

Peter Falls

How many of you can remember a time when you were ashamed of yourself, so much so that you despised yourself for some act you did, or maybe something you failed to do? You never thought that you could ever sink so low. Maybe you had committed yourself to doing something great for the Lord, and you not only failed, you humiliated yourself. Maybe you broke a trust; perhaps you hurt terribly someone you loved; perhaps you boasted of what you could do and then publicly showed yourself a coward. Do those memories still sting? Maybe some of you are feeling that way even this morning because of how you have failed this week.

Well, I'm not here this morning to rub salt in your wounds. I bring up this subject to introduce one of the most embarrassing and tragic episodes in the Bible – Peter's denial of Jesus. Whatever the shame you may have experienced, I assure you that Peter felt his shame and self-hatred all the more.

Listen to **Mark 14:66-72**:

66 Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came.

67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth."

68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed.

69 And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is one of them."

70 But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it."

71 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"

72 A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And when he thought about it, he wept.

Every time I read this story, I am reminded of how fast and how far a saint of God can fall. Peter failed God, and he failed God in a big way, we all know that. Peter's story is important to us, because we all find ourselves in the place of failure from time to time. When we do, it is a comfort to know that our heavenly Father is a God of boundless love, unending mercy, and absolute forgiveness. God can especially use our failures to rid us of the self-confidence and pride that hinders our walk with Jesus.

Remember Jesus had told His disciples, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me," (Mark 8:34). When we do not deny ourselves, we are in danger of denying our Lord.

I pray the Lord will speak to our hearts today from Peter's example to challenge us, to warn us and to encourage us for His glory. If you have failed your Lord, I want you to see that there is forgiveness. If you are still depending on yourself, I want you to recognize the warning signs and repent.

Let's consider the aspects of Peter's fall and forgiveness together today.

I. Peter's Fall, Denying the Lord

Let's set the scene. Jesus has just been arrested by the Jewish leaders while praying in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has been taken to the palace of the High Priest, where He endured a sham trial, in which the Jewish leadership did everything it could to guarantee that He received a guilty verdict and a death sentence.

When they arrested Jesus, everyone of His disciples run away in fear for their lives, verse 50 says, "**Then they all forsook Him and fled.**" John 18 tells us "**Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple.**" John tells us that the other disciple, probably John himself, "**was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.**" John goes back out and speaks to the girl who is watching the door and convinces her to allow Peter in as well, John 18:15. Mark tells us in verse 54, "**But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.**"

At this point, John disappears from the narrative and Peter becomes the focus of the story. As Peter sits at a fire in the courtyard warming himself, v. 54, a woman approaches him. John 18:17 tells us that it was the same woman who let them in the door. She comes up to Peter and she identifies him as one of the Lord's disciples, verse 67: "**And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.'**"

You can imagine that she did not walk up to him and whisper her accusation to Peter. She said what she said in a voice that everyone who was nearby could have heard.

When Peter hears her words, he immediately denies any connection to the Lord Jesus. He gives this loud denial saying, "What? I don't know what you are talking about! You're crazy!" Then he walks away, v. 68.

As soon as Peter makes this first denial, he hears the sound of a rooster crowing in the courtyard, v. 68. That rooster was a warning to Peter. Jesus had told him very clearly that before the rooster could crow twice, Peter would deny his Lord three times, v. 30. When Peter heard that rooster crowing, he should have walked out of that courtyard. He should have removed himself from danger.

At this point, Peter was not thinking about roosters, he was just trying to deflect attention from himself. I can imagine him standing around trying to look nonchalant; just trying not to draw attention to himself.

Peter's attempt to hide himself failed. No sooner does he walk away than another girl sees him and yells, "**This is one of them!**", v. 69. Again, she says it loud enough to draw the attention of everyone within earshot, Matt. 26:71.

Peter denies any ties to Jesus for the second time. According to Matthew 26:72, this time Peter denied the Lord with an "oath". Peter swore before God that he did not know Jesus.

According to Luke, when the second maid confronted Peter, a man also approached him and identified him as one of the Lord's disciples, Luke 22:58. So, the heat is on! Peter has been recognized. The people in the courtyard are on to him now. His secret is out. His identity has been revealed.

Peter is angry, confused, frustrated and embarrassed. Maybe he is afraid. He knows that his life is on the line.

After his second denial Luke 22:59 tells us that an hour passes. Peter may think the people gathered there have forgotten about him. He could not have been more wrong.

The people in the courtyard approach Peter the third time. They accuse him of being one of the Lord's disciples, v. 70, "**Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it.**" Peter's accent has identified him as being from Galilee, the place where every one of the Lord's disciples but Judas called home. Galileans stuck out in Jerusalem like a Texan in New York City. His accent gave him away!

Apparently, this group was led by a relative of Malchus, the man who's ear Peter cut off when Jesus was arrested. According to John, this relative says, "**Did I not see you in the garden with Him?**" (John 18:26).

When Peter hears this accusation, he loses all hold on himself. Peter begins to "**curse and to swear**", v. 71. Peter may have said something like this: "May God Almighty curse me if I am lying!"

