

Pride Comes Before a Fall: Mark 14:26-31
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This is a sermon for everyone who has ever felt like Peter did when he had denied Jesus. It says later in this same chapter, in verse 72, that he broke down and wept. Have you been there? I have. I assume you have, too. You have good intentions, a high level of zeal, a tremendous amount of excitement and great expectations. You say to the Lord, “I will do anything for You! I give You my life! Nothing will ever get in between us. Nothing will ever cause me to stumble!” And then, not too long after that, you find that your affections are fickle. You find that the passion you felt so intensely at that moment has now withered away. A temptation or trial has thrown off your focus, and now you are consumed by some ungodly action or attitude.

What we see in this passage is our human frailty and fickleness. But we also see Christ’s faithfulness. I entitled the sermon *Pride Comes Before a Fall*, because that’s what happens with Peter here. Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” That basically summarizes what is going on with Peter and the other disciples in Mark 14. They think they’re so committed to Jesus. They think they’re so strong. But they’re not. They are fickle and weak, and they all fall away. But Christ is faithful to them and will gather them again.

Notice that the institution of the Lord’s Supper in verses 22-25 is sandwiched in between the prediction of Judas’s betrayal and the prediction of Peter’s denial. This highlights for us the agony of this night for Jesus. Everyone was turning against Him. One of His own disciples was going to betray Him. And the rest of His disciples were going to desert Him. Jesus was experiencing tremendous emotional anguish. As an aside—If you struggle with loneliness, if you struggle with sadness because of what others have done to you, how others have turned against you or deserted you—know that you have a Savior who can identify with your struggles. He went through these painful things, and He can comfort you in your time of hurt.

I Will Strike the Shepherd

Let’s look at these verses briefly this morning and see the encouragement that is here for us. And we’ll look at a few other passages as well to see the rest of story. Verse 26 concludes the account of the Passover meal which Jesus and the disciples ate together in the upper room. They sang their final hymn and then proceeded to the Mount of Olives. And then Jesus has this

troubling announcement to make to them. He tells them what is going to happen, and He also backs it up with a quotation from the Old Testament. “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’”

The quotation is taken from Zechariah 13:7. This Old Testament verse is speaking of the good Shepherd who is yet to come. “‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,’ declares the Lord of hosts. ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, declares the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’ ”” (Zechariah 13:7-9, ESV)

We notice a couple of things in that context. First of all, the Lord is the One who strikes the shepherd. Did you catch that? It’s the Lord of hosts who says, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd.” This is the same point that we see in Isaiah 53:10 where it says, “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief.” God the Father is the One who ordained the death of Jesus. Many other individuals played a role, but the Father is the One who ultimately willed it to happen. And Jesus brings this out in quoting the words of the Lord from Zechariah 13 as “I will strike the shepherd.”

The other thing from Zechariah 13 that is significant in the context of Mark 14 is that after the sheep are scattered the Lord preserves and refines His own. They are refined like silver and tested like gold, and they call upon His Name. And He says, “They are my people,” and they say, “The Lord is my God.” That is what’s going to happen with Peter and the disciples. They will scatter, but then Jesus will gather them again.

After I Am Raised Up

This is what Jesus goes on to tell them about in Mark 14:28. This is the encouragement. Of course, it was very troubling and discouraging for them to hear Jesus say that they would all fall away. But look at what Jesus tells them immediately following that. “But after I am raised up . . .” Jesus has already spoken to them about His death and resurrection, and He does so again here. The shepherd will be struck down—He will be killed. But then He will rise again. And what will He do after He has died and then risen to life? He will go before them to Galilee. He is going to be with them again! He is going to gather them again and be with them in the very place where He first called them.

Following the resurrection, the women arrived at the tomb. Much to their surprise they found the stone rolled away, and they saw an angel in a white robe. This is recorded in Mark 16:1-7. The angel told them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

Jesus always keeps His promises. He knows the future. He controls the future. I feel like a broken record I’ve been saying this so much the last several weeks. But all through these events of Passion Week we’ve seen how Jesus is in absolute control. Things are not merely happening *to* Him. He’s not in over His head. Things are not out of His control. He knows exactly what is going to happen, and it will all happen according to plan, for His glory, and for our salvation.

