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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Peter Denies Jesus, Jesus Restores Peter

Mark 14:66-72

Here we have one of the saddest and yet most hopeful stories in the Bible... the story of the devastating fall of one of the greatest leaders the church has ever known

It is devastating because it shows how far sin can take us... the shamefulness of the details makes the story exceedingly poignant

How can such a mighty follower of Christ fall so far as to call down curses on himself if he even knows Jesus? How can sin be so powerful? How can temptation be so effective? It is surpassingly sad that one of Jesus' best friends in the world could not summon the smallest amount of courage to stand with his friend during his trial and speak a word in his defense.

Jesus had called on his followers to be willing to die just as he would. After Peter had rebuked Jesus for predicting his own death on the cross... Jesus warned his disciples in this way...

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Later it would be said of the followers of Jesus in defeating Satan:

Revelation 12:11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

But Peter loved his life in the world more than he loved Jesus that night... a devastating denial from one who had been given so much by the Lord

BUT YET... This account is hopeful as well... we see the incredible grace of God in rescuing Peter from so great a sin. The TRUE PETER was not the one who denied Jesus, but the one who boldly proclaimed Jesus on Pentecost and in front of the Jewish council... the Peter who denied Jesus was merely MASQUERADING as an unbeliever, a stranger to Jesus. The incredible grace of God rescued Peter and restored him to his service!

I. The Downward Journey of Peter's Sin

A. Remember the Context

1. Peter, the Leader of the Twelve

- a. In every list of the Twelve, Peter is always named first... he seems to have been the leader of the Apostles
- b. In many encounters throughout Jesus' life with the Apostles, it was Peter who would speak for all of them
- c. Most prominently in Caesarea Philippi:

Matthew 16:15-18 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

- d. Peter was the key leader among all of Jesus' followers

2. Jesus' Warning and Peter's pride

Mark 14:27-29 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." 29 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

- a. Jesus' plain prediction

Mark 14:30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today-- yes, tonight-- before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

- b. Peter's prideful answer

Mark 14:31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."

- 3. Peter's prayerlessness

Mark 14:37-38 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Mark 14:40-42 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

- 4. John 18: Jesus weaves a safety net... but Peter won't stay in it

- a. Jesus boldly went out to face Judas and the soldiers with him

John 18:4-6 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" ⁵ "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am" Jesus said... and they drew back and fell to the ground

- b. Jesus forces them to state their orders

- c. Then masterfully, Jesus crafts a safety net for his disciples to escape temptation and apostasy

John 18:7-9 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." ⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

- d. Peter refused to stay in that safety net
 - i) Drew his sword to fight
 - ii) Cut off the servant's ear
 - iii) Ran away
 - iv) Came back and followed at a distance
 - v) Entered the courtyard

B. Peter and Jesus Clearly Contrasted

- 1. Peter's confused journey... staying close to Jesus

Mark 14:53-54 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

Jesus and Peter are set up as a clear contrast, especially in John's Gospel

- 2. Careful weaving in John's narrative
 - a. Jesus' trial, Peter's denial; meanwhile, back at the trial; meanwhile back at the denial
 - b. Clear purpose: to contrast the serenity and power and courage of Jesus with the sinful cowardice and falsity of Peter... the glory of Christ and the sinfulness of man

C. Harmonizing the Denial Accounts

- 1. Matthew and Mark in very close agreement and list three denials
 - a. First, before a servant girl in a courtyard

- b. Second, before another girl but out by the gateway
 - c. Third, before bystanders, possibly again in the courtyard
2. Luke also lists three denials
 - a. First, before a servant girl, apparently near a fire
 - b. Second, before another person in a place not specified
 - c. Third, before yet another person, still in the courtyard
 3. John records three denials
 - a. First, before a servant girl at the doorway; then, after a break in the narrative ...
 - b. Second, before some unnamed people
 - c. Third, before one of the high priest's servants, a relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter had cut off
 4. ALL FOUR GOSPELS make it clear... it all begins with a simple question from a slave girl in the courtyard

Mark 14:66-67 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

5. Isn't it incredible how temptation works! Peter was drawing his sword and ready to fight the Roman guards... but he wasn't ready for a simple question from the slave girl
 - a. In Matthew, two of the denials come in the presence of girls
 - b. It heightens the cowardice of Peter
 - c. He wasn't directly threatened with arrest, torture, and death
 - d. A servant girl would be seen as hardly a threat at all
6. BTW: notice the possible sense of disdain from the slave girl... "that Nazarene, Jesus"... HATRED!

