



The Gospel of Mark | Mark 14:53-72 June 28th, 2020

If you're with us here or if you're at home, I want to invite you to take your Bible and turn to Mark Chapter 14 and we're going to start in verse 53 this morning. We're going to cover down through verse 72 as we finish out this chapter, and we're almost to the end of this gospel. And so, we've been in this for a long time, and it's going to be a lot of fun. So, I want you to turn there, as you turn there, I want to ask you to just take a moment and pray for me this morning. So, um you know, last week I preached, and then I woke up on Monday morning and I had no voice. It was just gone, like, disappeared completely. And for the better part of three days last week, I couldn't speak, like I couldn't talk at all or even say one single word. And so, it was very quiet in my house. I won't tell you that Lezlie was excited that I had no voice for three days, but it was quiet and I have drank lots of hot tea hoping that I would be okay this morning and until I came up and prayed a minute ago, I just didn't know how this was going to go. So, it seems to be okay, so I hope you found Mark, and this is going to be a great text. We're going to look at it. So, let's read this together. Mark 14 verse number 53:

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witness do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows. And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And

he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And a servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. And he broke down and wept.

This is God's word. Let's pray together. Father, I ask this morning that you would now, by your grace, give us wisdom as we look at this text to see how you have revealed your power to us through the gospel. In Jesus name. Amen.

So, as you look at this text, alright, look back up at verse 53 where we're going to start and once again, we're in what we've called a Markan sandwich. Now this is where Mark takes and he begins with a story and then suddenly just kind of goes away from it and goes into a whole different story, and then comes back to the story that he started with as kind of a book end on this story that's in the middle. And so, if you look, verses 53 and 54 they focus on Peter. But then, from verse 55 on down through 65 the attention shifts to Jesus and his trial before the Jewish Council or the Sanhedrin. And then, beginning in verse 66 we return to the Peter story. And so, it's like book ends, and Mark is trying to draw our attention in this to see a contrast between the faithfulness of Jesus and the unfaithfulness of Peter. And so that's what's going on here. So, beginning in verse 53 it says, and they led Jesus to the high priest. Now remember, this is the Jewish and the Roman authorities that have come after him in verse 43 and the high priest is a guy whose name is Caiaphas. Now, we don't see that in Mark's Gospel, but Matthew tells us, and the other gospel writers tell us, that this is the Jewish high priest whose name was Caiaphas. He ruled from AD 18 up to 36 and they take him, they take Jesus to the palace of Caiaphas, and so they don't go to a court, but they go to this man's house. It's his private residence, his palace, and they would have walked into a Roman style, a place that was shaped in a square. There was a courtyard in the middle, and it was all opened. The house went around it, and so right there in the middle would have been a courtyard. And it would have been two stories, and they take Jesus into this place. It says that all of the chief priests and the elders and the scribes, now remember those three groups make up what's called the Jewish Sanhedrin. There are 71 of them, they're the ruling Council of Jerusalem or Israel. Now, when it says all of the chief priests and scribes, notice that doesn't mean every scribe in all of Jerusalem. It means all of the ones who are on this council, they all come together, and they come together, and verse 54 tells us that Peter has followed him at a distance. Now I want you to underline the word 'at a distance,' right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards, just underline the phrase 'sitting with the guards,' and he was warming himself at the fire, underline the phrase 'warming himself at the fire.' So, this is taking place in the palace. It's two stories, and Jesus is up in the upper, upstairs of the palace and he's before these authorities and down below in the courtyard, Peter is involved in this story. Now I want you to remember that this is Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny him, about to take place right in front of our very eyes. Now that should clue us into something, and

that's that Jesus once again isn't just a passive person who's a victim in this story, but he is absolutely at every step of the way, carrying out the purposes of God. He is in full control, even though they seem to be in control of his destiny, he's the one who's in control. Now, remember that Peter has told us, or he's told Jesus, and we read it, but he told Jesus he would never, ever, ever deny him. Now look at what happens, just look back up in verse 27, Jesus says to the disciples, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I'm going to strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." But Peter said to him, we saw this last week and let's take a look at it again, even though they all fall away, he's putting himself against the rest of the disciples, even though the rest of them fall away, I will not. And Jesus said to him, Truly, I tell you this very night before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me Peter, three times. But he said emphatically, If I must die with you, I will not deny you. And they all said the same.

