

Peters Fall

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to that chapter we read together earlier, Luke chapter 22, verse 56.

Luke 22 and verse 56, then a servant girl seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him said, This man also was with him, but he denied it, saying, Woman, I do not know him.

A little later someone else saw him and said, You also are one of them. But Peter said, Man, I am not. And after an interval of about an hour, still another insisted, Certainly this man was also with him, for he too is a Galilean.

And Peter said, Man, I do not know what you are talking about. And immediately while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter and Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.

And he went out and wept bitterly. I'm very aware that Mr. McLeod is doing a series on Luke.

[1 : 12] And it's certainly not my intention to cut in on what he is doing in the mornings. I've calculated that a number of weeks until he reaches this point, by which time perhaps it will be time in any case to return to this subject.

But in any case, when two preachers, I'm sure you know this already, when two preachers preach on the same passage, they always say something different. You're always going to get something new from the Bible.

There's nothing samey about the Bible at all. The Bible is always fresh. And so even if tomorrow you were to hear another sermon on this chapter, it would take it from a different angle altogether. And I've seen this before, of course, between the two of us. Sometimes just by coincidence, we preach on some similar subjects and we always take a different slant on each one.

And then I'm also aware of another thing as well, and that's that very often Peter's denial is spoken about in relation to preparing for a communion.

[2 : 15] And, of course, it's a particularly appropriate theme in terms of examining our own hearts and our own lives in the light of this apostle who denied Jesus, who said, stated publicly that he did not know Jesus.

And by so doing, he betrayed his love for the Lord. He denied his love. He spoke in such a way that undermined his love for the Lord.

And very often we look at that in terms of where we are, in terms of our love for the Lord in relation to the Lord's table. And perhaps it's not very usual to take it as a theme after the Lord's table as we now are this week.

But I think it is. I think it is an entirely appropriate. I hope they'll be able to show you later on how appropriate it is. We have sat at the Lord's table and very often these are precious times in the life of a believer.

We enjoy the fellowship that is associated with communion. We enjoy the services, the preaching, an extra study on God's word. And very often people feel a closeness.

[3 : 42] And certainly there is that awareness. There's that heightened awareness of what Jesus has done for us. And that, of course, is the whole idea of taking communion. And yet there's always got to be that time when you return to your responsibilities and the testings and the trials of living in the world for Jesus.

And that's where the testing is going to come. And I always, the elders will tell you that when somebody comes to the Lord's table for the first time, and we have a discussion with them about why they want to sit at the Lord's table, what God has done for them.

And then I always say exactly the same thing. Maybe they think I'm repeating myself too much. But I think it's really important to say this to everyone who becomes a member for the first time.

This is only the beginning. And this is where the war starts. As soon as you make known your faith in the Lord for the first time, then Satan will come in and he will use every opportunity that he can to bring you down.

Believe me, I know it from my own experience. And it's important to say that because it's important that people should be aware of the kind of life that the Christian life is.

[4 : 58] It's a life of testing and difficulty. And when we're going to be put into the situation that Peter was in, where very easily, in a moment's time, we could end up denying where we belong and who we belong to.

So it's important after a communion season to be aware of the kind of world that we live in. It's important all the time. I'm also aware that some people make an excuse out of Peter.

They say, well, here you have this tremendous disciple. The best known of all the disciples of Jesus was that any of the twelve so knowledgeable as this man, so enthusiastic and so strong as a leader, he went on to lead the church and to preach.

He was filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Acts chapter 2. And then he went on to do great things for the Lord. Well, if a man like that can fall, then surely it's not that bad if I fall.

But that's not the point. The point of the story is how utterly miserable this time was for Peter. And with the benefit of hindsight, if Peter could live that moment again, he would not choose to make the catastrophic mistake that he made.

[6 : 17] Hindsight is a great thing. I think we would all agree with that. Hindsight is always a great thing. And with the benefit of hindsight, we would all do things differently if we could be able to go back in time and to re-decide the bad decisions that we made and take the right road instead of the wrong road.

Many times we've taken the wrong road. If only we could take... We would all choose to take the right road, wouldn't we? And Peter would as well. Believe me, he wouldn't be saying to you tonight, he wouldn't be saying, oh, that's okay if you do what I did, because if I can fall, then you can fall. That's not what he would say. He would say, I made a terrible, terrible mistake. And I brought misery to myself. I brought shame to the name of Jesus and untold harm to those who were around me.

This was not a time that I look back on with any kind of pleasure at all. And so that's why I want us to look at it this evening.