D. Denial #1: "I don't know what you're talking about!"

Mark 14:68 *But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.*

1. A simple denial... it doesn't directly connect to Jesus personally... he just denies even knowing what she's talking about
2. Matthew emphasizes the public nature of the denial... denying BEFORE THEM ALL
3. This is the devastating first step down the slippery slope
4. From now on, it just gets worse and worse

E. Denial #2: "I don't know the man!"

Mark 14:69-70 *When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." ⁷⁰ Again he denied it.*

Matthew 26:71-72 *Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"*

1. Amazing that it's another young girl... the Greek implies this
2. Peter is moving around, surrounded by the enemies of Jesus
3. John says he is warming his hands by a fire... standing with those who hate Jesus, little by little being influenced by them
4. The second servant girl spreads her accusation around to the watching crowd... THIS MAN WAS WITH JESUS OF NAZARETH
5. Peter's denial moves to the next level...he denies even knowing Jesus, and he does so WITH AN OATH!
6. He swears... maybe by something sacred like the temple that he DOESN'T KNOW THE MAN! He distances himself as much as possible from Jesus

7. See how completely alone Jesus was at the human level... the very thing he had predicted would happen

John 16:32 But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

- F. Denial #3: Calling down curses on himself and swearing... "I don't know the man!"

Mark 14:70-71 After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." ⁷¹ He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

1. The final act of this tragedy brings it to new levels of disgrace
2. Peter's accent was that of a Galilean and he couldn't escape it
3. Now it seems the entire group is on him like a pack of wolves sniffing the scent of blood
4. Peter feels he has to come up with something even stronger... he even CALLS DOWN CURSES ON HIMSELF... stronger than the OATH he just swore before than
5. Peter is perhaps said something like this: "May Almighty God strike me dead and curse my family if I know this man!"
6. See how far Peter has fallen at this point!

II. The Significance of Peter's Denials

A. Peter's Position

1. Peter called by the Lord to be one of the Twelve, eyewitnesses of his life; on the basis of the eyewitness testimony to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection the church would be built
2. Peter was specially selected from the Twelve to be one of the three closest apostles... Peter, John, and James... the closest friends Jesus had on earth

3. Peter was the leader of the Three! He was continually the spokesman

Matthew 16:15-16 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

4. Christ's exaltation of Peter

Matthew 16:18-19 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

5. Peter had also been privileged to see the transfiguration of Jesus... eyewitnesses to his glorious radiance on the sacred mountain... to hear the voice of Almighty God saying, "This is my Son, whom I love"
6. Peter had been selected along with James and John to stay with Jesus in Gethsemane and pray with him
7. His denials are DEVASTATING!

B. Peter's Promises... very personal pledges of loyalty

Mark 14:29 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

Mark 14:31 Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."

C. Peter's Fears... clearly terrified of death! That's why after Peter urged Jesus not to die, Jesus taught them all this

Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

D. Peter's Sinfulness

1. It is a very serious thing to deny Jesus Christ
2. He does it out of love for his life... he is trying to SAVE HIS LIFE IN THIS WORLD
3. Peter's fear of death caused him to turn away from his faith in the Lord
4. The terrifying sentence on this came from Jesus himself:

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

E. Clear Contrast with Jesus

1. By contrast, Jesus is boldly proclaiming before the Jewish authorities his identity as the Son of God
2. By contrast, Jesus is actively laying down his life for his sheep
3. By contrast, Jesus is saying to the Father

Not my will but yours be done!

Peter has hit the bottom of his life... this is the lowest Peter will ever go. PRAISE BE TO JESUS, HE DOESN'T LOSE US!

Matthew 18:12-13 What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.

III. Jesus Rescues Peter... But Painfully

A. The Rooster Crows and Jesus Looks

1. Jesus had programmed Peter's mind to remember by his clear prophecy

Mark 14:30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today-- yes, tonight-- before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

Only Mark mentions the rooster crowing TWICE... the first time the rooster crowed was like the Lord's warning shot across the bow. But now, the prophecy is finally fulfilled:

Mark 14:72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time.

2. To make it even more painful, just at the moment, Luke tells us that Jesus looked at him

Luke 22:61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."

How was this possible? I don't know... remember Jesus had three different phases of his trial before Annas and Caiphas, so he was probably being moved from one of those places to the next

This look must have been among the most painful things in Peter's life

But the pain was necessary to shock him into repentance!

3. But these two things—the rooster's crowing and Jesus' painful probing LOOK were instrumental in recovering Peter

B. Peter Remembers Christ's Word

Mark 14:72 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times."

C. Peter Leaves

Matthew 26:75 And he went outside

1. GET OUT OF THERE! ***"Lead us not into temptation" "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Cor. 15:33)***
2. Peter was in over his head!

3. The rooster's crowing and the Lord's look moved him out of danger

D. Peter Weeps

Mark 14:72 And he broke down and wept.

1. The tears flow for the sin of that night
2. The tears are a display of the wounds of his soul
3. Mark implies a torrent of thoughts and memories and overpowering grief... like a landslide within his soul
4. Matthew says he wept BITTERLY

The rest of Jesus' rescue of this wandering apostle will have to wait till after he atones for his sins and rises from the dead

E. John 21: Jesus Hurts to Heal... and Restore (more in a moment)

IV. Lessons from Peter's Denials

A. The Greatness of Christ's Perfect Character

1. The direct contrast with Jesus is stunning
2. Where Peter, the leader of the Apostles was weak and sinful, Jesus was strong and sinless: where Peter was faithless, Jesus was faithful; where Peter called down curses on himself, Jesus became a curse for Peter and for us; where Peter sought to save his life, Jesus laid down his life

B. The Universality and Depth of Sin

1. It's amazing that we even have this account at all
2. Peter was in the midst of his ministry as the apostle to the Jews... one of the PILLAR leaders of the church; this account, written years later, would have been devastating to his reputation
3. BUT IT WAS THE TRUTH! Mark's Gospel is according to many scholars really Peter's account

4. And the honesty of the Bible concerning the sins and failures of its greatest leaders is one of the clearest evidences of the divine origin of the Bible
5. Peter was a great leader who committed a great sin... and God showed him great grace
6. From this we learn again the lesson of the universality of human sinfulness

Ecclesiastes 7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

Romans 7:15-18 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. As it is, it is no longer I who do it but it is SIN LIVING IN ME that does it.

