

Mark 14:53-72

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[0 : 0 0] We take up our Bibles and turn to Mark chapter 14. We've been tracking through this one of four eyewitness gospel presentations of the life of Jesus and we come to the last two paragraphs of chapter 14 and you'll find that helpful if you have it open on page 851 in your Bible. As you heard it read, these two paragraphs are deeply practical and deeply painful, very personal and I want to start by setting this up going back to verse 50 if you look back on page 851 by pointing out that when Jesus is arrested all the disciples run away.

They all abandon Jesus and then we have this little strange story at the end of last week's passage, 51 and 52. Did Aaron deal with this? He did not. It's because there's nakedness in it. It's a very strange little story of a young follower of Jesus who after Jesus is arrested the guards try to grab him and they get a hold of his tunic, his clothing and the only way to escape is for him to slide out and to run away naked into the night. And most commentators agree that this is likely Mark himself, the writer of the gospel. He's never put himself into the story until now.

But he does so at this point to show that none of us can look down on any other follower of Jesus who denies Jesus or runs away or has moments of failure and weakness.

Great. As we trace the failure and denial of the great apostle Peter in just a moment, we are all exposed and we are all naked in our need of Christ. And this is part of the work of the word of God to open us to God because nothing is hidden from his sight. I know we all look beautiful beautiful and are well covered and we cover ourselves emotionally and spiritually, but there's nothing hidden from God's sight. And as we open his word, we see our need and we also see in this passage the greatness of the mercy and kindness and power of Jesus exactly to people who are failures like you and me. It's great. And Mark, this is how he sets it up. Mark wants us to know that he is no better than others. So the only picture we have of him in the gospel is stripped of all his clothing that would cover him running away, which is what kind of happened to all the disciples. One of the great messages of today's passage is that we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem. And we're all equally in need of Jesus Christ. I am, you are, the disciples were, Mark was, and none of us have any reason to be confident in ourselves that every single one of us are weak and feeble and failures.

And the keenest Christian among us, the strongest Christian among us will fall. I do, you do. Which is why we're so grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ here. So these two paragraphs are beautifully positioned because what comes through in the Jesus paragraph is his courage and kindness, who is, Will was saying, in the darkness of false accusation and suffering, choosing to go to his death, misunderstood, abused and beaten, he is walking through this precisely for moral and spiritual failures like you and me.

[4 : 1 7] So at the heart of this whole chapter, chapter 14, which you've now been looking at for three weeks, is Jesus and his death. Have you noticed that? From the morning in Bethany when Jesus is anointed, to the supper in the evening where Jesus gives the last supper about his death, to the betrayal, and then to Gethsemane, and then to Jesus' violent arrest, we're swimming in corruption and lies and manipulation and denial, which is the world we live in. And everything in these verses is moving toward the execution of Jesus, which is now just hours away. And we have now these two lovely paragraphs.

And they're set beside each other in peril. They happen at the same time to show us a contrast between Jesus and Peter, between our Saviour and all of those whom he saves. And the point of the passage is that the key to Christianity is not that you and I are firm and strong, not that you and I will do great things for Jesus, but that Jesus is firm and strong. Christianity is about what he does for us, not what we do for him.

So two simple points, two paragraphs. The first one is the courage of Jesus' confession, verses 53 to 65. And to show you that Mark wants us to hold these two paragraphs together, as soon as Jesus is arrested, verse 53, they take him into the high priest's house. And in verse 54, Mark immediately goes back to Peter and what he tells us about Peter should ring alarm bells. Verse 54, Peter had followed Jesus at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself by the fire.

So in verse 50, he ran away with everyone else, but he hadn't completely abandoned Jesus. He's now following Jesus from a distance. And if you've been reading Mark's gospel, you'll know that that is absolutely the opposite of what it means to be a disciple. You cannot follow Jesus from a distance.

And it's part of the reason for his great collapse in a couple of verses. He wants to follow Jesus now, but on his own terms, at a safe distance. And so he's there by the fireside, toasting his marshmallows, wanting to save his own life.

