

Confessing Sin and Following the Lord

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[0 : 00] To begin with, you may wish to open again to Luke chapter 5.

I want to draw attention especially to Peter's response to what the Lord had done for them.

His response in verse 8, Luke chapter 5, verse 8. When Simon Peter saw it, that is the amazing catch, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

To begin with, we are together in these days to prepare for communion, which we hope to share together, to celebrate, to remember the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus, God willing, tomorrow morning.

It is an occasion to remember him. He said, do this as often as you eat this bread, drink this cup, you remember him.

[1 : 19] And we also declare him, declare him as our life and hope. We declare his death, proclaim his death, show his death until he comes.

It's a reminder that he alone, Christ Jesus, by his death and by his rising again, only he grants us freedom from our sins.

That is the only way in heaven and earth and all the ages of the earth that any single human being may gain freedom from their sins, our sins.

And it's gaining freedom from our sins that then gives us freedom. I was going to say from, or perhaps best, in the middle of every other pressure in life.

The pressures will still be there, but we will not be bound by them if we know the freedom from sin that he gives us. It's through that freedom from sin that we enter into new life.

[2 : 28] And that's what it means, is to find the way of escape and freedom from so many other things that bind us. You might remember Paul writing to the Philippians in chapter 4.

He says, don't be anxious for anything. You know how binding anxieties can be. But bring them by prayer and supplication.

God will give you release. He will give you that peace that passes understanding and guards your heart and mind.

That's what I'm talking about. It's a new life in the Lord Jesus. But then, I want to come at that this evening. I'm very struck by the way that the Lord deals with Simon Peter.

We perhaps look at it first and we think, well, how does Simon Peter respond to the Lord? It's more about what Jesus is doing with Peter. We can learn a great deal, I think.

[3 : 35] And especially such a time as this. And perhaps especially if you are here with a fascination and no certainty.

Perhaps you are wishing that you might take part in the Lord's Supper. Perhaps you are one of those who thinks, perhaps many have thought in times past, I'm not good enough for that.

How could I claim acquaintance with this Jesus? How can I say, I believe? I think that's very much like Peter.

And all of us would do well to reflect on how the Lord deals with him. Between Luke chapter 5 and John chapter 21.

There are just two things I want to highlight this evening. And the first is confessing sin. And the second is following the Lord. So let's talk about confessing sin first of all.

[4 : 45] That is how Peter makes his response to the Lord. But let me first, before I look at Peter, for a moment. The Bible tells us something.

And friend, that has to be enough for you and for me. If the Bible tells me something, tells you something, never forget it is God's word. He is the God who establishes the stars.

We sang of it. And he is the one who speaks to us in the Bible. And if we read anything in the Bible, we have no reason whatsoever to doubt it.

And the Bible tells us that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us, purify us from all unrighteousness.

There is no question in that statement that God will forgive. The if is whether I will confess my sins.

[5 : 54] There are no exclusions there. Except any who choose not to confess your sins.

But if you confess your sins, and it may not be a reasoned kind of confession, it may be a desperate confession such as Peter's.

If you confess your sins, the Bible assures you this is what God will do. And we have no reason whatsoever to doubt that.

Not one of us. It's God himself who says it. Maybe Peter hadn't heard that quite so clearly. I suspect he's heard it, but not clearly.

It's there in the Psalms. It's there in the law of God. It's there in the prophets. If you confess your sins, I will forgive.

[7 : 00] Psalm 32, for a start, we sang it together. Peter would have known those words. But he's a man. There's no real difference between him and me and you.

And we need to put ourselves for a moment in his position, perhaps, to see why he did what he did. Why he said what he said. But he is not saying anything in pattern with what I've just read.

If we confess our sins, to know that he is faithful and will forgive us. Peter confesses his sin. I am a sinful man, O Lord. But he has another agenda that he offers.

And in that way, he's perhaps very much like you and me. You see what's happening with Peter. He meets a demonstration of God's very close presence to him.

And if you and I know the sense of God being very close to us, very close to you this evening, if God did something that was as mighty and powerful in front of us as he did for Peter, you'll be overcome with a sense of his majesty.

