

# Peter's Backsliding

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Preacher: Mr David Macdonald

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as we look to the Lord to help us and to lead us and guide us in our thoughts, turn back with me to Mark chapter 14.

And I would like us this morning to take for a text words which we find in verse 54. Mark chapter 14 and verse 54.

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.

Especially these words, Peter had followed him at a distance. I would like us this morning to study the theme of what's commonly called backsliding.

It is a common phrase both in the Bible and in our Christian circles today. And I would like us to really especially look at the event brought before us by Mark this morning.

[ 1 : 05 ] The denial of Peter, the backsliding of Peter. But before we do that, I just want to see a few things. First of all, in order to be backslidden, you have to be a Christian.

Now that might sound obvious. But what we're studying here this morning is not someone who's close to the Lord in a sense of close to becoming a Christian.

It's not someone who's had a few good experiences and is close to trusting himself in the Lord.

We're studying here this morning someone who is a Christian.

Peter is a disciple. He is someone who has put his trust in the Lord. But for one reason or for another, he finds himself at a distance to the Lord.

And that's important because when we come in our own Christian circles to talk about backsliding, we must first of all know that we're talking about someone who is saved.

[ 2 : 04 ] You see, in order to be backslidden, in order to fall back or slide back from something, you have to have had that something in the first place.

And the second thing I want to say about this is that it in no way affects Peter's position as a Christian. Let me give an example of this. If we have a small child and a father who for one reason or for another, they fall out.

And for a few days, they may not talk and they might be at a distance. Now, that child is still the son of the father. He is still the father's son.

But for one reason or for another, the fellowship with his father is broken. And that's really what backsliding is like. It doesn't affect our standing as a Christian, our position as being sons and daughters of God.

But what it does affect is our fellowship with him, our fellowship with God. And the second thing I want to say about that this morning is that although we're studying Peter, I don't want us to be unnecessarily harsh on Peter.

[ 3 : 14 ] You see, we could be studying many great men from the Bible this morning. We could be looking at David in his sinning with Bathsheba. We could be looking at Noah in his drunkenness.

We could be looking at Moses and his murdering. You see, it just so happens that this morning we're looking at Peter. And Peter was at times a man of great faith. We'll see that.

But in this moment, he comes before us as a great example to you and to me. Because if you're anything like me, you can see in Peter and in Peter's denial so many similarities to ourselves in how so often we let our Lord down.

And I want us to see this morning that backsliding is a process. You see, it doesn't just happen. We're not talking about an instant sin. We're not talking about Peter doing one thing wrong.

I want us to see that backsliding follows a process. And we can see in Peter's life how that develops. You see, if we look back, he had moments of great faith.

[ 4 : 21 ] I think of the moment when Christ comes to him walking on the waves. And Peter says, Lord, if it is you, bid me to come. And Jesus says, come.

And Peter, in that moment of faith, he steps out of the boat and he walks on water towards his Lord. And he could never have done that without great faith in God.

I think, too, in John chapter 6, when people are leaving him and Jesus says to the disciples, will you also go away? And Peter stands up in front of all the disciples and he says, to whom else can we go?

That is a moment of great faith for Peter. But we notice how things begin to change. And perhaps it's first noted in Matthew chapter 16, where Peter has just confessed Jesus as Christ.

But then Jesus begins to teach about his death and his resurrection. And remarkably, it tells us Peter takes Jesus to one side and he says, it actually says he rebukes Jesus.

[ 5 : 26 ] And he says to him, Lord, far be it from you. This will never happen. You see, in that moment, when Jesus is teaching about what must happen to him, Peter doesn't understand.

And he takes Jesus to one side and he says, Lord, this won't happen like that. You've got this wrong. And you see how that develops in the life of Peter.

In Mark chapter 14, this text we have before us, when the disciples are sitting around at the table.

And Jesus says to them, one of you will betray me.

And it says they said one to another, every one of them said, is it I? Peter himself said, is it I? Will I betray you?

Now that's remarkable. This is a man who was just walking on the water. Or this is a man who was saying that to whom else can we go? Now he's saying, will it be me that lets you down?

[ 6 : 25 ] But there's other moments when he shows ignorance too. You remember when Jesus is washing the feet of the disciples and he's coming around and he comes to Peter and Peter says, no way.

You will not wash my feet. That is not the way it is. And you see he's ignorant to the way that Jesus is in his humility. And then in the Garden of Gethsemane, we read here, Mark just says one of the disciples.

But in the other accounts, we know that it was Peter that when the high priest's servant comes towards Jesus, Peter takes the sword and strikes off the ear.