Now drop down to verse 50. Then everyone deserted him and fled. See, Peter is part of the everyone. He fled with the rest of the disciples in Gethsemane. It appears, though, that as they all flee that Peter kind of from a distance says, ah, I better see what happens. And it looks like he circled back around and just kind of joined up with the crowd from a distance sort of blending in. I want you to notice those three phrases that I asked you to underline about Peter. These are the ones that describe him in this moment: at a distance, sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Those words, I think, are a perfect description of how most people want to follow Jesus. Most people want to follow Jesus from a distance, with the crowd, warming themselves by the fire. In other words, let's say it this way, most people are willing to follow Jesus as long as it's safe and comfortable. If we move beyond safe and comfortable, suddenly we don't really find following Jesus to be as exciting as we once thought it was. And this story of Peter is going to really shed light on us and some of the challenges that we face. But first we have to hold on to this and just kind of set it aside because this is, as I said, a sandwich story, and we now need to shift gears to what's happening with Jesus. So, verse 55 tells us that the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. Now this is an unjust trial that's taking place. Nothing about this trial looks like what is prescribed for a trial in the Jewish Mishnah, which is what they would have looked to to understand how to do things. In fact, first of all, you have to see here that this isn't taking place at the normal meeting place of the Sanhedrin. This isn't happening in a courtroom. In fact, this is taking place at the high priest's house in the middle of the night. Now, just think about if someone were pulled over today for speeding, and we pull them over and said, you know, you've got a broken tail light, you have no license, you have no insurance, you know, in fact, I don't think that you're really even who you say you are. I'm going to arrest you and you're going to stand trial tonight. We're just going to go over to the county judge's house right now and wake him up. Now, you would say this, where's my lawyer? This is not right! So, this is completely a practice that's unjust as it's taking place, it's happening in the middle of the night, and that is actually illegal in the Mishnah, they're not allowed to hold trials at night. And yet they are.

The other thing is, this is a capital trial. They're going to put Jesus to death, and you know the Mishnah forbid you to put anyone before a jury of sorts, the Sanhedrin, to face capital charges on the Sabbath or on the eve of the Sabbath, or during a festival, or on the eve of festival. Now here we know that we're right smack dab in the middle of the Passover Festival! And what do they do? They put him on trial. There's also supposed to be at least two witnesses that can corroborate the story and the charges against someone. We're going to find that they don't have any witnesses that even agree with each other. And then finally, the capital offense, the person who's condemned, if they're condemned of a capital offense, the Mishnah requires that the jury of sorts, that the Sanhedrin, meet again the next day and go through the whole process again to confirm it, before he's actually put to death. Now none of this happens. This whole thing is rigged. It's rigged from the start because look at what it says in verse 55, the chief priests and the whole council, what are they doing? They're not seeking answers, they're seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death. But they found none. Now they're not looking for facts. The goal is simply that they can find sufficient evidence to turn him over to the Romans and to kill him.

Now, remember how this chapter began. Look back at verse one at the beginning of this chapter: It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and to kill him. What are they looking for? They're looking for a way to arrest him and to kill him. They're not looking to discover if what Jesus is saying is truthful. They're just looking for a way to arrest him and kill him. So, we know going into this that they have one goal as they gather in the darkness of night in Caiaphas' palace. It's to kill Jesus. Verse 56, many bore false witness against him, but their testimony didn't agree. Isn't it interesting? It's the middle of the night and they have all these witnesses on hand. What are these guys doing at the high priests' house in the middle of the night? Where did they drum up these witnesses like this? This means they already had them there. They said, come here, you stay at my house. You be ready. We're going to get Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane; we're going to bring him here. So, they've got him and they're all ready to go. It's obvious that this is all a schemed up, careful plan that's unfolding. Verse 57, some of them stood up, now this would be the Jewish Council themselves, the Sanhedrin, stands up at this point, and they bore false witness against him. So now we have the false witnesses of these people, these so-called witnesses who've been brought in to testify, but now even members of the Sanhedrin stand up. And here's what they say. They said, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy the temple that is made with hands. And in three days I'll build another not made with hands.'" Yet even about this, their testimony, the Sanhedrin, this is the Jewish Council, their own testimony doesn't agree with itself. And notice this is the only specific charge that gets raised during this whole entire fiasco, is the best we can call it, and look at the charge: I will destroy this temple. This is what they say Jesus said. Now we know that Jesus said that the temple would be destroyed in Mark 13. But Jesus didn't say he was going to destroy the temple. He didn't say he was going to come in with torches and an army and tear the temple to the grounds. The Romans were going to do that in AD 70 but not Jesus. And they say Jesus has said he's going to do this. You know what's interesting, though, is that when Jesus is hanging on the cross in Mark 15 even the

other person hanging next to him will look at him and say of Jesus the same thing. Those who are mocking him at the cross will say, this Jesus said he would tear this temple down, well, let's see him do something special now.