[8 : 27] You'll have great awe towards him. You'll know a sense of his authority and of truth. You'll know the holiness of God.

The day is coming, we learn, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That day is coming. Everyone in all the earth and the ages will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Lord, it will be unavoidable. But Peter has seen it. The inexplicably enormous catch of fish.

Peter's only explanation, it's abbreviated, we jump straight into it, his only possible explanation is God is in this. God is doing something in my life, in my experience that I cannot fathom.

[9 : 30] It's greater than anything I've ever known before. And if God is doing this work, God seems to be very close to me. And if God is close to me, a sinner, I'm in danger.

That's Peter's. He captures it in those words. Depart from me. I'm a sinful man, oh Lord. I'm a sinner before a holy God.

And he knew. Through Moses, you cannot see my face. No one may see me and live. Depart from me. Give me space.

Give me safety. Because I'm a sinful man. You are Lord. God is at work. God is at work through you. So Peter, in that experience, he reckoned that his only hope to survive was that Jesus would leave him.

That there would be arms lengthened more between him and God. God working through this Jesus. That's the only way he could see to survive. But it was this mighty work of God that compelled him.

[10 : 44] There was nothing else he could do but to confess his sinfulness. And perhaps that is you. And I think we're in a day when that must be every one of us to acknowledge that we are sinners.

may God yet do a mighty work in us. And as Peter, in his time, his experience, he confessed his sinfulness, but he had seen no way of escape except that the Lord should leave him.

He believed that his sin had such a strong hold on him that he had to say, leave me, Lord, or I die. Now, you here this evening may be very aware.

You may be just quite aware of your sins. And you feel they have you trapped in some way. You know that they come between you and God.

You have a wish that they might be taken away. But there is nothing between you and God. You may have some kind of wish.

[12 : 01] It may be a desperate wish as it was for Peter. You're here. You know in your mind just what I've drawn to your attention earlier. God promises to forgive.

But for some reason, you refuse to believe that's you. You know it's a danger to live with unforgiven sin. Perhaps you can find no other way out of it but to resort to Peter's cry.

The works of God, the words of God, this way of the Lord Jesus, even all that you know, perhaps you've had many years learning of what it signifies that Jesus has died on the cross.

How the Bible prepares for that. It fascinates you. It has a hold on you. Yet you can't seem to find a way through.

Will he forgive my sins? Can I talk about dishwashers for a minute? You get your first dishwasher.

[13 : 22] It's bright. It's shiny. Wonderful technology. Why do I talk about dishwashers? Well, they're made to clean things, aren't they? Jesus came to cleanse us from all our sin and unrighteousness.

It's a bit of a parable, shall we say. You get the dishwasher but you've spent so many years standing at the sink, scrubbing away, cleaning the dishes that that's what you go on and do the next time.

You've got that shiny dishwasher there and while you've got your hands in the suds you perhaps lean back and think, well, this is a wonderful machine. It looks beautiful. You're scrubbing away.

And the things that go through your mind you think, well, it's new, it's sparkling, it's clean. How can I make it dirty with my dirty dishes? Or perhaps you even go so far as to say, well, how can it clean my dishes?

They're the dirtiest dishes you can imagine. Is it really going to clean my dishes? Yes, the advertising says it will but mine is surely too much of a mess.

[14 : 33] Or perhaps you even go so far as to say, well, yeah, I'm going to use it but let me do the first wash myself. Isn't that what we do so often?

Let me get a bit good enough to come to the Lord's table. Let me do a bit of washing, clean up my act a bit. The Lord says he will forgive my sins, he will cleanse me from all unrighteousness but me?

Really? It's a wonderful thing, all this great work of the Lord to cleanse men from sin and to make us new.

These are wonderful things. I can really admire what he's done. It's bright, it's sparkling, it's beautiful.

But worship, preaching, even confessing sins, they're not about admiration from a distance.

[15 : 40] They're not even about feeling amazed. You could stand there looking at that bright, shiny machine. and you say, it's amazing what it can do. This is not about mere amazement.

It's not about knowing all about it. You can be a dishwashing engineer, know exactly how it works and yet not use it.