You see in that moment, he's in absolute anger as to what's happening to Jesus. And then we read in the words of our text, Peter followed at a distance.

You see how the process works, my friend, but I don't really need to tell that to you because we can see it in our own lives. If you're a Christian here today, perhaps you can look back to times in your life where you were walking hand in hand with the Lord, so to speak, where if he asked you to get out of the boat and walk on the waves, you would go because your faith in him was so strong.

[ 7 : 42 ] If people said, will you follow anyone else? You would say, how can I? I love my Lord and my faith is in him. But perhaps as the devil begins to tempt you and as sin starts to enter in, perhaps he says to you, is this the way your life is going to go?

Perhaps you had a plan for your life. Perhaps you knew where you were going to work, where you were going to live, what you were going to do, who you were going to do it with. And perhaps one by one, God enters in with providences and it's changing things and the devil comes to you and says, is this really the life you signed up for?

Or are you really wanting to be a Christian if it's like this? And he begins confusion in you just the same way as he began it in Peter. And perhaps you, like Peter, know of times when you're ignorant when it comes to the church and me with you.

When we look at the church and we say the church should be doing this and that and the next thing and these people should be saved and they should be saved in this way, at this time, in this way.

And God doesn't respond in that way. And we begin to say, well, what's going on here? This isn't what I expected. This isn't what I wanted. And before long, you're angry with the Lord, just like Peter was.

[ 9 : 04 ] And you're saying, this isn't right. This isn't the life that I thought I would have as a Christian. And then before long, you, like Peter, are following at a distance.

And I want us to see in Peter's life at this moment five things that I believe we can see in our own lives when we too backslide from Christ and follow him at a distance.

The first thing I want us to see is a chasm. It tells us in the words of our text that he followed at a distance. What that literally means is that there was a division.

There was a chasm between where he was and where Jesus was. And you know, if we know Peter at all, we know that that was never the case with Peter.

If anybody could say, I know the Lord, Peter could. If anybody could say, I know what he does, the way he does it, when he does it, Peter could. Why? Because Peter always followed him so closely.

[10:07] Jesus took Peter and the sons of Zebedee with him wherever he went. And Peter was always following him closely. And that perfect closeness with the Lord rules out any opportunity for a chasm.

It means that there's no chance that Peter could follow him at a distance. And you know, when that's the case, it rules out any divisions. You know, but we see from the very beginning of the Bible that the devil tries to make divisions.

He tries to make chasms. You remember, in the Garden of Eden, it tells us that man walked with God in the cool of the day. And there you have a picture of perfect unity, perfect fellowship, God with man, and even man with fellow, man with Adam and Eve together.

They were the perfect couple. They were together. She was the perfect partner for man. But then the devil comes in and he tempts Eve. And Eve and Adam both fall in sin.

And then when they see their sin, they hide from God. And what does God say? Genesis chapter 3, Adam, where are you? And you know, it's not that God doesn't know where he is.

[11:20] It's that God is saying to him, Adam, why are you no longer at my side? Why is this fellowship now broken? Why is there a chasm between where you are and where I am?

And you see the division in mankind too. We must always note that. It wasn't just between man and God. Note what man says. God says to Adam, why did you do this?

Adam says, the woman you gave me. Is that not remarkable? Moments before, she was the perfect partner. Now she's the reason why Adam sins.

But you know, we shouldn't see it as a surprise because in our own lives, when the devil comes in and he tempts us and he says, this Christian life isn't what you expected. It's not what you want. It's not everything you dreamed. He begins to give you these temptations so that you follow the Lord at a distance. And there's a chasm between where you are and where he is.

[12:19] And that forms a chasm between you and your fellow brothers and sisters. Do you not find that? Oh, I don't want to go to the prayer meeting tonight. I don't want to go to church this Lord's Day.

I don't want to go to the fellowships or host the fellowships anymore. There's a chasm between you and fellow brothers. Why? Because there's a chasm between you and the Lord.

That's what Peter experienced. But the second thing he experienced was a cold heart. You see, in the words of our text in verse 54, it tells us that he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.

And you know, what's remarkable about this is that Peter is here looking for heat outside of him that he doesn't find within him.

You see, he's looking for warmth in the world that he once found at Jesus. Let me describe to you what I mean. You see, there was a time when Peter's heart burned within him.

[13:24] I don't need to tell you that. You know that to be true. You imagine when, I return to it again, in John chapter 6, when Jesus says to them, will you also go away?

Peter says, to whom else? How do you imagine Peter saying that, friends? Do you think he was whispering these words? Well, to whom else can we go? Do you think he was merely in doubt saying these words?

