

“Can Cowards Find Courage?”

Luke 22:54-62

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“If at first you don’t succeed, skydiving is not for you.” Well, there are a few aspects in life where there really are no second chances, and skydiving is kind of one of them. However, the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ, is indeed the great news of another chance. No matter how you have blown it, no matter what mistakes you have made or sins you have committed, God in His grace, through Jesus offers you a second chance. That is a message of hope, a message our hope starved world, full of hope starved individuals, desperately needs to hear. One of the more powerful illustrations of how the Lord provides second chances is the story of the apostle Peter. We will take a closer look at that story today. Our text is Luke 22: 54-62. If you have your bible you can turn there, otherwise the verses will be on the screen. This is actually a sermon I had started to prepare and then skipped. That is a longer story, but today we will go back and explore it. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would encourage and challenge us through this portion of His word today.

Luke 22 describes the events on Thursday, the day before Jesus is crucified on Good Friday. During the last supper that Jesus shares with his disciples He has warned them that one of the twelve would betray Him. Jesus knows it is Judas, but the other disciples ended up pointing fingers at each other. Peter then proclaims his loyalty to Jesus.

**Luke 22:33 “Lord,” he told Jesus, “I’m ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”**

Jesus responds, no you are not.

**Luke 22:34 “I tell you, Peter,” he said, “the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that you know me.”**

Peter’s bold profession is indeed not something to which he will live up. Jesus and His disciples then leave the upper room, go to the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prays and is then arrested. At that point, Peter in his zeal, tries to defend Jesus by attacking a servant of the high priest with a sword. Jesus rebukes him for that. Then, **Luke 22:54 They (the temple guard) seized Jesus, led him away, and brought him into the high priest’s house. Meanwhile Peter was following at a distance.**

According to Matthew, Jesus was first taken to the home of Annas, the former high priest, and then

to the residence of the current high priest, his son-in-law, Caiphas. I suspect the details of what to do with Jesus are still being worked out, as numerous members of the Jewish Sanhedrin are there. In Matthew’s gospel it says Peter follow “to see the end.” He apparently wants to be with his friend, his Lord, no matter what is going to happen. At that point he seems to have some real courage.

**Luke 22:55 They (those who had arrested Jesus) lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, and Peter sat among them.**

There were enough people that Peter thought he could blend into the crowd, but ...

**Luke 22:56 When a servant saw him sitting in the light, and looked closed at him, she said, “This mans was with him too.”**

Now, I believe that part of Peter really wants to say, “Yes, I am a follower of Jesus. He is my best friend. I believe He is the Messiah.” But those words are not the words that come out of his mouth.

**Luke 22:57 But he denied it: “Woman, I don’t know him.”**

You don’t know Him, Peter? You have been with Him basically 24/7 for the last three years! Peter is afraid of what will happen to him if he is identified as one of Jesus’ followers. Maybe he too will be arrested. Peter made a bold claim a couple hours earlier that he was ready to go to prison or even die for Jesus. But now it seems he is nothing more than a coward.

**Luke 22:58a After a little while, someone else saw him and said, “You’re one of them too.”**

Ah, Peter has a second chance. I am sure he felt guilty about denying he knew Jesus. This time he will.... No.

**Luke 22:58b “Man, I am not!” Peter said.**

Again, part of him wanted to say something different, but he didn’t.

**Luke 22:59a About an hour later, (in Peter’s situation an hour was a long time) another kept insisting, “This man was certainly with him, since he’s also a Galilean.”**

Peter apparently had a northern accent, which indicated that he was native of Galilee. This is yet another chance for Peter to affirm his relationship with Jesus.

**Luke 22:60 But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” (Three times Peter has denied any relationship with Jesus.) Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.**

Morning is approaching, **Luke 22:61 Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter.** (It is hard to imagine the pain there must have been on Jesus’ face) **So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.”**

Peter has made his own choices, but the Lord Jesus knew exactly what Peter would do and even when he would do it...

**Luke 22:62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.**

Okay, that is the text, the first question that comes to my mind is how does this denial differ from Judas’ betrayal of Jesus? Yes, Peter was remorseful, but according to **Matthew 27:3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.**

I would simply say that, on the surface, Peter’s denial seems very similar to Judas’ betrayal. Now, Judas was actually conspiring with those intent on murdering Jesus, while Peter failed on a more personal level. I believe there is a big difference between what Judas and Peter did. I like to say Peter’s betrayal of Jesus was partial and temporary, while Judas’ betrayal was total and permanent. However, that is not evident on Thursday night. It is what happens later in Peter’s story that makes it clear he is *not* a Judas, that his cowardly denial of Jesus is *not* indicative of who Peter really is. It is *not* a reflection of the quality or genuineness of his faith. It is a really bad night for Peter, but better things are ahead.