It's there for washing dishes. Christ came to cleanse us from our sins. that is his great purpose towards us.

This worship, this preaching, this reading of God's word, this hearing of it, what the Spirit says to his people, this confessing of sins, it is about obeying, trusting.

Faith is not feeling. it's to obey. It's about taking the dirty dishes of your life, your sins, and giving them to the dishwasher.

[16 : 53] That's what he came to do and he tells us that and the blood of his new covenant will wash your sins away. make that confession.

Put your sins in his hands and he will give you the new heart he has promised. Don't say, I'm a sinful man.

Depart from me, Lord. Now see what else happens. Again, the Lord's dealings with Peter. He confessed his sins and then he followed the Lord.

Remember, Peter wanted the Lord to leave him be. How does the Lord respond? How will the Lord respond to you if you confess your sin?

How will he respond if you confess, Lord, I am not worthy to be near you? He knows you're unworthy. He knows it better than you do yourself. What did Jesus do with Peter?

[18 : 03] When he confessed sin and said, leave me? When you confess sin and you say, Lord, but I can't come near you? Did Jesus give him what he wanted?

No. Far from it. He turned around and he said, don't be afraid. And as we read it in the other Gospels, he said, follow me.

And Peter did follow. He just did it. He didn't understand it. He didn't know where it would lead him. He just followed.

Lord, this man has a grip on my soul, on my life. And he's open to me. He will not leave me.

He lives in the ways of God. Peter, at that point and for several years to come, had seemed to have very little idea of what Jesus was about, who Jesus is.

[19 : 10] Until Jesus, sometime later, asked his disciples, do you remember there were many who left him, didn't like the words that he was preaching. And then he turns to this select group and he says, you do not want to leave too, do you?

And Peter answers, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Didn't mean he understood everything, or he might not have denied Jesus three times that dark night of the cross. But he knew one thing.

Here was a Lord he had been afraid of. He was the Lord that he has come to rely on. He became the Lord that was his joy, his compelling attraction.

And it was because the Lord Jesus had taken this man. This man cried out in fear of judgment, and he brought him to trust and to delight in him, a desperate delight.

[20 : 21] Just remember, if it were up to Peter, and if it's up to you and me, they would have had nothing more to do with each other. If the Lord had heard Peter and taken him at his word and left him.

But it's not up to him. And the very fact that you are here this evening, that I'm here, that we are here, is to say to you and to me again, it's not up to you and me.

But the Lord is calling you. He wants you to walk with him, though you know you are a sinful man or woman. And you know that if it was only that, you could not live with him.

But he says it's not only that. You can come with me. Will you come with me? It's the Lord who keeps Peter close to him.

And this is the same Lord who says if you confess your sins, I am faithful. I will keep my word. And it is just.

[21 : 30] And I will forgive your sins and purify you from all unrighteousness. The same Lord held on to Peter.

I wonder if there was something deliberate about that repetition, that phenomenal fishing experience. Luke chapter 5, John 21.

So similar, wasn't it? Except in the second time, Jesus had not made himself known to them. was it to remind Peter what he had thought that first time?

Was it to teach us the great transformation that he alone brings to our lives? There was Peter that first time he felt so deeply a conviction, a weight of sin.

But staying there was not what God willed for him. How could Peter know that? How can you know that? By hearing what the Lord says, because he says, I will forgive if you confess your sins.

[22 : 43] He heard the Lord's word, you have a place with me, follow me. And he knew, being made able to obey, as the rest then followed.

He drew near to his Lord, nearer and nearer. And it's in obedience that we repeat this demonstration of the Lord's death until he comes, the Lord's supper.

It's Jesus saying to you and to me again, if he preserves us till tomorrow, I have still given myself for you. Follow me. what about my sins?

What about your sins? Jesus, the Lord, says to you, they are greater than you will ever know. So what then?

What about forgiveness? It's greater than your sins will ever overcome. I will forgive. the Lord tells you and me, every one of us who has ears given, made to hear.

[24 : 00] He tells us, come and remember and proclaim my death until I come. And he would not still command that if you could not follow it by his grace.

He would not command it if he was unable to renew you, forgiving you, purifying you. I'm made very much aware that as the Lord dealt with Peter, confessing my sins is essential.