Peter is on dangerous ground. He has fallen fast and he has fallen far. First Peter lies. Then he tells a double lie to cover up the first lie. Then he tries to prove his lies by swearing an oath and calling down curses upon Himself. It is just the grace of God that Peter was not struck down by the Lord where he stood that night.

Peter never believed that he could have done what he did. Jesus tried to tell him, but he refused to believe the Lord. Peter fell and he fell fast!

Yet, there he stands! This man who was the leader of the disciples. This man who swore that he would die for Jesus before he would deny Him, v. 31. This man who had tried to defend Jesus with his sword just a short time before, v. 47. There stands the same Peter calling down curses upon himself and swearing before God that he knows nothing about Jesus Christ. The text suggests that he kept on cursing and swearing.

So that is Peter's fall. Denying his Lord. Next we will examine the why Peter fell.

II. The Causes of Peter's Fall

Peter never believed that this could happen to him. What happened to bring him to this place? That is what I want to investigate for a few moments.

There are some clear signs that show us that he was headed for trouble in his spiritual life. These signs can also reveal the presence of spiritual problems in our own lives.

Here are few of the signs that should have served as a warning to Peter.

A. Self-confidence – (14:27-28) After Jesus and His disciples finished the Passover meal earlier in the evening, Jesus told His men that they would all forsake Him that very night, v. 27. Peter insisted that the rest of them might leave, but he never would, v. 28. Peter believed that failure was an impossibility! That is a dangerous place to be.

The Bible warns us again and again about thinking we have reached a place where we are immune to failure. Proverbs 16:18, "**Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.**" Proverbs 29:23 "**A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor.**" 1 Cor. 10:12, "**Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**"

Never think that what happened to Peter can't happen to you. Maybe you can't conceive of any circumstances where you would deny the Lord, but neither could Peter. The fact is, you are as prone to sin as anyone. We are just one thought, one act, one word from being right where Peter was.

B. Defiance – (14:31) Even though Peter was told very clearly by the Lord what would happen, Peter rejected the Word of the Lord, v. 31. Even though Jesus quoted Old Testament prophecy, Zech. 13:7, to prove that what He was saying was going to happen, Peter denied it. He was defiant in that he stood in open opposition to the clear Word of God.

Verse 31 says that Peter “**spoke more vehemently**”. This means that he got in the face of Jesus, and in no uncertain terms, told Him that what Jesus was saying would never happen! It was like picking up a Bible and saying, “I don't care what this book says, it will never happen to me!”

Another sign that a believer is headed for trouble is when they refuse to listen to the Word of God. You can do as you please, but the Word of God will always be right! If you want to be right, line up with the Word of God. Any believer is in trouble when they stand in defiance of the Word of God!

C. Prayerlessness and Indifference – (14:33-38) In verses 33-38, Jesus went to pray and told His disciples to pray with Him. They were overcome by sorrow and indifferent to the needs of the moment. So instead of praying they fell asleep. They fell asleep not one time, but three times! They failed to pray and seek God, which would have served them well when the attacks of the devil and the flesh came.

Friend, you are headed to trouble when you allow your prayer life to die. When you stop seeking God's face and show clear indifference to His will and His Word, you are headed for failure in your spiritual life. When the inner man is allowed to become indifferent and prayerless, the inner man is beginning to crumble. Beware when your prayer life starts to suffer!

D. Impulsiveness – (14:47) Jesus told His men that He was going to be arrested and that it is the will of God that this happen. When it does, Peter reacts impulsively and strikes out with his sword, cutting off the ear of a man named Malchus, v. 47.

Peter was doing what he thought was right with no thought for what God was doing around him. Peter was out of sync with God and with God's plan for the Lord Jesus. Jesus did not need Peter to defend Him. He could have summoned ten thousand angels to protect Him. He could have defended Himself. He had just spoken and the mob had fallen to the ground, John 18:4. His arrest, His trial and His death were part of God's perfect plan. Peter refused to accept it that attitude contributed to his fall.

We are headed for a fall when we walk impulsively. When we take no thought for the will of God, we are headed for trouble! When we take no thought for what God is doing around us, we are headed for trouble.

We need to be deliberate and prayerful as we walk through this life. Impulsiveness says, “I know what to do, I'll handle this myself.” Prayerfulness says, “Lord, I need Your help, I can't do this on my own.”

E. Following from a Distance – (Mark 14:54) We must give Peter credit. His love for Jesus refused to allow him to stay away. He followed the Lord, but we are told that he followed from a distance, v. 54. The physical distance between Peter and Jesus was a

picture of the spiritual distance that was opening up between them. When Peter was near Jesus, he was filled with confidence and faith. When he was separated from Jesus, he was filled with fear and doubt.

The same is true for us. The Lord's will is that His children walk as close to Him as possible. When we are close to Him, we will live clean, holy lives. We are given faith, power and love. We have the faith to stand for Jesus, the power to work for Jesus, and the love of Christ that will lead us to serve Him and the world around us for His glory.

When we walk afar off, we do not serve Him, love Him and obey Him as we should. When our love for Him and our desire to be close to Him fades, we are headed for a fall. Many in this very room are following Jesus, but you are following Him from a distance. Get back to Him today, before you fall into deeper sin!

