

Facing Crisis

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to be with you all. How are you? No, really.

How are you? I wish you were here to be able to give me feedback, but it's more of a loaded question these days, isn't it? I hear answers.

I'm surviving, managing, learning new routines, new ways of living, trying to figure out for me how to clean, how to schedule activities for my kids, what to feed them for lunch now that school lunches are no longer taken care of.

Lots of little details and new things that I'm managing. But more than that, we're also facing greater challenges, are we not? Some of us feel isolated.

Some of us are sick, and not even with the virus, but facing other illnesses. And we're afraid. Some of us are facing financial strain, anxiety about our jobs.

[1 : 17] The circumstances that we are in could be called a crucible. If you've never seen a crucible, it's actually a ceramic cup. It's about this big. And what it is, is it's something that's meant to hold a precious metal, particularly something like gold, that would then be heated up to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

The crucible holds it, and the heat brings pressure to bear on the metal with the purpose of purifying it by revealing the impurities and then burning them away.

And when the heat is turned up, when the pressure is on us, how are you doing? What do you see in your own responses in the last week or two to all these challenges?

And more pointedly, how have you engaged or not engaged in your spiritual life these days? Are you running to God? Or do you find yourself abandoning God in the midst of a crisis? It is this that our passage turns us to today.

[2 : 39] We are continuing in our series in the book of Luke. We're going to be in Luke chapter 22. We are coming near to the very end of his life. As Luke narrates the story, he is ramping up towards the crucifixion and the resurrection.

Last week, Pastor Nick reminded us and taught us from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, saying, not my will, but thine be done, and his betrayal and arrest.

And this week, the camera shift shifts from Jesus to the Apostle Peter and how Peter will respond to the crucible of his moment.

So, let's look at Luke chapter 22, starting in verse 54. Let's read this together. Then they seized him, that would be Jesus, they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house.

And Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, this man also was with him.

[3 : 56] But he denied it, saying, woman, I do not know him. And 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, saying, certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.

But Peter said, man, I do not know what you are talking about. And immediately, while he was speaking, the cock crowed.

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said of him, before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.

And he went out and wept bitterly. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for your word and how it is a comfort and a challenge to our lives.

[5 : 03] The way that it helps to redirect our attention. Lord, not only the thoughts of our minds, but the things that we love and the ways that we act. We pray this morning that you would be with us and help us.

Lord, we pray that your word would speak to our hearts this morning. That your spirit, Lord, would be at work in us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

How do we respond in the crucible? We're going to look at this passage and look at it in three parts. We're going to look at Peter's story. We'll look at our story. And then we're going to look at how Jesus meets us in the crucible of crisis.

So first, let's look at Peter's story. It's a fairly straightforward one. There's not a lot of confusion here about what happens. Jesus has been arrested. He's led astray into the high priest's house. The house would probably be a typical house in that day. It would have an outer courtyard and a gate that would come in. And there would be a courtyard outside of the buildings. And in that outside, there would be a place for crowds to gather, for visitors to gather.

[6 : 15] And because it was night, they would have had a fire lit in that area. And as Jesus is brought in and through, we see the apostle Peter following at a distance.

It may be that he was doing this bravely. For he alone, it seems, of the disciples, continued to follow Jesus rather than fleeing when he was arrested.

And yet he did it from a distance. He was afraid, uncertain about how much to identify with Jesus and how close to get to him.

And so in the house, he sits down with the other people around this fire. And one of the women sitting there, one of the women sitting there looks at him and says, Aren't you with that guy they just arrested?

Peter's response is strong. I do not know him, woman. He interjects that woman in there to emphasize, I don't know him.

[7 : 21] He abandons any association with Jesus in that moment. And another man right afterward says, Well, no, aren't you one of them? Aren't you a part of that group that was with that man?

And again, man, I do not know what you're talking about. He abandons association with Jesus' followers as well.

And then an hour later, and as we put all the gospel stories together, it seems that this had now progressed through the night, and we're coming towards dawn this hour later.

Maybe Peter had hoped that they'd forgotten those comments. Maybe they thought he could slip in there unknown. But he'd also had time to think for an hour about the fact that he just disassociated himself with Jesus and abandoned him.

And another man comes, and he looks at him. And in the text it says, another certain man. He looked at him, and he insisted, No, you are one of those.

[8 : 33] You were with him. For you're a Galilean. From the region up in the north where Jesus came from and where his disciples had come from. You are with him, aren't you?

And Peter pulls the greatest denial that we have all done at some time.

When someone has said something to us and called us out, and we don't want to admit to it. Man, you are crazy. I don't know what you're talking about.