Now we come to Verse 60, and it says the high priest stood up in the midst, now this would be the climactic moment of the trial. In fact, if the high priest was going to render a verdict of guilty in a capital offense, he had to stand up, tear his clothes, and render the verdict. And that's what he does, he says to Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men are testifying against you?" But Jesus remained silent, and he made no answer. Now notice how that seems to be so fascinating to us because you would think that Jesus would defend himself. But look at what Isaiah 53 says about Jesus in verse seven, He was oppressed, and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. As I've told you over and over again, Jesus appears in this story to be this passive victim. But make no mistake about it. There's never a moment that Jesus is not completely in control. Jesus has said, no one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord only to pick it back up again. Jesus is in full control and he's doing this to fulfill what Isaiah 53 said about the suffering servant, that we saw last week, would take upon himself the sins of his people. Jesus is fulfilling everything that's said here and incidentally, let me just say, I think as Christians, I have become convinced in the last 10 years of my life that one of the greatest signs of maturity and growth in the life of a Christian is when you can arrive at the place that you no longer feel like you have to constantly defend yourself. Why? Because Jesus was the only person who is completely right about everything, has never done any wrong, and he doesn't say anything in defense of himself. He allows himself to be vindicated by his Father. In fact, it's God the Father who will vindicate him. He doesn't say, hey, no, that's not what I said. This is what I said. And we spend so much of our time saying I didn't say that, this is what I said. Listen, here's the thing. We all have to come to understand something. When people say things about us that make us so uptight, 'I can't believe they said that about me, I didn't say that. Why would they say such a thing?' And we let it get under our skin, listen you just have to remember something, even if what they're saying about you in the moment is not true, well, the cross of Jesus says that there are far more worse things about you that are true than what those people are saying about you in the moment. The cross is the greatest criticism of my life. It says to me I needed one to die in my place because I'm so wicked. And so, Jesus allows himself to be vindicated by the Father. Certainly, that is what we as his disciples were meant to do, is to be those who say I don't have to defend everything that's ever raised against me, be it true, false, doesn't matter. I need to entrust myself into the hands of the Father and be obedient in my discipleship to Jesus.

And so, Jesus stands there, and now look, the high priest asked him again. He says, Are you the Christ? In other words, are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed? Now the word blessed here is just basically used as a substitute for God. Are you the Son of God? Because Pious Jews didn't say the name of God, and so he just substitutes it, it was forbidden, in a sense, and these two titles are synonymous. He's asking him a