Here He tells His disciples some important things, part of which they don’t want to hear. But it will all happen just as He says. He tells them that they’re all going to fall away, but that He is then going to re-gather them.

Peter’s Pride

Of these two things that Jesus speaks of, what does Peter choose to focus on? Jesus spoke of them deserting Him, and then He spoke of His own resurrection. Which of those would be more exciting to talk about? The resurrection! This still hasn’t sunk in for them. So Peter immediately latches onto the statement about them falling away. It’s interesting that they don’t seem to have anything to say about Jesus being raised up and going before them to Galilee. It’s as though they don’t even hear that part. Peter’s pride is so wounded by the idea that he would fall away, so he defends himself.

This is what pride does. Pride defends. And pride makes bold claims about oneself. And pride elevates oneself above others. Peter does all of these things in his short comment in verse 29. “Even though they all fall away, I will not.”

First of all, he is defending himself in response to Jesus’ authoritative declaration. That is always a foolish thing to do. Jesus Christ, the God-Man, has just prophesied that Peter and the others will all fall away. Peter is saying that Jesus is wrong. Who does Peter think he is? It’s similar to what happened in chapter 8 when Jesus predicted His death and resurrection, and then Peter rebuked Jesus. How did Jesus respond to that? He said, “Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Here, again, Peter thinks he’s going to set Jesus straight. Peter must have been thinking, “Oh,

Jesus must not realize how committed I am to Him. Jesus underestimates my passion and my perseverance. I must assure Him that I would never fall away.” So Peter arrogantly defends himself, even though he’s at the same time saying that Jesus is in error.

Secondly, Peter makes a very bold assertion about himself. I will not fall away. Peter is looking to himself. He is relying on his own strength. He is boasting in his own ability. And he’s saying, I will remain committed to You no matter what.

Then thirdly, he is elevating himself above the others. Do you see how Peter separates himself from the other disciples in this statement? “Even though *they* all fall away, *I* will not.” He distinguishes between *they* and *I*. You can almost picture him pointing at the others, and maybe using a condescending tone—“I know these other guys, these slackers, they’ll probably all fall away (I can see, Jesus, how Your statement will be true concerning them), but not me . . . I will never fall away.”

Even after Jesus tells Peter specifically what is going to happen, Peter comes back a second time, saying emphatically, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And then all the others chime in, because they don’t want it to look like Peter is the only committed one there. They know that Peter’s comment in verse 29 reflects badly on them, and they have to stick up for themselves. So they’re all saying, “Me too! Me too! I will die with you before I’ll deny you.” And it just makes them look all the more foolish in light of what is about to happen.

Peter’s Fall

Now let’s look at Peter’s fall. In verse 30 Jesus foretells what is going to happen down to the specific details. “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” That sounds pretty harsh. Peter can’t imagine that he would ever do such a thing. But, of course, he also can’t imagine what is going to transpire in the coming hours.

The fact that Peter will deny Jesus three times shows that it’s not just a mistaken denial or a momentary lapse in judgment. It’s not going to be something where the words are half-way out of his mouth and he catches himself and corrects himself. No, this is going to be a willful and serious denial. And he’s going to be so committed in his denial (because his fear is going to be so great) that even the first rooster crow will not awaken him to his senses. It won’t be until the second rooster crow that he realizes what he has done and repents of it.

Look later in this chapter to verse 66.

This is after Jesus has been arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, and all the disciples left Jesus and fled (verse 50). And Peter

followed Jesus at a distance as He was led to the council. And now Jesus' words to Peter are fulfilled.

Read Mark 14:66-72.

What a horrible moment for Peter. What a humiliating moment. Just hours earlier he had stated his allegiance to Jesus. And now he has broken that allegiance so miserably.

Jesus' Power

The beauty in this story, though, is not in Peter's fall, of course. The beauty of this story, and the encouragement for us, is in Jesus' power. As we have already seen, Jesus knew what was going to happen. And He is also in control over all of these events. He is orchestrating all of these things for His own glory and for the good of His people. Even this horrible denial will be a means to those ends.