So what happened to Peter after he denies Jesus. We know the next day a group of Jesus’ followers witnessed His crucifixion, Luke says “from a distance.” The apostle John was one, but whether Peter was there, we cannot be sure. The next time Luke mentions Peter is in chapter 24, which we explored a couple of weeks ago. It is Sunday morning. The women, probably five or six followers of Jesus, have gone to His tomb and discovered it is empty. They find the disciples, the eleven, and report this.

**Luke 24:11, 12a But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb.**

I am not sure why Peter runs to the tomb. Perhaps he remembers Jesus’ statement referring to His resurrection and thinks, maybe, just maybe that is why Jesus’ body is gone. What is clear is that Peter’s failure on Thursday night, is no longer defining who he is. Peter is once again the leader of Jesus’ disciples. Following His resurrection on Easter Sunday, Jesus then spends 40 days on earth before His ascension. The New Testament indicates there were numerous encounters between Jesus and His disciples during that time. We don’t know much about any of them, except one. John 21 describes a meeting between Jesus and seven of the eleven disciples along the Sea of Tiberias, better known as the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are out fishing in their boat, and when Peter learns Jesus is standing on the shore he jumps out of the boat and runs through the water to meet Jesus. His enthusiasm for being a follower of Jesus seems to have returned. John then records a conversation between Jesus and Peter. In fact, the NIV labels it “Jesus reinstates Peter.” We don’t know all they talked about, but the Lord Jesus makes it clear that Peter will indeed have a role in leading the church after Jesus ascends to heaven. Jesus is not going to let Peter’s one bad night define who he is.

The next description of Peter is Luke’s account in the book of Acts, chapter 2. The disciples, the eleven plus probably many of the other 120 believers that were in Jerusalem at the time, are gathered on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus had ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit comes upon them and they miraculously speak in tongues or other languages. Peter gets up and preached to the crowd that has gathered. He gives quite a sermon. He talks about how the Old Testament points to Jesus as Messiah and speaks very boldly to the Jewish leaders who were part of the audience.

**Acts 2:23, 24, 36 But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. “So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God**

**has made this Jesus, who you crucified, to be both Lord and Christ!"**

Yes, this is Peter, who just a few weeks earlier was afraid to tell a servant girl he even knew Jesus. Peter's message has a powerful impact and many in the crowd ask, "What shall we do?"

**Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of you sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."**

We don't know how many were in the crowd that day, but Luke tells us

**Acts 2:41 those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day – about 3,000 in all.**

In other words, if half of those in the crowd were converted that day, Peter was speaking to 6,000 people. This is an amazing transformation. In 50 days, Peter did not lose 50 pounds. No, he went from being a coward, who denied he even knew Jesus, when a servant girl asked the question, to a man of great courage, who speaks to a crowd of thousands of people. Some in that crowd were powerful men who hated Peter. Yet, he boldly proclaims that "Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, some of you conspired to murder Him, but God raised Him from the dead. You need to repent or you will be in big trouble!"

Okay, that is a look at a 50-day slice of the apostle Peter's life. What lessons does the Lord have for us? **First**, we don't have to define ourselves by our mistakes or sins. Peter did not define himself by the horrible things he did that Thursday night. He felt guilt and shame. He wept bitterly. But he was able to get past that and experience forgiveness and restoration. Yet, there are a lot of people who can't get past a bad night, or a bad week or bad year. Sometimes, it is a belief that "God could never forgive me for what I did." That is Bill's problem. He has made a mess of his life. Too much alcohol, some illegal drug use where he got busted, gambling debts, and now an arrest for burglary. As he sits in the county jail, Bill feels desperate. He has no hope. He is ashamed to even call his mom and let her know where he is. The Chaplain at the jail says God offers free and full forgiveness. But Bill think that is too good to be true. How could God ever forgive him? He has never had any time for God, why would God care about him? Folks, someone needs to introduce Bill to the friend of sinners, the one who forgave and restored a friend who totally let him down.

Oh, this forgiveness is not cheap. It cost Jesus His blood, His life. But it is available to people like Bill.