I want us to be prepared in terms of our ongoing Christian life. And as I said this morning, there are many of us who are facing new chapters in our lives, going to places we've never gone before, facing new beginnings in our Christian life.

[7 : 30] Now, whether you are or whether you aren't, it is important to focus our attention on Peter because he's a man like you and I. He's a human being. He's a sinful human being.

He's inclined to fall and fail at any moment in time. In fact, if you take the contrast, it was quite stark. The contrast between Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration.

I'm sure you remember the story when Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain. There he was transfigured. His whole appearance was changed. And there appeared Moses and Elijah.

And they began to speak with Jesus about his crucifixion, his coming crucifixion. And the whole event was so glorious as far as Peter was concerned. He didn't want to be anywhere else. He suggested that they build three tents, one for him, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

He wanted to stay there. He didn't want to go back again because he was so filled with the sense of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. It must have been an absolutely marvelous experience for Peter.

[8 : 32] And it's no wonder he wanted to stay up there. I think perhaps I would have wanted to be up there as well. But yet it was necessary for him to come down and for him to live as an ordinary human being again for Jesus.

You think of the contrast between that moment and the moment that Peter is alone and he's surrounded by a bunch of hostile people and they're asking him awkward questions.

And instead of giving the right answer, he's lying to them. Now, how can that be? How can you one day be on the top of a mountain watching the glory of Jesus Christ?

And then the next moment you're on your own and you're denying that you ever knew Jesus. Can you believe the contrast? And yet, the same thing could happen to any one of us if our circumstances...

Circumstances are very important in terms of the way in which we behave. And that's what I meant this morning when I said it's one thing to be a Christian when you're surrounded by friendly people and people who respect the Christian faith and people who are Christians themselves.

[9 : 42] It's another thing altogether to be alone and to feel that you're alone and to wonder if God is going to help you. And you know that if you say one answer, if you give the wrong answer as far as they're concerned, then that's it.

You're going to lose. You're perhaps going to lose their friendship and they're going to look upon you as a bit of a weirdo and that person's a bit religious and a bit extreme and a bit fanatic and a bit intolerant.

Those are the kind of words that they use for Christians nowadays. And that's the choice that you have to make. Or if you give the answer that they want, then you're one of the crowd.

I can tell you, I know which is the easy thing. It's easy to be one of the crowd, to just melt into the crowd and to just be one of them. And you're kind of hoping that, well, maybe one day I'll get a wee chance to witness, but I'll just wait for it.

But if you don't take the chance at the beginning, what makes you think you're going to take the chance later on? If you're not prepared to stand up now, what makes you think you're going to be able to stand up later on?

[10 : 47] How is it going to get easier? It doesn't. It doesn't get easier at all. By far the easier thing is just to melt into the background, don't let anybody know who you serve or who you belong to and just go along and do the things that they do and just that's it.

Well, you're never going to be up. That you're taking the name of the Lord and you're denying Jesus when you do that. Who do you serve tonight?

Who is the Lord of your life tonight? Are you prepared to stand, to take a stand for him? I'm not saying you become a pest.

I'm not saying you become unpleasant when you're surrounded by people. I'm not saying that you become hostile to people. Of course not. We have to have the meekness and the gentleness of the Lord.

If anyone knew how to live in a hostile world, Jesus did. And all we have to do is to copy him and ask, always ask, what would Jesus do? That's always the question.

[11 : 46] What would Jesus do? How would Jesus live in this world? I want us to just look for the rest of the time this evening at some of the circumstances in which Peter denied, publicly said that he didn't know the Lord.

I want us to look, first of all, at the incredible privilege that Peter enjoyed as a disciple. Of all the 12 apostles, Peter is the best known.

Nobody would deny that. He was also the most bold and the most confident. He also gives the impression of having known more than the rest. I don't know if that's true or not, but certainly he was like, I don't know if you have any experience in teaching a bunch of kids.

There's always one that puts his hand up first. It doesn't matter what question you ask him, he's got his hand up. Before you've even asked the question, he's got his hand up. That's the impression you get for Peter. Peter always wants to know and he always wants to be first and he always wants to be foremost and he always wants to be there in the middle of things.

Now, that was his nature and God used that eventually. God used that to build him into a leader in the church.

[13 : 01] But as well as that, Peter had tremendous privilege. I've already made reference to the time that he was up the mountain. He also saw Jesus walking on the water and that wasn't good enough for Peter.

Peter wanted to walk on the water with Jesus. If it is you, tell me to come to the water, on the water. And Jesus said, come. So he stepped on the water and he actually experienced the power of Jesus in his own self.

