carry out even the best desires of the spirit.

And so after the disciples said that they would die before they denied, it seems that rather than engage them in conversation, Jesus decides to show them rather than tell them.

And this brings you to my second and final point. The weakness of the flesh exposed. Read in verses 32 to 34.

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, sit here while I pray. And he took with him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

And he said to them, my soul is very sorrowful even to death. Remain here and watch. Jesus goes off to pray and you would think that his top three disciples who just moments ago vowed that they would die before they denied, that they would have been watching and praying with him after he poured his soul out to them and he was saying to them, I am sorrowful to the point of death.

[10 : 06] But we read in verse 37, and he came and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, Simon, are you asleep?

Could you not watch one hour? Now, isn't it interesting that Jesus comes and meets the three disciples asleep and he only addresses Peter.

And it seems like what he's saying to Peter is, he's saying, Peter, Peter, you were the first to vow that you would die before you denied me.

But you're not even strong enough to stay awake for an hour and pray with me. Pray with me in my sorrows. Support me in this grief that is coming upon me.

God is coming to you. And then in verse 38, Jesus addresses Peter and the other disciples.

[11 : 13] He doesn't just address Peter anymore. He addresses them all. And we won't see this in our English Bible, but in verse 38, Jesus uses the plural form for you, the pronoun you, and also in the verbs.

He's speaking to them in a plural sense. And that's how we know that Jesus transitions from verse 37 when it's clear, He's speaking to Peter, and He's now speaking to all the disciples.

He uses the plural form in verse 38, and He says to them, watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The Spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.

And Jesus didn't speak those words in a vacuum. Jesus spoke those words to them in the context of just a few moments ago when they expressed their deep desire, they expressed their deep commitment, they vowed, I will die before I deny you.

All of them said it, Peter said it first, but they joined in, and they all said that they would do that. And here Jesus is saying to them, I know that you will sincerely, from the depths of your heart, I know that you desire to die with me rather than deny me.

[12 : 30] Yet, your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak. You need to watch and pray so that you can fulfill that desire of your spirit and not give in to the weakness of the flesh.

Mark tells us that Jesus goes away a second time, and he prays, and he comes back, and he finds the disciples sleeping again. But he didn't wake them on that occasion.

He just let them sleep, and he went away a third time. And he came back, and again he found them asleep. And why were they asleep?

Because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. you would think that after, again, from the very outset, you would have thought that they would have watched and prayed with their master as he was in grief and in sorrow.

You would think that their memories would be jogged. When he comes to them, he says, watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation. You think that that would have jogged them to watch and pray, but no, they don't.

[13 : 48] And why? Because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. And knowing now that his hour of betrayal was upon him, Jesus awakens the disciples, and even as he is speaking to them, Mark tells us that Judas arrives with the chief priests and the scribes and the elders, and he betrays Jesus with a kiss, and they arrest Jesus.

We read in verse 47. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his heir.

Now we know from John's gospel in chapter 18 that the one standing by who did that was Peter. Peter was the one who cut off the heir of one of the high priest's servants, a man by the name of Malchus.

And we can be sure that Peter was not aiming for his heir. Peter was not just going and saying, let me cut his heir off. Peter was trying to take his head off. And he missed and got his heir.

And I think we're able to see right now what Peter had in mind when he told Jesus, before I deny you, I'll die for you. Peter was willing to fight.

[15 : 11] And no doubt Peter still had in mind the earthly kingdom where Jesus would set up his kingdom on this earth and they would rule, an earthly kingdom they'd rule over the Romans and all their oppressors.

The kingdom that Peter had in mind and the fight that Peter had, all it needed was a sword. It required human strength and human weapons and Peter was willing to do that.

In his gospel account in Luke, Luke chapter 22, Luke tells us that Jesus healed the man's heir. And he said to Peter, no more of this.

And Peter put away his sword. Jesus required him to put away the sword that he was clearly relying on to fulfill this vow that he would die with Jesus before he denied Jesus.

And so how does Peter do after he has to give up this sword that he was depending on? How does he fare in terms of fulfilling this vow that he is going to die with Jesus?

[16 : 20] How does he do? Well, Mark tells us in verse 50 what Peter does, but he also tells us what the other disciples do as well.

And they all left him and fled. they all left him and fled. Brothers and sisters, this is the weakness of the flesh exposed.

These are the men who walked with Jesus, watched him heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and they vowed that they will stand with him and even die with him before they denied him.

And Mark, in humility because he was one of those who fled, he tells us in this brief sentence, and they all left him and fled.

Mark tells us in verses 53 and 54, and they led Jesus to the high priest and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.

[17 : 35] And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest, and he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.

Well, that's not so bad. Peter is still following, even though he is at a distance, he is still following Jesus. And he defended Jesus up to the moment.

Jesus said, put your sword away. And I think Peter was probably feeling generally good that he was pretty much standing with Jesus. He was laying low, kind of disguising himself among the guards of the courtyard.

But young, I think Peter felt he was doing pretty good. But then the moment of truth comes. The moment of truth comes, starting in verse 66.

And we read, And 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 the Nazarene Jesus.

[18 : 50] But he denied it, saying, I neither know nor understand what you mean. and he went out into the gateway, and the rooster crowed.

And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, This man is one of them. But again he denied it.

And after a little while, the bystanders again said to Peter, Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean. But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know this man of whom you speak.

And immediately the rooster crowed for a second time, and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.