question. Are you claiming to be the Messiah? Are you saying you're the Son of God? And Jesus says "I am." This is the clearest, most forward, this is the most straightforward answer that Jesus ever gives. And you will remember that up until this point, throughout the Gospel of Mark, time and time again, people, demons, people who have been healed, Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, they've recognized who Jesus is. And every time Jesus has said something: don't tell anybody. It's what we call the Messianic Secret in Mark. It's as if every time someone recognizes Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus says don't tell anybody I'm the Messiah. We keep saying why? Why doesn't want anybody to know he's the Messiah? It's because he's had a mission to accomplish. His mission leads him to this moment. He wasn't going to claim Messiahship three years earlier when they want him to make him king by force. He had a mission, and the mission was clear. Every road led to this moment. It led to Jesus fulfilling Isaiah 53 which was to be the suffering servant dying for the sins of his people. And now that he's there, the moment, the climax of the mission has arrived. Now he reveals in the clearest of fashion who he is, and he simply says, "I am." And because he is, because he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, then he will be vindicated. He will remember, even though he's not going to defend himself in this moment, he's going to entrust himself into the hands of his Father. He will be vindicated because look at what he says, he says, "I am." And because I am, you, you Caiaphas, you Jewish rulers, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power. Once again, the word Power functions as that substitute for God. You will see me seated at the right hand of God himself, and I'll be coming with the clouds of heaven. Now Jesus when he says this, he's blending together two things. Psalm 110:1 and then Daniel 7:13. Psalm 110:1 is the most quoted Old Testament passage in the whole New Testament, and it refers to the Messiah being vindicated after his suffering. And then Daniel 7 as we saw referred to the Son of Man, we saw this in Mark 13 when we talked about Jesus coming on the clouds, and we said, this isn't so much about Jesus returning as much as it is Jesus returning to his Father, where he will be seated at the right hand of the Father in glory. That's why we know that Mark 13 has to be referring to this because he says to Caiaphas, hey Caiaphas, you, you Caiaphas, are going to see this happen, which means that after Jesus has been raised from the dead and ascended, Jesus has been vindicated. He is at the right hand of the Father, which means that he's gone to the Ancient of Days. Jesus is saying this, and he can't say it more clearly. While you may mock and kill me, that's what you're doing with this whole circus, this charade, this fiasco. You're going to mock me and you're going to kill me. And you're going to reject me as the Messiah, the Son of the Most High. But understand this Caiaphas. After you've had your moment, you're going to die. And you're going to die having realized that you were wrong, and I was right because I'm going to be raised from the dead before you die. And the gospel of my lordship is going to be preached throughout all the world and you're going to see it happen before you die. But Caiaphas, it gets worse for you. It gets worse for you. Because here's why, Caiaphas, my Father is going to vindicate me as the Lord of the Universe. And when he does, then you do understand that that means that on the day that God judges heaven and earth and he's made me as his Son, the one who will carry out the judgment of heaven and earth, Caiaphas, you need to understand, this is not the last time you and I will see each other in a

courtroom. Except for the next time that we do, I will be the judge and you will stand before me and every word and thought you have ever spoken will be brought to light. And Caiaphas, oh Caiaphas, there will be no excuse for you in that moment. Jesus is who he claims to be.

The high priest, as you can imagine, doesn't like anything about that. And so, he tears his garments. He's outraged and he says, "What further witnesses do we need? You've heard this blasphemy. What's your decision?" In other words, he's asking the council to rule. Is Jesus a blasphemer or not? Now I just want you to consider something. Either Jesus is a blasphemer in this moment, or Caiaphas is a blasphemer. And if Caiaphas is a blasphemer then the trial that he will stand before Jesus will not go well for him. This is a sad moment for the ruling high priest of Israel to be so wrong. It's a sad moment when we recognize that this is the reason that Jerusalem and the temple ruled over by the high priest, is going to come crumbling to the ground, when God the Father judges the temple via the Romans in AD 70. They all condemned him as deserving of death. And some began to spit on him, and they covered his face and they struck him saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows. And just like that, Jesus' second prediction comes true. In Mark 10:33 Jesus says, we're going to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man is going to be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They're going to condemn him to death. They'll hand him over to the Gentiles who are going to mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And three days later, he'll rise from the dead. Everything up until this point has come true. Why would we not assume that three days later he will rise from the dead?

Now, at this point, the story suddenly swings back to Peter. It shifts back to Peter, and we see here that Jesus has been faithful and courageous in front of very powerful people. And now we're going to see Peter not be faithful and courageous but be completely coward-like and completely unfaithful before some people that have very little power. In fact, a young girl, verse 66, Peter was below in the courtyard, that's why I said Jesus was upstairs earlier, you were thinking, how did he know it was a two-story house? Because this verse. He was below in the courtyard, so this is simultaneous as this is going on, and one of the servant girls of the high priest, she's probably just passing through as she does her chores, she sees Peter warming himself - that ties us back to Verse 54, we know this is the exact same moment, so these events were happening simultaneous, she's having this conversation with Peter while the conversation we've just witnessed is taking place above between Caiaphas and Jesus - and she looks at him and she says, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But Peter denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." He's basically saying I don't even know what you're talking about! Don't tell me that, I don't know what you're talking about. And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed, I know some of your Bibles might not have the rooster crow. That's because there's a discrepancy in manuscripts, some of the oldest manuscripts don't have that verse or don't have that phrase and some of the other ones do. It's really irrelevant. Verse 69 says this, the servant girl, and let me just point out, why do you think he went to the courtyard? Why do you think he went to the gateway, is where he actually literally goes to? I think he's readying himself to escape. He's ready to run. He says, hey man, I've

