

Failure & Repentance

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome. If you're new or visiting with us, we're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which is why we turn back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark.

You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection, and for some time now, we've been walking with Jesus through the very last week before His death and His resurrection. We're in between a sandwich right now. We're in between trials.

Last time, we looked at Jesus' religious trial, and next time, we're going to look at Jesus' civil trial, but in the meantime, and we had a hint at this, by the way, in verse 54, we're going to look at a sad story from Scripture, which is Peter's denial, and as we do that together, one of the main questions I want to ask is, why did Peter do it? Why did Peter deny his Lord? And so with that, I'm going to invite you to turn with me to Mark chapter 14, starting at verse 66. You can turn in your Bibles. You can turn on your phones. You can turn in your worship guide. Remember, no matter where you turn, that this is God's Word, and God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read it now, starting at verse 66. 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. Verse 68, 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 the 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. Verse 71, but he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I don't 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.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for telling us not only what's encouraging, but also stories that are sad, stories of failure and mistakes, so that we can know that we're not alone in our failure and our mistakes. We thank you for the grace that you offered Peter, and we thank you that that grace is available to us as well. We ask that you would be at work by your spirit now, searching our minds and our hearts, and most of all, showing us the grace that we have in Jesus Christ. It's in his name that we ask all of these things. Amen. I certainly don't need to tell you all that it's a major news event in the U.S. or around the world whenever there's a plane crash. Not a similar news event, of course, when there's a car crash. This happens much more frequently. Plane crashes seem these days to be a rare event. And there's a reason for that. What is it that there's always a search for after a plane has crashed? What is it that they always want? Yeah, they always want the black box. You guys pass the test. And the black box, right, is this audio recorder that's in the cockpit where they can hear exactly what the pilots were saying as the airplane failed. So they can figure out what it is, what is it that went wrong? What happened in this situation? Black boxes, by the way, cost tens of thousands of dollars for just one. The reason being it needs to survive all sorts of circumstances.

[4 : 50] So if your plane goes down in the sea and it's thousands of feet underneath the surface, that black box still needs to be able to function. So thousands of dollars just for one plane are invested in this instrument so that they can solve the mystery of what happened and try to prevent it from occurring again in the future. I told you earlier, we're going to ask this question, why is it that Peter betrayed Christ? Of course, we're familiar, if we're Christians, if you've read the Gospels before, if you've grown up in the church, you know the fact of Peter's betrayal, his denial, excuse me. What's the reason for it, though? Why is it that he finds himself in this place of failure? You might wonder the same thing about yourself in your life. How did I end up there?

Or if you're going through it right now, how did I end up here? If you've lived for much time and you look at your life, it's inevitable that we're going to see moments of failure, lapses of judgment.

One man has said, and I've mentioned it before, everybody has a rap sheet. Now, yours may not be as bad as Peter's, but we don't want to underestimate the seriousness of what happens here. Now, why is it that the black box is so important after a plane crash? Well, I believe the main reason is this, that there's a goal to learn what happened so that we can prevent it in the future. And that's part of why Peter's story is so important for us. We've been watching this story unfold for a while throughout the chapter. If you were here with us a few weeks ago, you may remember that when we were looking at verses 26 through 31, I basically skipped over it.

And I said, this is setting us up for what's going to come later. Well, what's going to come later is now. And that gives us an insight into what's been happening. We are not going to gloss over Peter's actions now. We're going to turn to them and look directly at them so we can understand the black box of Peter. We have the recording, in other words. We've not been left to wonder about how Peter ended up in this place. No, we've been watching him go here step by step towards his own crash. Okay, so verses 26 through 31, I glossed over this when we were in that passage. Remember, Jesus there predicts that his disciples will abandon him. And what does Peter say, verse 29, even though they all fall away, I will not. Now that could be bad enough, but Peter then doubles down. Jesus says, basically, that's not going to happen. Verse 30, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.

And what does Peter say? If I must die with you, I will not deny you. Peter here has more than just overconfidence. Peter's problem is that he has misplaced confidence.

[8 : 02] Peter has tremendous confidence in himself. And we're just getting started. So Peter tells Jesus, no, you're wrong. You might be God in the Christ, but when you say, I'm going to deny you, I'm not.

Well, he continues. Remember, the Garden of Gethsemane happens right after this, verses 32 through 42. What happens with Peter? He is one of the three that's brought along with Jesus, while the rest of the disciples are left behind, he is told to watch and pray. What does Peter do? He sleeps, not once, not twice, three times. What were Jesus's words? Verse 38, watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

Peter doubles down. He is not just overconfident. He is not just full of his own ability to withstand temptation. He then, on top of that, fails to watch and pray. It should not surprise us then what happens next. Peter believes he can succeed on his own, and so the inevitable occurs.