And he broke down and wept. this was the moment of truth for Peter. Peter lied and swore that he did not know who Jesus was.

[20 : 07] He denied the one whom he vowed he would die for. And the weakness of the flesh and its inability to carry up the desire of the spirit is on full display for Peter to see.

And brothers and sisters, it's on display for us to see because we're no different. We're no different from Peter.

Like Peter, we easily think that all we need to remain faithful to Christ is a made-up mind. And we minimize our need to stay close to Christ, to stay spiritually awake, to stay in prayer, expressing our utter dependence on him.

Because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is desperately weak. Without Christ, brothers and sisters, we can do nothing.

In Peter's moment of truth, about the weakness of the flesh, he breaks down and he weeps. And Peter's weeping is an expression of godly sorrow.

[21 : 27] He wept openly before the servant girl and before all the bystanders. And in his weeping, he was no longer denying. Peter could have put on a brave face. He could have walked out and said, I don't know what you're talking about.

But no, he broke down and he wept. and in that moment when he saw the weakness of his flesh, and he saw his utter need for grace and for God, in his tears, he openly identified with Christ and he owned him.

And Peter failed. But he didn't utterly fail. in two weeks, we'll look at another who utterly failed.

We'll look at one who betrayed and utterly failed, but Peter did not utterly fail. He experienced godly sorrow and he repented.

Again, all of us this morning, if you've served Christ for any reasonable period of time, you've come to realize that the spirit is always willing, but the flesh is desperately weak.

[22 : 45] And when we have confidence in our flesh and we don't stay close to Christ, demonstrating our dependence on him, we fail like Peter and we fall into sin.

And perhaps for some this morning, this is a present reality. For some this morning, you may find yourself in circumstances where you are currently denying Christ, failing to live for Christ, failing to stand for Christ, and you never thought that you'd be where you are this morning.

And my prayer for you is that the same way the Holy Spirit convicted Peter, he will likewise convict you and he'll bring you to a place of deep repentance and deep dependency on the Lord to be faithful to him and to serve him.

There's an aspect of this account of Jesus predicting Peter's denial that we don't have in Mark's account, but we find it in Luke's account.

In Luke 22 verses 31 to 32, Luke records that Jesus was the one who actually initiated this conversation with Peter.

[24 : 17] Luke tells us that Jesus spoke these particular words that we're going to read even before Peter said he would die before he denied. Jesus said to Peter, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Now, there's something in our English Bibles that's not as obvious to us in terms of what Mark actually, what Luke actually wrote.

In our English Bibles, it seems like Jesus is really just speaking to Peter alone in verse 31, which he is, but he's not speaking about Peter alone.

In verse 31, when he says, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, the you is plural. And so what he's really saying to him, he's saying, Satan has demanded to have all of you, you and your fellow disciples, he's demanded to have all of you so that he might sift you like wheat.

He might take you the way you take wheat and you shake it to take the husk off of it, and then you beat it. He said he wanted to do that, he demanded that he wanted to do that with you.

[25 : 57] But then he turns his attention to Peter because he knows that Peter's the one who's going to fail in a way that we don't see recorded for the other disciples. They all fled, they all ran, but Peter's the only one who we see denying three times, invoking curses on himself, saying, let lightning strike me if I'm not telling the truth.

Peter, and Jesus says to Peter, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

Peter failed. He didn't fulfill the desire of his heart, but his faith did not utterly fail. And Jesus said to him, and when you have turned, or literally when you have repented, strengthened your brothers.

What is interesting about this is that Peter was being assured by Jesus that his failing was not final. The same way Jesus predicted his denial is the same way that Jesus predicted his repentance.

and Jesus predicted that he would be a source of strength to the other disciples. He's saying to them, even though you failed to this degree, you'll strengthen your brothers.

[27 : 30] You know one of the interesting things to do as you read your Bible? after you've seen Peter in the Gospels, read Peter in his letters.

He's a different man. He's a transformed man. Because he's come to realize the weakness of the flesh.

He's come to realize how much he needs the Lord and he needs the Lord's strength. Brothers and sisters, Satan demands to have all of us.

And if he could, he would. And he would sift us as wheat. But the Lord prays for us.

Scripture says he ever lives to make intercession for us. And though we fail, we're not finally fail.

[28 : 50] Because he intercedes for his children. And they should encourage us. Satan can't take advantage of us. Yeah, he can attack us.

He can tempt us. But he cannot sift us as wheat. And when we fail, because we've relied on the flesh, and we've been not dependent on the Lord in prayer, prayer, and being spiritually alert, we can by the grace of God experience repentance, and we can return.

And I pray for us this morning. I pray for all of us. I pray we'd hear this word this morning. If when you think about your Christian life, the first thing that comes to mind is your commitment and your strength, I want to say to you that you don't understand.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. And we are utterly dependent on the Lord. And so I pray this morning that this truth will encourage our souls today and every day, especially in the moment of temptation that we would trust the Lord by his spirit to strengthen us than relying on the arm of the flesh.

Would you pray with me? Father, we are grateful this morning that we have one who intercedes for us, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 50] Lord, we thank you that even though we have an enemy of our soul who desires to sift us as wheat, the Lord Jesus faithfully intercedes for us.

Lord, may we leave this place fully convinced that our flesh is weak. spirits are willing but our flesh is weak.

Would you help us to demonstrate our conviction of this truth by staying spiritually awake and being faithful in prayer?

God, work in all of our hearts, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.