been spotted. I better get by the door. I've got to find an exit. He's looking for the red exit signs, right? Verse 69, the servant girl saw him, she sees him moving over into the shadows by the courtyard gate, and she began to say to the bystander, she says, "Hey, this man is one of them!" Now who do you think the bystanders are? Well those with guards he's standing next to back in Verse 54. She's telling them, hey, guys, see? This is one of Jesus's guys. He's trying to get away. He's escaping. Verse 70, But again, he denied it. And after a little while, the bystanders again said to Peter, "You know come to think of it, certainly you are one of them for you're a Galilean." Now, Matthew tells us they knew he was a Galilean because of his accent. So, accents give you away. You all from the Midwest, you're in good shape. Us Texans, we're in trouble, alright? But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to answer and he says, "I don't know this man of whom you speak." Now, this is a tough phrase to translate in Greek. I think the NIV probably captures it a little better when it says, "he began to call down curses and he swore to them, I don't know this man you're talking about." In fact, New Testament scholar Mark Strauss is one of the translators of the NIV, says it this way, and I think it's probably really accurate. Peter is essentially saying, go to hell for making such accusations against me. I swear to you, I don't know this man. Now just feel the strength in that phrase. You can go to hell for saying this. This is Peter, the guy who promised he would never fall away from Jesus. Now, you see this and then recognize that immediately the rooster crows the second time, and Peter remembers how Jesus told him before the rooster crows twice you're going to deny me three times. And he broke down and he wept. Once again, Jesus has predicted everything that was going to take place. He's not a passive victim. He's completely in control.

Now remember I told you earlier that I wanted you to hold on to that description of Peter. In fact, I said, I want your underline some phrases in this description of Peter. In verse 54, look back at verse 54 again. Peter followed himself at a distance. He went right into the courtyard of the high priest. He was sitting with the guards and he was warming himself by the fire. Remember I said that those three phrases, 'at a distance,' 'sitting with the guards,' 'warming himself by the fire,' that I said those were a perfect description of how most people want to follow Jesus; that we want to follow Jesus as long as we can kind of do it at a distance. In fact, because if we can follow him at a distance, then it can be comfortable and in fact, at a distance, it's safe, right? I mean, we know that that means we're not up front on the front lines. We're kind of back. We don't have to be in the game, where the people are tackling people. We can kind of be on the sidelines holding the clipboard, just looking like we're part of the team. And what difference does it make if we ever get a bruise or a scratch or a cut or a concussion from being in the game, as long as we hold the clipboard and keep our uniform clean, if the team wins, well see, I get a ring too. I think this is how Peter feels, and I think this is how most of us feel. If I could just stay back at a distance... Now, remember, though, this is the man, though, that said, even though they all fall away, I won't. In fact, he says emphatically, if I must die with you, I'm not falling away. So how did this happen? How did he deny Jesus and what do we learn from this? Well, I think there are three very clear reasons that Peter denies Jesus and I want to unpack those for you here for just a moment:

The first reason, alright? And I want you to just write these down in your Bible or somewhere where you can review these a lot in your life, alright? I think the first reason that Peter falls in this moment and denies Jesus is because Peter doesn't believe Jesus. That's number one. Peter doesn't believe Jesus. Let me show you this, in Mark 14:27 Jesus says to them you, he's talking to the disciples, including Peter, you will all fall away. Those are the words of Jesus. You will all fall away. Now remember what I've said so many times to us. There is a major difference in believing Jesus and believing *in* Jesus. And most people are comfortable believing in Jesus. If you say, 'Hey, do you believe in Jesus?' They say, 'Oh, of course I believe in Jesus.' But you know what? Who cares if you believe in Jesus? The Bible tells us that even the demons believe in Jesus and yet they tremble in fear. Here we find that Peter, we would never ask something as ridiculous as, 'Hey, do you think Peter believed in Jesus?' He'd eaten with Jesus. Of course he believed in Jesus. The better question is, 'Do you think Peter believed Jesus?' That's the question that you and I have to ask ourselves. Not just 'Do you believe in Jesus?' Who cares if you believe that this man named Jesus lived 2,000 years ago, suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified, dead, and buried as the Apostles Creed tells us? That's irrelevant. The bigger question is not do you believe *in* Jesus? But do you *believe* Jesus? Look at this, Peter hears Jesus say, 'you will fall away' and he doesn't believe him. You know why? Cause if he believed him, he would have wept right here. Not at the end of this tragic story, right here he would have wept. He would have wept bitterly. He would have fallen on his face before Christ, and he would have balled his eyes out. And he would have said, Oh, God, Oh, no. If that's what's going to happen then Jesus, I need grace. And he doesn't ask for grace because he doesn't think he needs grace.