The greatest defense from a guilty heart. Peter abandons Jesus in that moment.

He's afraid. That fear is like the fire. The fire of the crucible that burns, reveals his impurities, and shows his weakness.

[9 : 45] Do you remember what Peter had said? We read this just a few weeks ago. You can look at it in your Bible, verse 33 of chapter 22. Peter said to Jesus, Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

Jesus had said this trial would come. He said he would pray for Peter. And Peter said, You don't need to pray for me, Jesus.

I've got this. I'm already with you. But here's his chance to show his true loyalty. And he fails.

Miserably. Three times. With time to think about it, even. He denies Jesus by distancing himself. I don't know him.

I don't know them. I'm not one of them. I don't know what you're talking about. The crisis revealed Peter not to be who he hoped he would be, but to be who he really was.

[10 : 51] So that's Peter's story. And it's a tragic one. And it's a sobering one.

What about us? How are we responding to the crisis of our day? The heat is being turned up in our crucible, is it not? And are we running to God, or are we abandoning him?

Look, we face something that's been not faced in this whole generation, maybe in a century.

There's a real danger what's going on with us.

There's a real danger of getting a virus. There's a real fear of dying. There's a real fear, not only for ourselves in our own life, but also for the lives of those that we love, for ones both near and far, that we want to protect, that we want to care for, and we don't know how.

There are real fears in this present moment. There are also real losses connected already with the effect of this pandemic on our lives.

[12 : 00] Some have already lost jobs. Many more likely will. You've lost financial stability. You've lost income. You worry about whether you'll be able to stay in the home you live in, how you will feed yourself and your family.

We've not only lost financial stability, we've lost social milestones that become so important.

Birthdays and graduations have been canceled. Weddings have been put off or done alone.

And funerals have been canceled or done with only the closest members. These are not recoverable milestones.

They are real losses. And we've lost connection too. We lose the necessary fabric of the love of people around us, the importance of physical touch.

We're separated from our families, from our classmates, from our church family, from our friends.

And in the reality of this, the fire heats up.

[13 : 10] And it shows the impurities of our hearts, doesn't it? Or to change the metaphor, the pressure of our circumstances squeezes us like a toothpaste tube.

It doesn't make what's inside. It just merely lets what's inside get squeezed out so everyone can see it. So what comes out of me in a time like this?

Well, often it's not what I hoped I would be, but it is what I really am. This week I've recognized that I have a mode that I have developed of how to survive in crisis.

It's to hunker down, batten down the hatches, throw all the unnecessary things out of my life, and to just survive.

And you know, there may be some wisdom in some of those things. I want to manage well. I want to develop good strategies. But I know in my heart, I don't do that by turning to God and allowing Him to be my refuge as I batten down the hatches.

[14 : 20] It's more my New England bones, pulling up my bootstraps, protecting myself with a deep fear that no one else will take care of me, no one else will protect me, and it's up to me to do it all.

That's what I've seen in my own heart. And do you know what happens? I have these little warning lights that come up on my dashboard of my life. Irritability.

I find myself impatient, easily angered, growing in my frustration with little things. When life doesn't work right, I find my fuse is very short.

I also know that for some of us, withdrawal will be a major warning line. We may sleep all day.

We may run to our addictions, whether they be social media or narcotics, whether they be pornography or Netflix. We abandon ourselves into these things to withdraw from the challenges ahead that we face.

[15 : 33] Some of us may be prone to have a warning sign of frantic activity. My kids are at home. I have to be the perfect Pinterest parent and have a 14-point plan for my kids every day of what they're going to do.

Some of us, our frantic activity is cleaning the house and finding something else to do to distract ourselves from the challenges that we face. Some of us spend all of our time on social media.

What's the latest news release? What's the latest update? What is that counter that keeps going up and up and up about the number of people affected by this virus? And we incessantly obsess and frantically take hold of these things.

These are warning signs of our heart. Instead of running to God, we often run to other things.

We run to these things that are not always bad things, but when we make them the ultimate things in our lives, they are in fact an abandonment of God.

[16 : 42] What are some of these things? We might become consumed with our health and safety. And so in doing so, we become committed to protecting ourselves and we lose our love for our neighbor, our ability to think about anyone but ourselves.

When we make this our number one priority, we abandon God who is the author of life and of death and who has numbered our days. We want to control that rather than trusting in Him.

Another thing we might run to is our productivity. Some of us struggle because suddenly we have to slow down and we don't like that. We don't like not being able to do the work that we usually do.

And we don't like the loss of projects and accomplishments. We feel exposed because our self-importance feels like it's slipping through our fingers as we're more and more unable to do what we want to do.