Shared in the authority of God over the elements. What an incredible privilege that must have been. What an experience. Can you imagine the experience that that must have been for Peter?

That's another thing that he, this knowledge too, when Jesus asked him, who do men say, who do the people say I am? Some say you're Elijah, some say you're, but who do you say I am?

Said Jesus. And Peter was the one to answer. He said, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. Now, it's easy for you and I to say that because we have our Bibles. We have our knowledge.

[14:03] It wasn't easy for Peter to say that. He had come to that conclusion by watching Jesus and by figuring out for himself that this could not be anyone else but God in the flesh, the Messiah.

So he declared it when Jesus asked him, who do you say I am? You are the Christ. So in all of these things, Peter was incredibly privileged. And yet he is the very one who's sitting at the fireside three times declaring that he doesn't even know Jesus.

Isn't that shocking? Now, let me tell you, I'm not looking down on Peter. I don't think I would have done any better. I don't know. I just don't know what I would have done.

I recognize in Peter myself. That's why it's here in the Bible. Not for us to criticize Peter, but for us to see that if he can fall, then anyone can fall.

And it's not just a young Christian that can fall. Young Christians are faced with particular types of temptation. But older Christians are faced with other types of temptation.

[15:24] which are just as dangerous and they're just as liable. Don't ever think for a moment that because you're a certain age or because you have a certain position in the church, because you're an office bearer or a minister or a member or a Christian of 60 years, that somehow or other that you can't fall or you're less likely to fall.

That is not the case. And if I can be personal, if I look at my own life, I say this honestly, the older I get in the Christian life, the more I am aware of the danger that I face every day and that I could fall. I say that in all honesty. You might be shocked at hearing that from a minister, but I'm telling you, that's the truth. And just as the grace of God alone that keeps me and you from falling.

So let's not ever rely on our experience or our knowledge or our privilege. Sometimes it's the most privileged people of all that fall so catastrophically and more so than a person who doesn't have that kind of privilege.

And there's another thing, of course, as well, that we tend not to take people's circumstances into account. The person who, that God says unto you, much has been given, much will be required.

[17:00] And so God is expecting more from you and I if we have a privileged background, for example, than he does. Now I'm not saying, I'm not saying that the person who doesn't have a background is not accountable.

Of course, everyone, we're all accountable to the Lord. But isn't it interesting how sometimes the ones who shine for the Lord are the last people that you would expect.

That's a rebuke. It's a rebuke to all of us. But then, I want us to look also at how Peter sinned despite the promise that he made to the Lord.

If you go back to verse 33, Peter said to the Lord, Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death. Jesus said, I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you deny three times that you know me.

There's Peter promising that he will lay down his life for the Lord. Well, what's wrong with that, you might say? Well, surely the man was so consumed with his love and devotion to Jesus that he said what he could and that he meant it at the time.

[18:06] I have no doubt whatsoever but that he meant what he said at the time. I have no doubt either that he loved the Lord with all his heart and that at that moment in time that he was willing to lay down his life for the Lord.

If somebody had come at that moment and said, right, Peter, you're going to lay down your life for Jesus, he would have done it. No doubt whatsoever. But that's not the time of testing because that comes later on.

You see, what you say today will be tested, not right now, it will be tested later on when your circumstances change, when you don't have the same confidence and when you don't feel the same as you do just now.

Life changes from one day to the next and the testing comes when life is when we are weaker. Besides, he didn't really know what he was saying when he said, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

I don't know if he realized what he was saying at that moment in time. You see, he was rooting his promise on his own love for the Lord and he was saying, well, because I love Jesus so much, I am prepared to go to prison and to death for him.

[19:30] That was his logic. What he did, what he failed to take into account was that the love that we have for Jesus doesn't arise out of us at all.

None of us by nature tonight is able to love Jesus and if you're able to say, I love Jesus, you can only do that because Jesus has first loved you but Peter made the classic mistake of imagining that somehow his love, his own love for Jesus was strong enough to get him through.

It's not. Neither is yours and neither mine. What is strong enough to bring us from one day to another is God's love for us and we must never, ever lose sight of that order.

I love him because he first loved me and you see that if you go on, if you carry on, you see that in Peter's life as well.

He was always reluctant to accept the grace of Jesus alone. For example, when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, he went round with a basin.

[20 : 45] John chapter 13, he went round with a basin and he began to wash the disciples' feet feet. And when he came to Peter, Peter was absolutely outraged.

He said, you cannot wash my feet, you must. He didn't understand what Jesus was doing. In other words, there was a reluctance to accept the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

There's something within each one of us that just struggles to have a part in our own salvation and struggles against accepting God's grace and his grace alone.