Instead, well, it leads to the second reason. Peter believed in himself. Number one, Peter didn't believe Jesus. But number two, he believed in himself. Look at Verse 29, Peter said to him, even though *they* all fall away, *I* will not. Jesus said to them truly I say to you this very night, Peter, before the rooster crows twice, you're going to deny me three times. Here's your chance, Peter. Look, you notice he gives him one... Peter, I'm giving you a chance. Believe me Peter, Peter believe me. Your whole, the last three years, Peter, all you've done is argue with me. Stop arguing for a change. Would you just stop for just a moment? Just close your mouth and just take your foot out of your mouth and quit arguing with me, Peter. Every time I tell you we're going to do this, you say no, we're going to do that. Every time I say this is going to happen, you say, no, that's not going to happen. And now I say, Peter, you're going to fall away. I'm not going to fall away. Peter, would you just stop for a moment and believe me. Peter, the rest of your life, you're going to need to believe me and it's got to start now, Peter. Peter doesn't believe him. Because what does he say? He says emphatically, if I must die with you, I will not deny you. Ah, Peter. He thought he was special. He thought he was special. He just didn't believe he was like everyone else. He just looked and he said, but others might, not me. They might, I'm not. You see that sort of self-confidence, man it just leads to arrogance. It leads to arrogance and arrogance leads you to say, I don't need grace. I possess in myself all that is necessary for a life of faithful discipleship to Jesus.

Well, when you don't think you need grace, then it leads to the third reason. One, Peter didn't believe Jesus. Two, Peter believed in himself. And three, Peter was spiritually lazy. Mark, 14:33 says this, And he took with him Peter and James and John. He's in the garden, and he began to be greatly distressed and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." This is his command to them. Look at Verse 37, And he came and he found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?" See that? Self-confidence, it always leads to spiritual laziness. Jesus says, remain here and watch. Peter went to sleep. Jesus is saying to Peter, 'Peter, buddy, you need to pray.' And Peter says, 'I need to get some sleep.' Do you ever feel that way? The alarm clock goes off, it's time to get up. Time to open our Bibles. Time to pray. I was up late, I need some sleep. Had he believed Jesus and not believed himself, you know what Peter would have been doing right then? He would have been crying out in prayer for God's grace. He would have been crying out and he would have been saying, Father, please help me! Jesus has told me now on multiple occasions that I'm going to fall away and I don't want to fall away! And so, I'm asking you, Father, please help me. Give me grace. I don't want to fall away. I want to be with Jesus. I want to die with Jesus if I have to. Don't let me fall away! But he doesn't say any of that. He doesn't pray any that, he doesn't say any of that. You know why he doesn't do any of that? Because he didn't believe Jesus, and he believed in himself. And when you don't believe Jesus and you believe in yourself, then you become spiritually lazy and you don't pray. So, guess where this leads him. Well, it leads him to the crowd. That's where he goes. And in Mark's gospel, the crowd is always made up of those people who just want to follow Jesus at a distance. That's who the crowd always is. The crowd is always made up of those people that are with Jesus kind of. But they're not really with Jesus. And when you don't believe Jesus and you believe in yourself and you're spiritually lazy, then you're always in the crowd. You're always just 'kind of' with Jesus, but not really with Jesus. And that's where we find Peter, isn't it? We find it right there in Verse 54. Peter, having followed him at a distance, was sitting with the guards, warming himself by the fire.