When we cling to that productivity, we abandon God who gives us work not for our meaning but for His glory. Some of us love and in the crisis, we, what rises to the top is competence.

[18:11] I want to know how to respond and manage this situation. This might be partly what I love. Whether it's homeschooling your kid, whether it's navigating new technologies, you find yourself constantly driving to how do I learn?

How do I become competent? How do I succeed in all of these things? Here might be the dashboard light for you. Do you spend more time researching these things on the internet than you do reading your Bible?

We abandon God who is the God of all knowledge and we abandon God who is able to do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. We seek a competence in ourselves that deny God in our lives.

and this leads very closely into the next one which is control. We love to be in control, don't we? We want to be able to determine our circumstances, to be able to control our outcomes.

I had plans and they've been taken out of my hand and I want to cling to them and I find myself struggling with bitterness at losing some of those plans.

[19:36] But when we cling to those things and cling to that desire for control, we abandon God who says, I know the plans that I have for you and they are not for your destruction but they're for your good.

Finally, one of the things that we've seen in our culture and in our own hearts is that crisis like this squeeze out our independence.

I want to do what I want to do. I do me, you do you. I'm going to go to spring break and do that thing. Many of those kids have repented of those statements since then, thankfully.

But is it not true that we all are reaching those points where we don't care, we just want to do what we want to do. We don't care how much it's affected and we feel this growing sense inside of us that's going to burst out.

If I can't do this, if I can't do what I want to do, I'm going to explode. And in doing that, we deny a God who has loved us with a great and sacrificial love that said, not my will but thine be done, God.

[21:02] our independence is the very core of our rejection of God and we abandon him in it. I hope by exploring these things, we might see that our story is not so different from Peter's.

Oh, we would never admit that we would just stand up and say, oh, I don't believe any of that anymore. But in our actions and in our hurt attitudes, how often have we abandoned God in this last week?

In the crucible, I too abandon him and act like I don't know him. But what does Jesus do with Peter and with us?

Look with me at the passage again. Verse 61. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Now, we're not quite sure how this was staged.

Somehow, Jesus, maybe he was being walked from one room to another. Maybe there was an open doorway that could be seen in to where Jesus was being held. But however it happened, Jesus, in that moment, was able to turn and look and make eye contact with Peter.

[22:23] And in that look, Peter was reminded that Jesus knew that this was going to happen. He had predicted that he would fail him. But he had also predicted, I am going to pray for you that you may not be overcome, but that you will stand through this.

And that when you come back after your failure, that you will be able to feed your brothers and shepherd them. Jesus' look was one that both reminded Peter of his sovereign holiness.

I knew that this was going to happen, Peter. I knew your weakness. I told you this was going to happen. And yet, his immense grace to us.

Peter abandoned Jesus, but Jesus has not abandoned us. In fact, he looks to us in growing, in gracious, and knowing love.

You've heard it said many times, Pastor Tim Keller from New York City, the gospel is this, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe. We have in the seed of our hearts every day the ability to abandon and deny God.

[23 : 48] And yet, at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. You see, this story of Peter's failure doesn't happen in a vacuum.

It happens as Jesus is headed towards the cross, which is the greatest moving of a holy God towards people who don't deserve him. In fact, in just the next chapter, Jesus will hang on that cross and he will cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus will go to the cross and be abandoned by his Father to rescue people like us who abandoned him. And this is the good news of the gospel, that even in our greatest failures this week, even in our greatest struggles, Jesus has not abandoned us.

He goes to the cross to take the penalty for our rebellion and our denial of him so that it might be taken away.

What a rich, what a beautiful savior we have who does this for us to rescue us so that that failure of Peter's or that failure that you've had this week, this month, sometime in your life does not define you.

[25 : 28] But the God of redemption has been abandoned by God for you so that you might be abandoned, so that you might be redeemed out of your abandoning him, so that you might be brought back.

To this I hold, my sin has been defeated, Jesus now, and ever is my plea. Oh, the chains are released, I can sing I am free, yet not I, but Christ in me.

And friends, if you're looking for hope today because you identify with Peter in your failure, look ahead to the beginning of the book of Acts. Luke doesn't recount the restoration that John does in John 20, but in Acts, Luke presents Peter again and again, the leader of the apostles, the one who preaches the gospel boldly on the day of Pentecost, the one who stands before the leaders when he has been arrested for following Jesus and says, you tell me, should I obey God or man?

I am willing to suffer and die for this Jesus because he suffered and died for me. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for the cross and the gospel hope that we have. Strengthen us today to face this crucible, this trial, this crisis.

[27 : 08] Lord, with the great knowledge of your faithfulness to us, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.