Look with me at the parallel passage in Luke 22:31-32. This is Luke's account of the same event where Jesus foretells Peter's denial. And Luke records a few additional things which Jesus said in that moment.
Read Luke 22:31-32.

This is Jesus' power. Satan desired to sift Peter like wheat, but Satan had to ask permission first. This is like the book of Job. Satan is a roaring lion wanting to harm and destroy, but he can only do what God gives him permission to do. God holds this roaring lion on an iron leash. And here we see that Jesus Christ, Himself, prays on Peter's behalf. Isn't that amazing! Jesus prays for Peter so that Peter's faith may not fail.

Here we see the difference between Peter and Judas. Judas denied Jesus in a final and ultimate way. Judas turned his back on Jesus and never returned. But Peter, even though he denied Jesus three times, he then repented and returned. But this was not of his own strength. It was all owing to the prayer and the power of Jesus. Matthew Henry wrote, "It is owing to the mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ that the faith of his disciples, though sometimes sadly shaken, yet is not sunk. If they were left to themselves, they would fail; but they are *kept by the power of God* and the prayer of Christ."¹

That should be a great encouragement to us this morning. We should never claim to be able to cling to Jesus in our own strength. We should never make arrogant claims like Peter did, thinking that our commitment to Jesus is so great that we will never deny him. But because of Jesus' power, because of what He

¹Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Lk 22:21

has done for us, because of His prayers for us, He will keep us to the end no matter what trials or temptations come. Our hope is not in ourselves, but in Him.

After Jesus' resurrection He had a very significant conversation with Peter. It was painful for Peter, but also comforting. For Jesus is commissioning Peter, and in this conversation it is evident that Peter belongs to Jesus. Yes, Peter denied Jesus, but Jesus has not denied Peter.

Read John 21:15-17.

Just because you or I have denied Jesus with our words or actions or attitudes does not mean that He cannot use us for His glory and for His kingdom. This is how Jesus loves to do things. He takes stumbling, weak-willed, fearful fools, and He redeems us and commissions us to do His work. Jesus knows that Peter denied Him three times (see Luke 22:61), and Jesus makes that painfully apparent by asking Peter this question three times.

Peter's response at this point is so different than his response before. There is no trace of pride in this response. There is no confidence in self. Rather, Peter appeals to Jesus' knowledge. "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." In other words, "there's nothing I can do to prove to you that I love you. You know my heart. What else can I say?" Peter has been humbled in a profound way, and now Jesus is going to use Peter in a profound way.

In Acts 2 the Spirit falls on the church at Pentecost, and in the power of the Spirit Peter gets up and preaches. In the following chapters of Acts we see these same men who had been so weak and fearful, now bold and courageous. The last passage I'm going to read from this morning is Acts 5 where the apostles show this great courage that is a result of the Holy Spirit working within them.

The apostles are now preaching the Good News with boldness, and they're being persecuted for it. On this particular occasion they get arrested and put in prison. But then an amazing thing happens. An angel of the Lord appears and lets them out of prison (Acts 5:19)! And then the apostles go right back to the temple and start teaching again. So the chief priests were perplexed by this whole thing, but they desperately wanted to silence these guys.

So this is what happens, and we can see in this that Peter and the other apostles are different men—they are Spirit-filled, courageous men who refuse to deny Christ even if it means they will be persecuted, even if it means they will die. Read Acts 5: 27-33. But then this Pharisee Gamaliel comes in and tells the Council that they shouldn't kill them. So in verse 39 it says, Read 39b-42.

The same Peter, who was proud and fell, is now preaching without fear. He is preaching with humility and courage even in the face of persecution. And later he would be martyred (Jesus predicts that as well in John 21:18-19). Peter, who had denied Jesus, would eventually stand up for Jesus even in the face of death. At that moment, not in his own strength, but by the power of the Spirit, he would truly be able to say, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."

This morning let us repent of our sins and trust in our great Savior who has redeemed us. He is way more committed to us than we are to Him, and by His grace and by the power of His Spirit He will cause us to persevere.