F. Bad Company – (Mark 14:54) While Jesus was being tried, spit upon, and beaten, the chief of His disciples was warming himself at the enemies fire. Peter's downfall was accelerated because he found himself in the company of people who had no love for Jesus.

When we surround ourselves with people who do not honor the Lord, we are headed for trouble. When you find more comfortable with lost people than you do with the Lord's people, you are headed for a fall. The company you keep reveals where your heart is.

Wrong company will result in wrong living, wrong loving and brutal falls. 1 Cor. 15:33, **"Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."**

Take a moment to examine your life in light of Peter's experience. He failed because he allowed these things to live in his life. Do you see the warning signs in your life?

III. Peter's Reaction to His Fall

Peter denies the Lord three times. As soon as he does, a rooster crows for the second time, just like Jesus said it would, v. 72. When this happens, Peter instantly realizes what he has done.

According to Luke 22:61, when Peter denied Jesus this last time, the Lord Himself turned and looked at Peter. When their eyes met, Peter remembered the Lord's words. He remembered that Jesus had told him he would do what he had just done.

Do you think the Lord's eyes were filled with anger and hate? Do you think the Lord looked at Peter with a look of judgment? I don't think so. I am sure the Lord's eyes were filled with hurt. But, I am just as sure that the Savior's eyes were filled with love, grace, forgiveness and compassion. I think that look said, "Peter, I tried to warn you, but you wouldn't listen. You denied me, but I still love you. You denied me, but I will never deny you."

When Peter saw those eyes, the Lord's words came back to mind. When Peter remembered, he ran from the courtyard and **"he wept"**. The phrase "he wept" literally means that "he broke down". He lost all control of his emotions. He was a broken man and he fell before the Lord in tearful, sincere repentance!

What does this say to us? It simply reminds us that the Lord sees us in our waywardness too. He sees the sins we tolerate in our lives. He sees the evil attractions we follow after. He knows all about the forbidden friendships we keep. He looks upon everything we do. He hates the sins that drag us away from Him, but He loves us in spite of our sins and He calls us to come back to Him with a broken, repentant heart.

If we will come to Him confessing our sins, He will forgive us. That is His promise, 1 John 1:9.

IV. Jesus Forgives and Restores Peter

Here is where this story begins to be a blessing. There is no question that Peter failed the Lord in a huge way. There is no question that the fall was his fault. There is no question that Peter was way out of God's will. But, there is no question that when he truly repented, Peter was forgiven and restored. The facts prove this to be true.

After Jesus rose from the dead, the angel who came to the tomb said this: Mark 16:7, **"But go, tell His disciples--and Peter--that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."**

A few days later, Jesus met Peter by the Sea of Galilee, John 21:15-17. While they are there, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him. Three times Peter affirms his love for the Lord and Jesus promises to use Peter. This promise is fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when Peter is filled with the Holy Ghost, and when he preaches the Gospel, three thousand souls are saved. Then, all the way to the twelfth chapter of Acts, Peter is the dominate figure in the early church. Yes, Peter failed God, but he repented and he was forgiven and restored by the very God he denied.

What the Lord did for Peter, He has done for many in this room. There are people sitting here who have walked away from the Lord, denying Him by the words they spoke and the lives they lived. But, some of those people have come back to Him. When they did, they were forgiven and they were restored and God is using them again for His glory.

This episode is not really just about Peter. The moral of the story is not, "What could happen to you if you are not prepared."

Think the setting of this passage. What is happening inside the house? Jesus is on trial. Why? Because Jesus was fulfilling His mission to bring redemption from sin, to provide forgiveness for sin. Whose sin? All who fail, all who sin. What kind of sin? Every kind of sin. Every kind? How do you know? Because of Peter.

Peter was among the twelve closest companions of Jesus. More than that he belonged to the inner ring of three – Peter, James and John. More than that he was for all intent the leader of the Twelve. And he failed to keep watch over Jesus in his most troubled time; he then abandoned him; and finally even denied knowing the person he loved and confessed as the Messiah. And he was forgiven. Peter was not only forgiven, he was raised back to his position of leader and given the privilege to be the primary preacher of the early church.

That's the gospel. The gospel is what this episode is meant to display. While Peter is falling in sin, his Savior is resolutely providing for his redemption. While Peter is demonstrating that no one can get close enough to God or be good enough for God, Jesus is perfectly performing God's will to atone for Peter's sins.

Jesus was innocent, yet He was declared guilty and died as a criminal. Peter was guilty, yet he lived and was forgiven, declared righteous by faith in Jesus. That is the Gospel. Jesus took your place. He suffered your shame and bore your guilt and died your death so that you could be forgiven and live forever.

If you have wandered away from God, you can come home. If you will, the Lord will receive you and He will forgive you. He will do more than that, He will restore you and He will use you again for His glory. If you are not where you need to be, or if your

relationship with Jesus is not as close as it used to be or should be, come home today! Don't delay, get to Jesus! Come to Jesus now, if He is calling you.