But nowhere in the Bible is there any evidence that once we have confessed our sins we should expect to have to wait until God assures us we are forgiven.

That we should not expect to wait for assurance of forgiveness by any other means. Yes, by the Spirit, but the Spirit speaks the words of the Lord Jesus.

it is the word of God that is given to us to assure us. It's God himself who says, I will forgive.

[25 : 16] And that will is not something future, it is a certain will. It's of certainty, surety. you confess your sins, the Lord is prompt to fulfill his word.

This unchanging God has not changed his promise. This unchanging God has only ever had one response to the confessing sinner.

No other response. You confess your sins, I will forgive. yes, it must be a heart confession.

Perhaps we might look for something like Peter's experience to draw it out of us. There is no guarantee of that eye, there should be no expectation of it. Because we have the greatest of things already.

The word of God that tells us of the work of Christ. confess my sins and find forgiveness and fellowship that following me.

[26 : 30] Friends, won't you receive? And if you've known it already, renew yourself in it. Receive freely. It can only ever be received freely.

Obey when he calls, accept what he promises. then you will understand, you will grow in faith, and he will become ever more dear to you. And so I bring you to the second installment of Peter's fishing experiences with Jesus, how dear Jesus was to him.

Having received him, having him near, never mind what others think. look at Peter.

As soon as he heard, it's the Lord. Look at the sensitivity of his partner, most probably John. But look at Peter. He didn't care what others thought.

He jumped into the water just to be there first. He was desperate to be with his master. And it does appear that it was the first time that he had time with him since he denied him.

[27 : 45] And it was eventually, shortly after this, the Lord spoke with him particularly. But Peter didn't care. Didn't mind what others thought. He just must have his Lord near to him.

This Peter who said, depart from me, Lord. Lord, will you take me to your arms? Don't let me go. Don't let me go.

great joy stirred him to action. This Jesus, one day I said to him, go as far from you as you possibly can just so that I can survive.

Now he says, this Lord is my life. How? He confessed his sins and his Lord took him to himself, took him to his arms.

Follow me. I forgive you. It comes in the word of God. I forgive if you confess and you can follow me.

[29 : 06] Let us dwell on these things. May the Lord bless it to us. and teach us more truly. Let us pray. The God of mercy, have mercy on us sinners, we pray.

Amen. Help us to hear by your mercy the word of your spirit resting clearly, firmly upon our hearts, our understanding.

Though there is so much more yet to understand, that we would know one thing, the great love, the open heart, heart, the faithfulness, and in Christ the great justice, all fulfilled, your perfect work, that we might come into your presence, we might draw near, never to be released, never to be forsaken.

renew in us each one, O Lord, we pray, and for some perhaps also grant that newness of life. Teach us also to number our days, and that even today is the day of salvation, that we would lay hold of your promise, knowing as we look on Christ, that will never be shortchanged, you will never fail, that you, Lord, great God of heaven, of all eternity, you are our assurance.

Speak with us then, we pray. Apply it to our hearts, reach out to many more, may we be Peters, with no care for our own reputation, but for the reputation, the name, the glory, the joy, the delight of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 45] As we ask again in him that you would graciously hear us forgiving sin. to your glory, honor, praise, and blessing.

Amen. Amen. In our closing praise, let us turn to Psalm 131 on page 173, it's the Sing Psalms version, Psalm 131.

Psalm 131.

O Israel, hope in God the Lord now and eternally. Let us stand to sing Psalm 131. Amen. My heart's not proud, O Lord, nor haughty is my eye.

I do not talker by myself with things too great or high.

[33 : 38] My spirit I have come, my heart is pacified, my soul is like a little child close to his mother's side.

just like a little child, my soul is calm in me.

All is there, hope in God the Lord now and eternally.

my apology, I forgot to mention about the tokens. Those who are intending to be at the Lord's table tomorrow are asked to stay for tokens at the moment.

If you come forward in the usual way to take your place in the middle part of the church at the front, allow them to go to the door as well so those who are not staying for tokens can greet them on their way out.

[35 : 09] Thank you. Let us receive the Lord's blessing. So may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.