There are other situations when people conclude "God could never forgive me." Jane has been a Christian for many years and is very faithful and active at her church. However, whenever she is asked to take a leadership position, a Deaconess, Sunday School teacher, leading a bible study, she always turns down that opportunity. Why? She doesn't feel worthy. You see, even though Jane went to a Christian college, those were her rebel years and she ended being sexually promiscuous. She now looks back at that time in horror. She met her husband and got married a couple years after she graduated and has been totally faithful to him, but she carries a lot of guilt and shame for what happened 20 years ago. Her husband knows very little about those years and she is grateful no one who went to college with her lives anywhere nearby. It is stuff in her past she just wants to keep buried so no one will find out about it. And as long as she keeps it buried Jane will still carry that guilt and shame. And she will not feel worthy to serve the Lord the way others do. After all, how could God forgive her. She was a Christian; she knew what she was doing was wrong.

Oh friends, though Jane has been a Christian for many years, she needs to go back and take a class on Grace 101. She need to realize and remember what the Lord says to us in **1John 1:9** a verse to Christians, to people who know better, but still sin. **If we confess our sins** (including our sexual promiscuity when we were in college) **God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** Jane needs to realize that Jesus died on the cross for her promiscuity, and if she allows the guilt and shame to infect her soul she is really saying she doesn't believe Jesus did enough for her. She is saying His death on the cross was not enough to forgive and cleanse her. And friends, if guilt and shame is infecting your soul because of sins and mistakes in your past, you need to turn to the Lord. Today you can experience His forgiveness and cleansing if you will trust in Him and seek His forgiveness. If you are not sure what that means or how to do that, please give me a call.

**Second**, we should not define others by their past sins or mistakes. Jesus knew Peter had failed Him miserable. There was really no guarantee that it

might not happen again. Yet, Jesus took Peter aside and said, "Peter, you are the one I have chosen to feed my sheep. I know you messed up big time that one night, but you are the one who is going to lead this infant church." Folks, I can say with total confidence that when people like Bill or Jane or anyone else turn to the Lord Jesus, trust in Him, confess their sins, they will experience His free and full forgiveness. He will not hold their past sins or mistakes against them. However, I don't have the same confidence when it comes to other people, other Christians. If Bill, with his criminal record, were to come to our church I would tell him, "Bill most people are not going to judge you. They will focus on who you are today, not who you were yesterday. They know if God has forgiven their sins, there is no reason why He can't forgive yours. That is the attitude most people will have. But, unfortunately, not everybody. There will likely be a few who define you by your past sins and mistakes. They will judge you, they will look down on you. And God will hate what they are doing. And you will need to ignore their insensitive words and suspicious glances. And Bill, you need to remember their problem with your past is their problem, not yours."

I would say something to Jane. Jane if you tell people about what you did when you were in college and how you have found God's forgiveness and cleansing most people will rejoice with you. They are going to embrace you. They will celebrate God's amazing grace that washed away their sins and yours. But probably not everyone will do that. Some will judge you, look down on you, define you by what you did 20 years ago. It is sad. And God hates their attitude. You will have to learn to ignore their judgmental attitudes. And always remember, their problem with your past, is their problem, not yours.

Oh friends, I hope you are not someone who defines people by their past sins and mistakes. I hope you are someone who is willing to forgive, someone who focuses not on what someone was like yesterday, but who they are today, and who, by the grace of God, they can be tomorrow. Now, I know when someone breaks our trust and hurts us or people close to us, we often don't feel like trusting them again. That is okay. When trust is broken, it needs to be repaired, so it can be restored. Sometimes people say, "Well, I will forgive him, but I will never forget what he did."

Friends, never is a long, long time. Maybe you cannot and should not forget what he did at this moment. But, one day, when the relationship is restored, those sins and mistakes will be both forgiven and forgotten.

**Third**, the Lord gives us courage to be faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ. Many of us empathize with Peter and his frail faith that was evident when he was afraid to even tell a servant girl that he was a follower of Jesus. Yet, we should also empathize with Peter as he stands up in front of a huge crowd and tells people about Jesus. We should have that same desire to let people around us know that Jesus is the Lord and Christ, who died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead to guarantee our salvation. Oh I don't expect you will be speaking to thousands of people, but you have friends, family members, co-workers, etc., who need to hear that great news of Jesus just as much as Peter's audience that day. You might be thinking, Pastor Dan, that is just not me, I am not a preacher. I just can't talk to people about religious stuff. I don't want to say anything that will offend somebody. It is just easier to keep my mouth shut. Friends, that was Peter's thought on Thursday night. By the grace of God, seven weeks later, he thought much differently. Today I would suggest you pray and ask the Lord to give you the courage to stand up and speak up for the truth of Jesus Christ. Ask Him to give you the wisdom, grace, and boldness necessary for you to be a faithful and effective witness for Jesus. Yes, on our own, most of us will probably do about as well as Peter did on Thursday night, but by the grace of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can have the courage to be who God has called us to be, and do what He has called us to do. May the Lord give us that courage today!