Well, we can't do anything else. We might as well just follow you now. No, this was Peter's heart burning within him. And he stands up in absolute passion before the disciples.

And he says, to whom else can we go? What we have with Jesus is better than anything we could have anywhere else. And why was he saying that? He was saying it because his heart was burning within him.

Because he knew this fellowship with the Lord. It made it so that his heart was burning for the Lord. Is that not what the two on the road to Emmaus said? Did not our hearts burn within us when he spoke to us along the way?

[14:32] And you know, friends, when we follow him at a distance, it means two things. And you know what I'm going to say before I even say it and you're going to tell me it's obvious and it is obvious.

The two things we no longer give time to is prayer and reading our Bibles. But you know, my friend, what makes our hearts burn within us is the same thing that made Peter's heart burn and the same thing that made the two on the road's heart burn within them.

It is the word of God, my friend. This word hasn't changed. It's still living. It's still sharper than any two-edged sword and it still makes your heart burn as it does mine.

I don't need to tell you these things when you're at fellowships and you're there at the communions and you're getting the word and it's coming to you and you can't get enough of it and you're saying, did my heart burn within me?

And what does that do? It causes you to go to God in prayer. You see, the great thing about fellowship for Peter with the Lord was constant dialogue. Jesus spoke to him.

[15:44] Peter spoke to Jesus. My friend, we should have that every single day. As we read God's word, he speaks to us and in turn it forces us to go and speak to him.

That's what makes our hearts burn, but you see when there's a chasm, when there's a distance between you and the Lord, it means that you sacrifice this and I sacrifice this and we no longer have that dialogue and so our heart is cold and so we look for warmth in other things.

That's what Peter's doing here. He's at this fire of the world because his heart is cold and he's looking for satisfaction somewhere else.

And you know, you imagine what that scene is like as they're all sitting around, who's there with him? There's Peter, there's a high priest's servants, there's all these people who have just arrested Jesus.

You imagine, you imagine what the conversations are like. We finally got him, that man who thought he was the son of God. Now he's nothing more than a prisoner and they're mocking Jesus and Peter is sitting there and he's privy to it all.

[17:03] And it all affects Peter's heart. But I don't need to tell you that because if you're a Christian, you know what that's like. Do you know what it's like to be sitting with a group of people who mock the Lord, who criticize the Lord and say, I can't believe you believe in him.

And all of that affects your heart when your heart is cold and there's a distance between you and the Lord. And it leads us on to the third thing that we see with Peter and ourselves.

It leads us on to a confession. you see this little girl, this servant girl comes to Peter when he's warming himself at this fire and he's listening to all this conversation and there's a distance between himself and the Lord and this little girl says, you were one of them.

And the first time Peter says, just be quiet. And she comes again and she says, no, you were definitely one of them. And Peter says, no, I wasn't. I do not understand what you're saying.

Don't talk to me. But the bystanders have been listening to this, the fellow people around this fire listening to this little girl and something begins to twig with them and they come and they say, you're a Galilean, you are one of them.

[18:23] And Peter invokes curses, he swears and he says, I do not know the man. Do you know, my friend, I find this one of the most difficult and saddest parts of the Bible because Peter did know the man.

Peter knew him better than most. But in this moment when there's this distance between himself and the Lord, when his heart is cold through lack of fellowship and dialogue with him and the effect of the world upon his heart, Peter in this moment fearing man says, I do not know him.

It's not that I've never been with him. It's not that I haven't heard of him. I don't even know him at all. This was the man who was saying, supposing I have to die for you, I'll go.

Now he says, I don't even know him at all. But again, I wonder if we're a Christian, if we know just what that's like. We know what it's like to talk a big game.

If we know what it's like to say, oh, someone asks me about my faith, I'll be able to tell them. I'll be able to tell them all about Jesus. But then there's a distance between you and the Lord.

[19:44] You follow him at a distance after the devil tempts you, confuses you, makes you ignorant, and then you, in your distance, get a cold heart through lack of dialogue, and then you find yourself in that situation, in the middle of the world's fire, and they say to you, you, I thought you were a Christian.

And in that moment when you have the opportunity to nail your colors to the mast and me with you, the devil gets the better of us, fear overcomes us, and we say, you've got it wrong.

I do not know the man. And my friend, that is the most heartbreaking moment of all, because Jesus never said that of Peter.

And you know, if you're a Christian in here today, you'll know that the most heartbreaking moment of that is that although you and me with you let him down every single day in so many different ways, he's never once let you down.