He denies Jesus not once, verses 67, 68. He denies him not twice, verses 69 through 70. He denies him three times, verses 70 through 71. And then, when he realizes what he's done, we're left with this image, verse 72. He broke down and wept.

Christian, the point is this. You are weaker than you realize. You are more dependent than you'd like to admit.

[10 : 20] I've told you over and over, as we're in the gospel of Mark, that need is the price of admission. And as I've said that, I've primarily meant need in terms of recognizing our need for God's grace, our need for forgiveness. Not just our initial need for God's forgiveness, but our ongoing need for God's forgiveness. We see here another aspect to our need, our ongoing need for God's strength, help, provision, and deliverance. We need God every minute, every hour. Calvin says this, page 8 of your worship guide, when we look at the figure of Peter, we learn that God must give us strength every minute of the day.

Christian, God must give you strength every minute of the day.

We see the same thing you'll find on page 6 of your worship guide. If there is one thing we can be certain God wants to teach us, surely it is to convince us once again that we are frail, life is fragile, and we depend upon God for everything.

Christian, you are weaker than you realize, more dependent than you're willing to admit.

Why did Peter deny Christ? He relied on himself. He failed to rely on God. He was confident in his ability, underestimated his need for God's strength. He was warned and encouraged to watch and pray, and instead he slept.

[12 : 31] We need God's help every minute of every day. Jesus tells us the same thing in John chapter 15. He says, I am divine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

For apart from me, you can do nothing. Peter gives us a warning himself, by the way. The character of this story later writes a couple letters, and his first letter, he says this, Be sober-minded, be watchful.

Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.

Peter writes that as someone who learned not the easy way, but the hard way. Peter learned that the devil is indeed a roaring lion.

Christian, your enemy, the devil, really is looking for someone to devour. He was able to get Peter for a time, thankfully because of God's grace, not forever.

[13 : 48] The enemy is dangerous. The threat is real. Woe to those who trust in themselves.

Woe to those who believe they've graduated from temptation. They don't need to confess their sins. They don't need accountability or the advice or counsel of others.

Woe to those who are spiritually self-sufficient. Who aim to fight battles without prayer. Who believe they can do it all in their own strength.

Who think they've moved on from the basics. Why is it that we fail so often? There are many reasons.

One of them is this. We rely on ourselves rather than trusting in God. We rely on our own wisdom, our man-made rules, our worldly principles.

[14 : 59] And when we can admit that, it's worth joining Peter and weeping. Peter teaches us about our utter dependence on God.

Peter warns us about trusting ourselves. Peter shows us the strategies and tactics of the devil. We must rely on God rather than ourselves.

We must look to God in prayer more than our own plans. We must ask God to protect us every hour, every day.

We must never forget what Jesus told Peter. Verse 38. Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Thankfully, though, Peter doesn't just leave us with a warning in this passage.

[16 : 11] The story of Peter's life and the story of his relationship with Jesus shows us there is not just a warning, but there's also great grace.

Now, to understand that grace, I, for one more minute, want to tell you how bad this is. Because to understand the grace of God, we have to understand the seriousness of sin.

It is not a small thing that happens here with Peter. It is, in fact, a very big deal. It is a scandalous thing that Peter does here. How do we know that it's scandalous for him to deny Christ?

Well, we have Christ's own words early on in the gospel. Mark 8, verse 38. He says this, Now, you might read that and think, Okay, Jesus will be ashamed of this person.

That sounds bad, but maybe it's not that bad. Well, Jesus clarifies for us. Matthew chapter 10, he says this, So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.

[17 : 21] But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. That's how serious Peter's denial is here.

Jesus says, without qualification, you deny me, I will deny you. And yet, there is still grace for Peter.

What do we do here with Peter's great failure? Well, there's two major contrasts, character contrasts, we're meant to see with Peter in this chapter.

One of them is Peter as opposed to Judas. The other is Peter compared to Jesus. Okay, and first we're going to talk about Peter compared to Judas. Judas, remember, did not just deny Christ.

He betrayed him. There's one other major difference, though, between Judas and Peter. Peter weeps.

[18 : 23] Judas does not. And we learn from Peter's story, ultimately, these are tears of repentance. I've told you before that tears are often a sign of spiritual life.