[7:12] And Jesus is taken into the high priest's house and you can, it's been archaeologically found and there's a church there today. And Peter is sitting with the guards outside in the courtyard, looking up to the platform where Jesus was, and he's sitting with the very guards who arrested Jesus and are about to begin bashing Jesus, but he doesn't want to stand out. He wants to hide among the guards as the kangaroo court convenes inside. Now, is kangaroo court a well-known term here?

It is. Okay. Nobody knows where it comes from. I could give you some theories, but they're not really well that interesting. It's a description of a process which is a mockery of justice, where a group of people engineer and manipulate a process because of the predetermined outcome that they want to get. And that's exactly what's happening here. And you may be interested to know that there's nothing legal about this proceeding. In a blasphemy trial, you need to have at least two hearings. Both of them need to be in the daytime. Both of them need to hear the innocent evidence first. Both of them are meant to take place in an official place, not the high priest's house.

And each witness is meant to be warned about lying. None of that happens here. Okay. They're not seeking the truth. They just want an excuse to murder Jesus. And so they cover it with a legal process, which is not unknown in our world today. But it's a brilliant picture of how evil works. The way evil works is by trying to suppress the truth. And we see it all around us.

And we see it inside us. The Bible says that we suppress the truth of God because we prefer to believe our lies. And suppressing the truth in the end is the spiritual cancer that lies under all injustice and all corruption. And I don't, you may not have picked this up, but as you read the trial of Jesus here, this kangaroo trial of Jesus, the irony is that all the witnesses actually demonstrate the complete innocence of Jesus and the greatness of the injustice. They are false witnesses and they can't even get their stories straight. I mean, everyone knows if you're going to, if you're going to be a false witness, you need to get, you need to get your story straight. And the closest they get to the truth is in verse 58, where they say that Jesus said he would destroy the temple made with hands and build another not made with hands, which is a garbled misquote of what John says in, sorry, what Jesus said. We have a record of it in John 2, where Jesus actually said, you destroy this temple and I'll build it in three days. And he's talking about his body. He's talking about the fact that they'll crucify him and he'll, he'll be raised on the third day. None of this really matters though, as they're bent on suppressing the truth. They've already made their verdict. And the high priest stands with great indignation and he says to Jesus, why don't you say something in your defense? Jesus. But Jesus remains silent. Because like a lamb led to the slaughter, he opens not his mouth, which is a quote from the Old Testament.

[10:58] And of course, Jesus is not the first or last person to be the victim of injustice. Jesus. But here they want to make Jesus nothing and they want to send him to his death. And that is precisely what he has come into the world to do. Here is the maker of the world. He becomes the innocent victim, not just to stand with all victims and identify with them, but so that he might rescue and save every victim. And that's why verse 63 is so important. And I wonder if you would turn down to it. It's on the next page, page 852. In the heart of darkness, there is a piercingly bright light as Jesus makes the good confession and reveals who he is and his words change everything.

The high priest again comes out and demands, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed? And now for the first time in the gospel and the only time from the lips of Jesus, with undeniable, unequivocal, definitive clarity, Jesus says, I am.

You know, there are a lot of people who say that Jesus never actually claimed to be Messiah. He does here. And it's in the presence of his enemies under the threat of death. And he says in the clearest possible way, I am. It's not that he's been tricked into this and taken off guard. He has waited for this moment so that there's no mistake in his identity. He's not going to go to the cross because of some misunderstanding. He's not going to go to the cross for his miracles or his teaching, but because he is the Messiah, the son of the blessed. This is who he is. This is what he has come to do. I am. It is the Old Testament word for God. I am, he says, the full I, I am. But Jesus goes further and completely overturns the tables. He says, and you will see the son of man, and that's the Old Testament judge of the living and the dead, the one from Daniel 7, to whom all authority is given.

He says, you will see the son of man coming on the clouds, seated at the right hand of the Father and coming on the clouds. In other words, high priests, you think you are judging me.

[13:42] But I'm not in the dock. The opposite is the case. You think that my future depends on you. The opposite is the case. Like with all of us, our future depends on him.

And the day is coming, Jesus is saying, when you will all appear before me, and when I execute judgment, it will be with perfect, clean, righteous holiness.