He's never once let me down. And as Peter is there telling that he does not know the man, Jesus is about to go to the cross to die for Peter's sins.

[ 21 : 06 ] Oh, my friend, in that moment it is heartbreaking, but that's what backsliding does. It brings us to the moment when we say, I don't think I even know him at all.

But in the truth, it is you do know him because he's died for you. And then that leads us on to the fourth thing, and that's a collapse.

Verse 72, after denying him, in verse 71, it says the cock crowed a second time and Peter remembered what Jesus said to him.

And then the very last words of this chapter, Peter broke down and wept. And you know, my friend, this is the climax moment.

This is the climax moment of backsliding. It's the moment when it all comes home, when Peter realizes what he's done, when he said before, I'll do anything for you, I'll do everything for you.

[ 22 : 08 ] Now he's done the very thing that Jesus told him he would do. And Peter breaks down and weeps. And you know, my friend, if you're a Christian who's ever gone through what Peter's gone through, you know what that's like.

You know that moment when you realize what you've done to the Lord. And for you, spiritually speaking, you break down and weep.

But you know, Mark doesn't mention it, but in Luke's account of what happens here, there is a remarkable mention to what Jesus does at this moment.

Luke 22, verse 61, the moment this realization comes on Peter, it tells us Jesus turned and looked on Peter.

And you know, my friend, that's the grace in the situation. And that's when you know that you're still one of his. Because in that moment when Peter has denied him, in that moment when he was ready to forget the Lord altogether, the Lord doesn't forget him.

[ 23 : 24 ] And Jesus turns and looks on him. And you know what that's like. You know what that's like because in that moment, the climax moment of backsliding, the only thing that brings home to you the fact that you've done anything wrong is the fact that you catch the eyes of the grace of the Saviour.

In some way or other, something brings home to you the fact that he is still yours. And you know the most heartbreaking thing for Peter in this moment is that he knows it should never have been like this at all.

Peter breaks down and weeps because he knows he should never have been at a distance to Jesus. Peter breaks down and weeps because he knows his heart should never have been cold. Peter breaks down and weeps because he knows he should never have confessed to not knowing him when all along he knew him. And you know my friend, that's the thing that gets you and gets me.

In the moment when we backslide, when we sin against the Lord, the thing that gets us the most is that we know it should never have happened.

[ 24 : 45 ] We should never have allowed ourselves to be at a distance to the Lord. We should never have allowed our hearts to grow cold. We should never have ever said that we do not know him when in truth we know him as our Lord and Savior.

But you know the fact that Jesus looks to Peter leads us on to the final thing I want us to see and that's a conversion. Because you see Jesus knew all along this was going to happen.

In Luke 22 at verse 31 when Jesus is prophesying that Peter will deny him he says to Peter when you have returned strengthen your brethren.

And what's remarkable about that is that the word return literally means turn around. It's the word that we use today for conversion.

For being turned around to Jesus. And although we may use it about someone who's come to faith for the first time, perhaps it would be better to be spoken of each and every one of us when we stumble and we fall and the Lord picks us up.

[ 26 : 04 ] You see, we're born again once but we need to be picked up by our Lord so many times and we need to be returned to our Lord so many times because if you're anything like me, you let him down so so often and he comes to you and he has to pick you up.

But what's remarkable about this is the knowledge. The knowledge that Jesus had that Peter was going to do this and I believe it only comes home when in John's gospel in chapter 21 it tells us of that great breakfast by the sea.

You remember when Jesus is resurrected and he comes back to the disciples and he comes to Peter for the first time since Peter has fallen and he says to Peter Simon son of John do you love me?

Three times he asks Peter but what's remarkable is Peter's last reply in verse 17 he says to the Lord Lord you know and you know I find these words remarkable because what Peter is admitting in this moment is the fact that Jesus knew him all along he knew that Peter would go wrong he prophesied that Peter would let him down and all along he knew this and what Peter is saying is Lord you know that I love you and Peter's confession is all the more marvelous when we think about what he's just gone through and what Peter is basically saying is Lord you know me you know that I love you but the only reason I do love you is because you first loved me you first knew me and what's remarkable about that is that you never forgot me what's remarkable about my love for you Jesus is that now I'm realizing it now I know it but before I was letting you down but Jesus you never let me down you know that I love you and my love fades and grows it gets dim and it gets strong but Lord you've loved me all along and my friend that's what's remarkable for the backslidden Christian as they return to the Lord you and I must come to him and we must say Lord you know me you know my sins my faults of youth you know me inside out you know my thoughts before I even think them you know me when I'm going to let you down and you still love me the same and you and I like Peter can come to him and say Lord if we're his we can say