Judas gives in to despair. Peter embraces repentance. We know the rest of the story. Peter goes on to be restored to Jesus.

Jesus restores him personally in the Gospel of John. And there we see Jesus invite him, feed him breakfast, and send him out to be one of the leaders of the church.

Peter's story continues. He's the one who tells us in 1 and 2 Peter, which we looked at as a church several years ago, about the importance of not denying Christ.

About the importance of enduring suffering. He's the one who warns us that the devil is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. God redeems Peter's story.

[19 : 31] Why? Because Peter was willing to weep. Judas was not. Judas instead gave in to despair.

Peter, by the way, goes on to become one of the pillars of the church. Church history tells us that he was crucified upside down. Because he believed he wasn't worthy of having the same crucifixion as his Lord.

So I hope that you're challenged by this passage. And I hope that God uses it to search our hearts together. And I also hope that you're encouraged.

I also hope that God uses the story of Peter to give you great hope. Even when sin is present. Even when there's great failure.

There is always a future. For those who repent. Even if it's a great violation.

[20 : 39] We never lose our future and our hope. When we come back to God with tears of repentance. I tell you that because John chapter 8 reminds us that the devil is a liar.

John says this. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character. For he is a liar and the father of lies. And one of the lies is this. Satan wants to convince you that it's all over.

Peter. You have failed. Maybe you failed as dramatically as Peter. And what he wants to whisper to you and what he will whisper to you. Is that there is no future for you.

He will tell you that it is time to give up. Peter reminds us that that is a lie from the pit of hell. That is false even when there's great transgression.

Now I'm not saying that the consequences won't be serious. Right? Especially if there's a great violation. What I am saying is that no matter what you have done.

[21 : 49] There is hope wherever there's repentance. There is hope wherever there are tears. Yes, there may be real loss.

Yes, there may be things that you can't undo. The greatest hope, your greatest hope is not gone. Remember Peter.

Again, in one of his letters talks about our inheritance in heaven. And what does he say? It's imperishable, undefiled. It's kept in heaven for you. I bet that was a comforting thing for Peter to think about.

Knowing how many things he messed up here on earth. Knowing that those couldn't threaten what he had in heaven with Christ.

So Christian, don't let Satan lie to you. The truth is this. Where there is repentance, there is great hope.

[22 : 49] Whatever mistakes you've made as a friend or a brother or a sister, there's hope where there's repentance.

Whatever mistakes you've made as an employee or as a soldier, there is hope where there's repentance. Whatever mistakes you've made as a parent, even if your children are grown, there is hope where there is repentance.

Whatever mistake you have made as a spouse, even if the divorce is final, there is hope where there's repentance.

But there must be repentance. We need tears, not despair. We need Peter, not Judas.

I told you earlier, there's two main contrasts that we're meant to pick up on here with Peter. One of them is between Peter and Judas. Peter shows us the way of life, Judas the way of death.

[24 : 05] The other contrast is between Peter and Jesus. Remember I told you when we were in the last passage to not overlook verse 54. Verse 54 told us this, Peter's story is sandwiched between Jesus' religious trial and his civil trial in the narrative.

All of that is to tell us this one thing. This episode with Peter happens while Jesus is before the Sanhedrin. These two things are occurring at the same time.

That is meant to underscore and highlight for us this, Peter is faithless while Jesus is faithful.

Peter denies Christ and refuses to walk into suffering at the very same moment that Jesus is choosing suffering.

Jesus is telling the truth while Peter is lying. Peter has hope. We have hope for that very same reason.

[25 : 27] Jesus remains faithful in the face of opposition and persecution so that he can welcome back his people who repent. Peter has hope in the courtyard of the high priest because Jesus is standing faithful in the upper room of the high priest.

Jesus is failing. Excuse me. Jesus is succeeding while Peter is failing. Jesus didn't lie last week before the Sanhedrin.

Jesus is not going to lie next week before the civil court. Jesus doesn't deny his people. And instead, he goes straight to the cross.

Brothers and sisters, that is our Lord Jesus. He is faithful when we are faithless. He tells the truth even when we lie.

We stay close to God so that we can stay far away from sin because we know we need him every minute.

[26 : 42] And when we fail, we return to God because we know he offers us hope and forgiveness. And so that's why we're able to sing, grace, grace, God's grace.

Grace that is greater than all our sin. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he tells the truth when we lie.

We thank you that he's faithful when we're faithless. We thank you that he runs towards suffering even when we run away from it. We ask that you would make us like Peter, that in our failure, we would return in tears to you, and that you would continue to use us as your instruments in this world for your glory.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.