When the real blasphemy here is that the high priest accuses Jesus of blasphemy, and condemns him to death, and hands him to the guards, and they begin to bash him, and they cover his face as they begin to whack him, and they say, you're a prophet, prophesy who's about to whack you, which is exactly what Jesus had prophesied three times in chapters 8, 9, and 10, remember? And Jesus knows the outcome of his trial. He's not trying to save his skin, and I think we see the great courage of his confession of who he is here.

But it's not so much his bravery that is key for us, but his willingness to deliberately choose the path of suffering and death, to lay down his life, to give his life over to death for the forgiveness of our sins, to bring us into the kingdom of God. And our faith confesses this Jesus, Jesus strong and kind, who pours his life out to death because of his overflowing grace for all of us who fail, as we're just about to look at now. So I want to turn to the second paragraph, from the courage of Jesus' confession to the cowardice of Peter's collapse, verses 66 to 72.

So the scene opens with Peter, he's still following Jesus from a distance, he's in the courtyard, and we've got to give him credit, he did get further than the other disciples, but creating a distance between yourself and Jesus, trying to follow Jesus from a distance, is very tricky, very slippery, and almost always leads to denial. This is the way the collapse begins.

[16:05] Yes, what he's doing is risky, but it's not costly. It's a cozy thing around the fire. So Peter has withdrawn from being an active follower and participant in the story of Jesus, to being a bit of a passive observer. And only a few verses ago, during the Last Supper, when Jesus said to all his disciples, you will all fall away because of me, you remember what Peter said with grateful confidence? I love this. They may fall away.

For others, they'll fall away, but I will never fall away. It's wonderful self-confidence. And Jesus says, look, before the rooster crows twice, you're going to deny me three times.

And Peter says, look, even if I have to die, I will never deny you. And it is in this place of following Jesus from a distance now, that it only takes a very small trigger to bring Peter down.

He's not facing the council or hostile group of soldiers, but a young servant girl sidles up to him. I mean, I think if a troop of soldiers had burst in and demanded an answer at sword point and saying, who's willing to die for Jesus, Peter probably would have stood up.

You know, if Jesus had asked him to defend him with all physical force, Peter was ready. But notice the way his collapse happens. This is so true to life, in my experience and yours.

[17:44] And if the apostle fails, you and I can fail as well. She doesn't openly challenge his courage. Listen to what she says. Verse 7, she says, you're with that Nazarene.

Verse 69, you're one of them. Verse 70, you're one of them. Hear it? You're one of them born again Christians, aren't you?

That's so un-Canadian. You're one of those evangelicals. That's so narrow. It's called othering. It's sometimes subtle.

It's sometimes very obvious. Where someone suggests that what you believe means you belong to the wrong group. That you're weird, but in a bad way.

That you're on the outs. That you don't fit in some way because of your views. If you believe what you believe, you know, if you're going to go down that track, you're not part of the mainstream.

[18 : 47] And it's a subtle way of reducing someone by labelling them. Or putting them in a group that we look down on. It's a way of marginalising or discriminating against someone and placing them under suspicion.

And the great irony today is that in our Canadian culture, we are working so hard on acceptance and inclusion of every possible kind, on every possible kind of behaviour, that if you step out of line or express an opinion that's contrary to the majority, you will be viciously excluded.

And I think this is even more powerful in collectivist cultures, in traditional cultures. And if you stand outside the flow of the majority, one of the worst crimes that you can commit is to say, I believe something different.

Because we want to be included. We want to be among the cool kids. All of us do. And we hate it when we're seen to be too different.

Particularly when we're trying to follow Jesus on our own terms. One of the interesting things about this little story here is that the source of Mark's eyewitnessing here is Peter himself.

[20 : 12] This gospel comes from Peter. And by the time it's written, Peter is the main apostle of the church, a great leader of the church. And this amazing honesty and exposure happens as he fails this trial by the fire.

And there's no blaming or judging because the facts are painful enough. Particularly for those of us who inhabited these facts. And Peter's denials become more and more embarrassing.

He begins, this doesn't come across in the Greek, his first denial is a spluttering, I don't know what you mean, I don't know what you're saying. And then he says, I've got no idea what you're talking about. And then he can't even bring himself to say Jesus' name.

