

## The Fall of Peter

Luke 22:54-62

April 13, 2025

So you can turn your Bibles to Luke 22 as we come to one of the saddest scenes in the Gospel accounts, one of the most pitiable, poignant scenes in the Passion narrative, which is the fall of Peter. And I refer to this scene as sad, pitiable because we can all sympathize with Peter, can't we? We know that if we were put into the same situation, we'd likely fall in the same way as he. And so we feel for our brother Peter. But we, as we do feel for poor Peter, let's not forget, never forget what this meant to our Lord.

Jesus has just been betrayed by Judas, a man whom he loved very much for years, sharing life and friendship with him, opening his heart to him. And now Peter, even Peter, most vocal in his support of all the disciples, even vehemently loyal as we just saw last week. He tried to behead a man in defense of

Jesus. Now in the very next scene, a sudden reversal as he denies three times even knowing Jesus.

Let's take a look at the text and read, starting in verse 54. "Now having arrested him," that is, Jesus, "they led him away and brought him to the house of the high priest. Peter was following at a distance, and after they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them, and a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, 'This man was with him, too.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.' A little later another saw him and said, 'You are one of them, too.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not.'

"And after about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, 'Certainly this man was with him, too, for he also is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about.' Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today you will deny me three

times.' And he went out and cried bitterly." Powerful just to read it, stunning and even, in a sense, frightening as we think about how close to home this hits in our own hearts. I want you to see a couple things before we get into the outline, just a couple things by way of observation. It kind of helps to draw the bead on the point, here.

First, you'll notice, and you've seen this as we've moved throughout the Gospel of Luke, that Luke has kept the focus the entire time on Jesus, as Luke has made him the center of our attention, as he should be. But as we come to this narrative, this account, there's a clear shift in focus, and it's ever so brief, but there clearly is a shift as Luke moves the camera lens from Jesus to Peter. Jesus is there at the beginning and at the end, but it's really Peter who is taking center stage in this scene. He's the main character, and Jesus is being portrayed almost in the background.

Now, that's not to say that Jesus has receded from importance or that he's less prominent, here. As a matter of fact, at the climactic point, it's his word that comes true. And

it is his look that pierces Peter's heart. So even though Peter as he takes the main stage, he cannot handle the spotlight. He crumbles. And though his resolve melts like butter in hot sun, though he fails to keep his word, we're meant to see that. But it's really not Peter's word that matters here. It's Jesus, who in the end remains immutable, whose word never fails. His word comes true. And that is worth remembering.

A second observation: The reason for the focus on Peter, here, is so Luke can demonstrate to his readers the need for all Jesus' disciples to watch and pray, so we don't enter into temptation, so that we don't fall into great sin. I mean, if the great Apostle Peter can fail in this way, well, so can we, each one of us. Do you see, there, in verse 60 as we were reading that phrase "while he was still speaking"? Maybe that rings a bell for you. We noticed back at the beginning of verse 47, it's the exact same phrase there, isn't it?

Luke uses that expression, here, to paint a contrast. Whereas Jesus, who had been preparing himself by praying, when the time of testing came upon him in verse 47, "while he was

still speaking," and there's no time to prepare because the arresting party has come upon him. And yet when the test came, he faced it, and he passed the test. By contrast, we see in verse 60, it's while Peter was still speaking, and it's in his third denial, he's already moved through denials, and now while he is still speaking, he's in the act of demonstrating his lack of preparation. He'd been sleeping rather than praying. So when his test came, he falls apart. He caves in. His resolve unravels right before our eyes.

Christian, take note, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Let him who thinks wealth is a good security against falling, or strength in physique or body or health is a preventative against falling, or let's put it this way, who thinks a full night's sleep is the most important thing to prevent you from falling, so that you have a clear head for the next day, take note, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." There is a deeper spiritual preparation that is required of us. The fall, it doesn't need to be that way, the fall is not inevitable, not for a Christian. Jesus has given us the key to avoiding falling into sin by staying far away from it.