Do you know why? Because in order to do so, we have to accept that we have nothing to bring to God. We have absolutely nothing to bring to God.

Maybe that's the reason why you're not a Christian tonight. Because you can't get your head around this. That the Bible is telling you in order to be saved, you have to come to the point where you admit you are lost, completely and utterly bankrupt, dead in trespasses and sins.

[22 : 00] And it's when a person comes to realize that that they come to discover the marvel of God's grace. It horrifies me the way people talk about God's love as if he owes us something.

God loves me, of course he does. God is kind, of course he does, of course he is. A person like that hasn't begun to understand what the gospel is.

The gospel begins with my utter rottenness and God's perfect holiness. And it's when you come to discover these two things and how poles apart they are that you come to discover the marvel of God's grace.

And there's always something within us that wants to have a hand in our own salvation. Even Peter there you can see a little bit of a wee semblance of something struggling within him not to accept God's grace and that and this was the way of course in which the Lord was teaching him the hard way that he had to see his own utter failure and his own bankruptcy his own bankruptcy I should say.

And so that what about Jesus' prediction? Jesus' prediction in verse 31 Simon, Simon, behold Satan demands to have you that he might sift you like wheat.

[23 : 31] And Jesus said I tell you Peter the cock will not crow this day until you deny me three times that you know me.

Jesus promised him that he would deny the Lord. That must have been a huge shock to Peter.

It must have been very embarrassing to him at the same time if the other disciples were listening because there was him on the one hand insisting I tell you that I'm ready to go to prison and ready to lay down my life for you.

And Jesus on the other hand is telling him the very opposite. Not only are you not going to lay down your life for me, you're going to deny that you even know me. It must have been hugely embarrassing for Peter.

Peter. And instead I rather think that as a reaction to what Jesus said Peter instead of stopping and thinking and allowing Jesus' words to be absorbed into his heart that he fought against them and said well that can't be right.

[24 : 47] It can't be right. Problems always come when we question God's word to us. And the way to be prepared for times when our faith is going to be tested is as I said this morning by living by God's word and by allowing God's word to enter into our hearts and by obeying God's word and by accepting what God's word says about ourselves.

If Peter had only accepted the words of Jesus he would have been fully prepared for any eventuality and he would have been prepared for that moment when the servants asked him are you not one of his followers?

Instead of that he had ignored what Jesus said. He had put it to one side. So that meant he was not prepared. It's strange isn't it how we always at the time for repentance after the event.

When Peter actually denied Jesus and when the cock threw and when Jesus looked at Peter that's when Peter's repentance began.

He remembered Jesus' words and he broke down. He wept bitterly. Isn't it strange why did he not repent beforehand? He knew exactly what if he had listened to Jesus he should have known what he was going to do.

[26 : 25] Jesus promised. Jesus doesn't make promises and not keep them. Jesus doesn't make prophecies and not keep them. He should have known exactly what the danger was and instead of doing that but it's always the same isn't it with temptation and with sin.

We know we're in danger. We know how likely we are to take the wrong road and yet is it not true that we often choose the wrong road only to regret it afterwards and to have to come back to the Lord in utter misery and maybe tonight one thing that we can draw out of this story is that we need to be prepared for the battle that stands in front of each one of us by listening and by being aware of the danger that each one of us is in listening to the Lord Jesus Christ I can't help thinking of Peter's prayerlessness as well remember when he was in the garden just before how Peter and James and John had gone into the garden with Jesus and Jesus had gone off by himself to pray and remember how he prayed father if it would be your will let this cup pass from me he all of a sudden saw the horror of what lay ahead of him but when he went back he found his disciples sleeping and Jesus said they should have been watching and praying lest they enter into temptation and it's no coincidence that Peter having not prayed in the garden was then put into a position where he fell and where he denied his Lord prayerlessness is a disaster for any Christian just like I said this morning about reading our Bible it is disastrous to shove the Bible into the background but it is also disastrous to neglect those times of the Lord with with the Lord in prayer which strengthens us and which gives us the authority and the confidence to face every day of the Lord.

knowing that we've knowing that we've knowing that we've spoken to the Lord that we've drawn strength from him that we've committed everything to him.

Let me ask you this. Life is hugely complicated isn't it? I know how complicated life is and yet we always try and work out our problems by ourselves.

Wake up in the morning we get dressed and the first thing we start thinking about is well what am I going to do today? And if you do pray you begin to say Lord protect me Lord keep me Lord help me Lord be with me all of these things that we all say I'm not saying they're wrong why don't you the next time instead of using all of these general phrases why don't you as you're thinking of all the things that you're going to do that day of all the decisions that you have to make of all the activities you're going to be involved in why don't you bring them to him in all their detail and spend time with the Lord bring him into everything every single detail of your life.