He says, that man. And he starts to other Jesus. This is the same Peter who for three years had seen Jesus' miracles.

You know, he had seen him raise the young girl to life. And heard the teaching of astonishing authority. He'd seen Jesus calm the storm and walk on water and feed the 5,000.

[21 : 22] And in chapter 8, he had confessed Jesus to be the Christ. And only a few hours before he'd said to Jesus, I'll kill for you, I'll die for you. And now he says, I know nothing about that man.

Why are we told this? Why is this brought to us? Why are we here this morning? Two reasons. One, it's to wean us from all forms of self-sufficiency, self-reliance and self-absorption.

Peter fails the simplest test here, just as you and I fail this test over and over again. Which means we don't rest on our own faithfulness.

We rest on the faithfulness of Jesus. Has the Lord shown you how weak you are? I mean, you and I are capable of collapsing so easily and so quickly.

And even today, as we leave and go home, we need to be praying, lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil. Because he alone can hold us and keep us.

[22 : 35] And the last words of the chapter, I think, give us great hope. When the rooster crows twice, Peter remembers the words of Jesus, and he breaks down and weeps.

And there's a great deal of hope in Peter's tears. We'll see in a few weeks. Although Judas does not repent, Peter races back to Jesus for forgiveness.

And the very fact that we have this gospel demonstrates the reality of Peter's repentance. But the very first step toward true faith in God, for all of us, is abandoning any pretense that we're spiritually able.

We're not. It can be very able in a lot of areas. But spiritually, we have no health in ourselves to help ourselves. We can never come to have confidence in the Lord Jesus until we abandon confidence in ourselves.

This is a critical place that you and I have to come to, to despair of our own spiritual ability, to recognize that we need a Savior. Only then do we come to Jesus and cast ourselves on his mercy.

[23 : 51] And I think this is where Peter's denial here in chapter 14 is such a help to us. Because his denial doesn't begin in the courtyard. You can see his self-confidence all the way through the chapter.

Do you remember when Jesus took the disciples into the Garden of Eden earlier in... Not the Garden of Eden, sorry. That's a jet lag error. Garden of...

Thank you. Garden of Gethsemane. And he said to them, pray. Pray with me. Watch and pray. And Peter was so confident he felt he didn't need to sleep. He didn't need to pray and so he fell asleep.

Interesting, isn't it? Pray that you might not enter into temptation. Now I can sleep. And then when Jesus says they're all going to fall away, Peter says, phew, not a chance. I'm made of different stuff. His self-confidence was his vulnerability. And when the arresting mob appears, the first thing Peter does is to take things into his own hands, take out a sword and try to defend Jesus.

[24 : 54] And it all makes him much more vulnerable to the blindside attack when it comes. And it uncovers how foolish he is and how foolish we are to be confident in our spiritual ability.

So I say it again. God has to bring every single one of us to the place where we recognise the truth of our own weakness and inability spiritually. Only then can we truly call out to God for strength. And that's the first purpose, I think, of this passage. It's to wean us from these things. And the second purpose, of course, is to win us over to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

When you may be painfully aware of your own weakness and lack of strength. You may have denied Jesus and you may be tempted and in the process of deserting Jesus.

We need to keep the two parts of this passage together. Because they not only give us the truth of our own weakness and failing, they give us the truth of Jesus' utter mercy.

[26 : 00] That the reason he is standing there and the reason he is being abused and the reason he is confessing the truth about himself, even to the men who hate him.

And the reason he goes to the cross is for you and for me. To give his life so that we might be saved. And when we are honest about our failings, only then can we start to try and keep ourselves in the love of God by drawing on his grace.

He has come with power. He's come with grace. He's come to rescue failures. He's come to the sick. To draw us into the friendship of God. And there is no friend that we have like Jesus.

Who always tells us the truth. Who always forgives us. Who always welcomes us back and gives us enough strength. Always doing the best for us.

And so we can follow him and be with him as a true friend and not from a distance. And that's why we're going to sing this next hymn. We're going to sing about the amazing love of Christ.

[27 : 09] How can it be that he can love us in this way? He loves us in this way because of his death and his resurrection. And this is who he is. So let's stand and sing the hymn together.

Thank you.