[ 29 : 11 ] Lord you know that I love you but the only reason that I do is because you first loved me and you never stopped and you know my friend if you're a backslidden Christian in here today you don't need me to tell you about it you see in Peter a chasm that you see in your own life between yourself and the Lord you see in Peter a cold heart that you see in yourself through lack of dialogue with him you see in Peter a confession that you too make about him in your lowest points you see in Peter a spiritual collapse that you see in yourself but my friend I want you to see this the hope of every backslidden Christian is that Jesus will always bring you back why because his love for you is constant and never ending perhaps you're here as a non-Christian

I don't want to miss you out this morning my friend perhaps you're able you can't go along with Peter and say you love him but perhaps you can go along with a lot of what's been said perhaps you know there's a chasm in your life too perhaps you know there's a distance between you and the Lord perhaps there was never closeness before but you know there's a distance perhaps you know your heart is cold it's maybe never been filled that void in your heart that you know is there it might never have been filled your heart might never have been on fire for him but it's certainly cold today perhaps you know what it's like and you can say with Peter I do not know the man and you're speaking truthfully but perhaps for you you're saying this morning I wish I knew him well my friend the remarkable thing for you too is that if you come to him you will find him too and if you come to him with the words of

Peter and say Lord you know me you know my sins my faults my failings and although I've never been yours before I want to be yours now and remarkably he will accept you as he has accepted me and Peter and everyone like him and he brings you into the fold perhaps you are here and you're not back slidden but you can remember what it's like and each and every one of us can look back on times in our lives like this and the remarkable thing is that Peter would go on to be used mightily by the Lord what I find amazing about that is that Peter never deserved it he never merited it neither do you and I but the word of Jesus comes to you and to me and restores us and through him and by his grace and his power he can use us in the future for remarkable things in the same way as he used Peter because the amazing thing if you're a

Christian this morning my friend is that although you may stumble and slip perhaps even every day the amazing thing is that you'll never fall away because if you're his you're his forever if you've been

saved by him you're saved by him forever and everyone whom he has he has never lost one ever and neither will he he saved Peter because Peter was his and he'll save you and I when we slip and we stumble because we're his and we go on every single day to live and to praise and magnify his name as the God who dealt with us in grace and in love the Lord to whom we can come like Peter and say Lord you know that I love you because you first loved me and you never stopped amen let's pray our gracious

God we give you thanks that in your word we find examples of faith like Peter men and women whom we can come to and we can draw so many similarities and comparisons from we give you thanks that each and every one of us is unique and each and every one of us has been made by you and if we are yours we have been made for you we pray oh Lord that you would bless us and that you would keep us as your people we pray that you would restore us if we slipped we pray that you would enable us to stand if we fallen and we pray that you would enable us to have a voice of witness and of truth that says I know the man because you have saved us because you have died for us and because you gave yourself for us we give you thanks for your wondrous love may we always come before you and give you praise for it and never cease to do so because of the wonders of your grace for Christ's sake

[ 34 : 59 ] Amen our concluding psalm this morning is psalm 45 from the sing psalms you'll find that on page 58 psalm psalm psalm 45 on page 58 will sing from verse 13 to the end of the psalm this is a beautiful picture of the bride of Christ that is the church who are brought before the king that is God himself and what's remarkable about this is that on this day when this account will take place that church will be made up of men and women boys and girls who like Peter have stumbled and slipped but have been restored by the God who loves verse 13 in glorious gold embroidered robes the princess waits within in richly ornamented clothes she's brought before the king attendant maidens follow her and so to you are led they enter and with great delight the palace courts they tread in places where your father stood your sons will take their stand you'll make them princes of the realm to rule throughout the land

I will perpetuate your fame through everlasting days therefore the nations of the world will ever sing your praise will sing these words to God what the princess Tim of the She's brought before the King.

Our tender maidens follow us, and so to you are led.

They enter on with great delight the powerless courts they tread.

In places with your Father stood, your sons will take their stands.

[ 38 : 01 ] You'll lead them princes of the realm to rule throughout the land.

I will perpetuate your faith through everlasting days.

Therefore the nations of the world will help and sing your praise.

We'll close in prayer. Our gracious God, we pray that each and every one of us here would be on that number on the day when your church is brought before you. And we pray, O Lord, that we would all know the love and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ for ourselves.

Bring us to our homes in safety. Bring us out this evening if it is your will. And to your name be all the praise, the honour and the glory, now and forevermore. Amen.