[29 : 51] You know once you do that you end up spending far more time with the Lord than you did not than you did beforehand. But that's real prayer real prayer is when we take it to the Lord and when we are aware of the imminent danger that faces every single one of us particularly if we think that we stand the apostle says if you think you stand take heed beware lest you fall and if only Peter had known and been aware as he should have been of how near the danger was and how in a moment of time he was going to commit this catastrophic mistake then he would I'm sure have it a second thought but then as we said before hindsight is such a great thing isn't it we would all love the benefit of hindsight well we have we've got the benefit of Peter's hindsight here in this story we've got the benefit of being able to look back over a real person someone who truly loved the Lord and who had every intention of living for him just like you have and yet he came to that point where his faith was tested and where at first he fell and maybe for you and I that will be the case as well we've all fallen at some point in our lives but Peter was brought back because the Lord loved him and those who the Lord loves he rescues he doesn't sometimes doesn't do it in the way that we expect but the Lord always comes after just as he did here beginning with that look verse 61 and the Lord turned and looked at Peter and I want tonight to leave you with these words and I want you to imagine tonight what kind of look that was you know people expression

I don't know how many muscles people have in their face they have hundreds of muscles in their face and we can put on different expressions that reflect how we're feeling or what kind of experience we're having what kind of day we're having whether we're happy or sad or perplexed or whatever and a person's look can tell everything and I don't think there's any coincidence that we're told specifically by the apostle here that Jesus turned and he looked at Peter what kind of look was that you know the expression if looks could kill you know what people mean by that well that's not

the kind of look it was at all it wasn't the look of rage it was the look of loving disappointment by the very person who Peter knew was the center of his life and the one he had come to believe him as the Messiah he had now let him down he had denied him he had lied what kind of friendship is that what kind of support is that

Jesus is just about to be condemned to death and his own friends well most of them have left him and the only one that's out there is denying that he even knew him which is best denial or desertion I don't know but I believe that that look stayed with Peter for the rest of his life and I would love for you tonight to think about what that look would have been like I would love for you tonight as a Christian to remember that look and don't ever forget it because that is the look that the living Lord Jesus will give to us when we fall it's not a look that will condemn or hate or kill or destroy it's a look that is always loving and perhaps it was the love in that look that was so painful more painful than anything else to Peter that despite what he had just said that this Lord he could tell just from his face that nothing was going to separate him from the love and that made his deed all the more the more awful because he had let down the Lord who he had known and he had loved and that's what it is that's the bottom line and that's what faces you and I tonight but let's make sure that we remember the Lord that we serve the Lord who has done everything for us who has loved us and given himself for us but there's just one more thing I want us to think about this evening there were two men who sinned against Jesus that night there was Peter we've just looked at him he was a disciple and he denied the Lord after Jesus rose again he restored

Peter that was what he made a point of doing the first thing he did when he rose from the dead he restored Peter back into fellowship with himself he made sure that Peter knew for sure that he continued to love him and that he still had a work for him to do but there was another man that night and his name was Judas Judas had been with the disciples all along he had the same privilege as Peter he knew he saw he saw Jesus and the miracles that he did he knew in his heart of hearts that Jesus was the son of God he was exposed to everything that Peter was exposed to but he that same time he betrayed Jesus because the more that he knew about Jesus the more he determined in his own heart that he wasn't going to serve him that he wasn't going to worship him and that he wasn't going to live for him see there's a world of difference between a believing loving falling failing Peter and a conniving disbelieving determined Judas determined that the more he heard of Jesus the more he wasn't going to surrender to him I hope that that's not you tonight I come to you tonight as someone who has fallen myself and who has often strayed in my mind in my heart and I I know what it is like as you do if you love the Lord but I know this that despite all my failures that I love the Lord because he first loved me and I know his grace towards me is a grace that never fails do you know that love because there's only one or the other you're either a Peter a failing fumbling Christian or a Judas who has never believed in Jesus

[37 : 30] I hope that tonight that might change as you listen to the Lord once again drawing you and inviting you to know himself and his forgiveness the forgiveness that Peter experienced and the forgiveness that God offers to all those who trust in him let's pray Father in heaven once again we come and we ask that you will show us ourselves in the light of your word we pray that your word will find a place in our hearts we pray that your word will speak deeply and solemnly to each one of us and that your word will encourage us as well and that you will show us Lord how to obey you and how to live by faith in Jesus name Amen