7. How do YOU see yourself in this story of Peter?
 - a. Do you see yourself in him... someone who could easily deny Christ if the pressure got to be great enough?
 - b. Do you understand how weak you are?
 - c. Do you have actual sins to confess to the Lord? Times you have refused to stand firm and testify to the Lord in the face of some non-Christians? Times you may have caved into peer pressure... failed to speak up because of what people would think?
 - d. Do you see how serious this is?

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

Peter shrank back from paying the price of testifying to Christ... and he ended up weeping bitterly

Do you have any such cause to repent and to weep bitterly for times you've sinned against him?

C. The Sufficiency of the Cross for Our Sins

1. The central message of the Bible... Christ died for sin
2. The atonement of the blood of Christ is sufficient to cover Peter's sin and ours
3. TRUST IN CHRIST! See in the cross the only remedy to our sinfulness

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

4. Do you have a strong confidence in the sufficiency of the blood of Christ to cover such grievous sins?

D. The Need for Constant Vigilance

1. Peter was self-sufficient and over-confident
2. Clear evidence of this: his repeated boasts and his prayerlessness
3. Prayerlessness: while Jesus was squeezing every last moment out of his intense prayer time in Gethsemane, Peter was sleeping
4. Peter was "ready to lay down his life" for Jesus... but he wasn't ready for a single question from a slave girl at the door
5. Temptation does not come in a clearly recognizable costume... it doesn't come as we expect it to: Peter was perhaps ready to fight the Roman soldiers, but temptation came quietly in from the side in the weak little voice of a slave girl at the door
6. Clear lesson from scripture... the need for CONSTANT VIGILANCE!

CSB 1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall!

7. Walk moment by moment in total dependence on Christ and constant awareness of your own weakness... and the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil

E. The Painfulness of Repentance

1. The disease of sin has a very painful cure... genuine heartfelt repentance and transformation never comes easily
2. The shock of the rooster crowing coupled with Jesus' penetrating look must have been incredibly PAINFUL to Peter
3. The memories of his confident boasting and Jesus' perfect prediction combined both to save him from further sin AND to begin the healing work of repentance... and that journey started with BITTER PAIN
4. Peter remembers with pain, leaves the vicinity with pain, gets alone in pain, and then reflects carefully on all that had happened... it starts with MEMORY, with going over the facts... then it comes by CAREFUL REFLECTION on those facts...

CSB Mark 14:72 Immediately a rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered when Jesus had spoken the word to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." When he thought about it, he began to weep.

The Greek word there implies a careful reflection, casting over it again and again... "What did I say? What happened? Why O why did I do that? How could I have denied him? It was the exact thing he said I would do? How could he know me better than I know myself? Can he ever forgive me? What kind of man am I, that I would abandon him when he needed me the most? I should have been a courageous witness for him during his trial, but instead, I was a faithless coward."

5. Soon, deep sadness and bitterness comes... and with it, WEEPING
6. The bitterness would be deep and profound... and lasting
7. And the pain of restoration wasn't over quickly... even after the resurrection, Peter may have wondered whether he could ever share in the feast of joy... was he now excluded?
8. Jesus began a painful three-step inquisition

John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes,

Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

The PAIN that Jesus caused by this three-fold opportunity for Peter to reaffirm his love for Jesus was necessary... without the pain after sin there can be no genuine repentance

9. For the rest of his life, Peter would walk in humility over this sin

1 Peter 5:5 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

F. The Possibility of Restoration

1. In some ways, it could be argued that Peter's role as a great leader in the church should have ended that very night
2. Some could argue that he disqualified himself from leadership by his faithlessness and cowardice and lying here
3. But how marvelous is the grace of God to restore sinners and still use them for his service!

Matthew 12:20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.

4. Peter was terrified of arrest and death here... so much so that even a slave girl's question threw him
5. But after the beauty of Jesus' gracious restoration of Peter in John 21, and after the day of Pentecost brought the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter lost his fear of death and boldly proclaimed the gospel:

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

Acts 4:8-12 "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

G. Peter's Glorious End

1. John 21 makes it clear that Peter would bring glory to God by dying with courage and faith

John 21:18-19 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

2. Church tradition tells us the Apostle Peter was crucified in Rome in 64 AD, crucified upsidedown

AMAZING GRACE! To build a perfect church out of such imperfect, flawed people!

God can use sinners like Peter, and like you and me!