But where do we find you this morning? Isn't that what we need to ask? Where do I find me? Where do you find you? See, are you really with Jesus, or are you with the crowd? Where are you in this story? This is like I've said, most people what they want to do is, is they want to follow Jesus at a distance, where it's safe, and where it's comfortable. They don't want to be right there in the middle of all this action, right? So, you just need to ask yourself three questions this morning, right? One, have I stopped believing Jesus? See, if you go to a Christian and you say to a Christian, somebody sitting in church on a Sunday morning, hey, have you stopped believing in Jesus? They'll look at you like you're crazy. They'll say, what kind of dumb question is that? I'm right here in church. I just sang the song about Jesus. What a wonderful name it is, that you have no rival, you have no equal. Did you hear me say all that? I mean, do you think I'm up here just saying that? I just said that. Of course I believe in Jesus. I'm not some sort of atheist. But that's not the question I asked. The question I asked is not have you stopped believing in Jesus? The question is this, have you stopped believing Jesus? Have you stopped taking him at his word? Have you stopped believing Jesus so much, because you've started believing in yourself too much? Has that led you to be

spiritually lazy? Do you find that when you should be awake praying, instead you're asleep? When you should be believing Jesus's words by reading them, you're not reading them because you've shut your Bible and you haven't opened it and looked at it for four days because you're spiritually lazy. You don't think that you need to open your Bible and read it because you have so much confidence in yourself, well see, you've stopped believing Jesus. See, this is how you wind up in the crowd. J. C. Ryle, who is an Anglican bishop in the 1800's, one of my favorite authors, J. C. Ryle, said something that has always stuck out to me, he said: Men fall in private long before they fall in public. And how true that is for every one of us. You see, when you look at this right, if you stop believing Jesus in secret, if you stop believing in Jesus in secret, then in secret you'll start to believe in yourself and you'll become spiritually lazy in secret. And the result is that you'll begin to deny Jesus in secret. When no one thinks, when you think no one sees, no one knows what you're doing. It's just my hidden sins. You do it because you denied him in secret. And before long you'll find that you deny him in public. You'll find that great is the fall, because you fell long ago.

I pray this morning that for every person watching this, listening here present, my prayer, I mean, you want to know what I pray as a pastor this morning? It is this, I pray my voice is like the rooster crowing for you. I pray you hear the first crow of the rooster and you say, oh no, and you do what Peter does right here in this moment, you break down and you weep bitterly over your sin. You break down and you weep, and you say, Oh, Jesus! Oh, how have I stopped believing you? Oh, Jesus, how have I started believing so much about myself? Oh, Jesus, how have I become so spiritually lazy? And when you weep and you break down bitterly, if you then find yourself in front of Jesus as a beggar in need of grace at the feet of the one who possesses riches and abundance of grace beyond anything you can imagine offering it to you, and you hear Jesus saying to you listen, did you not think that when I died on the cross for your sin, that one of the sins I died for on the cross was for your lack of belief in me? Did you not think on the cross that I didn't die for your sin of believing in yourself? Did you not think on the cross that I did not die for your spiritual laziness? And do you not think that I died on the cross so that in the moment that you break down and you're weeping bitterly over those sins that I would not have the grace that you need right then in the moment for you. You see, Peter is going to find grace in the end. We're going to see this story come full circle, and we're going to see Peter not cower in fear between a lowly servant girl and a group of guards out in a courtyard. We're going to find him in the seat of power before Caesar himself being crucified upside down because of his strong confession in Jesus. But I can promise you Peter's willingness to die crucified upside down was not because he had found so much confidence in himself. It was, in fact, because he finally quit believing himself and he started believing Jesus. That's how he became strong.

Our world is a mess and it desperately needs those of us who will follow Jesus, not at a distance where it's safe and comfortable. But those of us who will follow Jesus in a way that is defined by our denying ourselves, our taking up our cross, our following him. For that, we're going to need lots of grace. For that, we're going to need lots of Jesus. And

so, this morning, let's go to him then. Let's go to him now, knowing we need him, and let's confess our sin to him. And let's find grace to help in our moment of need.

Lord, I pray that you would be gracious to all of us. Help us, Lord, to stop trusting ourselves as much as we do and to trust you. Lord, you alone are worthy of a life being trusted in, our lives are not worth being... we can't trust ourselves, Lord. I mean we're so fickle. Lord, you are such a sure foundation. I pray, Lord, this morning that you give grace to us, all of us, to trust you, to believe you, to follow you. Lord when we fall, let us lift our eyes and see you, our gracious King. When we need grace, let us look to Jesus. Let us always find Jesus. Amen.