What is that key? It's back in verse 40 and verse 46, "Rise up," another way of saying, be watchful. Have your head up, looking around, and he's, some metaphors, spiritually speaking. "Be watchful and pray that you may not enter into temptation." So with this in mind, as we think about this account and what it's here for, let's get into our outline for this morning. We know what happened, obvious to us as we read through this. We remember the Lord's prediction back in Luke 22:34, so we've been expecting this fall. We know who it pertains to since Jesus was specific back in Luke 22:34, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you've denied three times that you know me."

So all that remains now as we move through the account is to kind of watch this slow-moving train wreck and let this horrific sight embed itself deeply into our minds and take root in our hearts so that we pay attention, and we learn how to avoid this for ourselves. Three points to guide us through the text, covering where it happened, how it happened, and then why it happened. The final point, why it happened, will promise you

much-needed relief and some encouragement coming out of this passage in the end. So hang in there, okay?

Number one, let's look at the scene, the scene, where it happened. Number one, the scene, where it happened. Go back to verse 54. We see how Luke sets this up. "Now having arrested him, they led him away, brought him to the house of the high priest." So having arrested him, that points to the arresting party, the Roman cohort led by a chiliarch, one of the garrison commanders, if not the garrison commander. They had arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane in the early morning hours of Friday, April 3, AD 33. And as we saw in verse 52, the Roman cohort was also accompanied by religious leaders of Israel: chief priests, temple officers, elders of the people. The elders of the people referring to the Sadducees and Pharisees that sat on the Jewish council known as the Sanhedrin.

At the time of the arrest, after taking Jesus into custody, according to what's written in Matthew 26:56 and Mark 14:50, the disciples left Jesus at that point, all of them, and fled. They ran away. And after that, this whole company, the arresting

party, the religious leaders minus the eleven Apostles, they started making their way back to the city by traveling west down the slopes of Mount Olive and where the Garden of the Gethsemane was, at the base of that mount, down the slope, crossing the Kidron valley and then back up the other side to the temple mount.

It's impossible to know the route for sure, but the most direct route from Gethsemane to the high priest's house would likely have been to pass by the north side of the temple and then go around the Antonio fortress where the Roman garrison was stationed, barracked, and then they'd turn south down to head to the high priest's house, passing by the temple to their, to their east.

The high priest's house, more like a palace in the city. It contained several places of residence, kind of like connected, joined mansions. Private living quarters were there at the high priest's house, private meeting spaces, kitchens, dining areas, all these things built around and looking down into an unroofed, open-to-the-sky, open courtyard area. Access into this courtyard



and into the house itself and the living spaces and the meeting quarters and all that came through an arched passageway that connected an outer gate going into the streets and into the city to the inner gate. There was a guard shack for the doorkeeper. There were posted guards, all to limit, control, limit and control access and maintain security there.

So after the arresting party moves down the, the slope of all of that, through the Kidron Valley, up the other side, around the temple, Antonio fortress, passing by the temple to the east, they move through the city and come to the house of the high priest. Having arrived there, the cohort transferred the custody of Jesus the prisoner to the custody of the temple officers, the officers of the chief priests, and the cohort returned to the Antonio fortress, leaving the prisoner with the chief priests, with its officers.

Now, in the remaining hours of the early morning, all the way until daybreak, Jesus is being examined by the religious leaders, and it starts with Annas, Annas, who is the former high priest, a very powerful man. He's up at the, kind of the top of

the pyramid with regard to soaking the money out of the people at the temple. He's in charge of the entire industry, the temple industry, of all the sacrifices and money-changing and all the stuff that he can extract a profit from. He's making money off of all the business contracts, all the things that are going on there. Annas is up at the top there, but he is the former high priest. His son-in-law, Caiaphas, is now the serving high priest when Jesus is crucified.

So they start with bringing Jesus before Annas, this former high priest, an older man, very powerful man. And in John 18:13, it says that "they led him to Annas, first, father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year." So this first examination by Annas is something like what we might call in our own criminal justice process, it's kind of like the initial appearance. This allowed Annas to interview Jesus. Maybe he could, by interviewing him, find some kind of a weakness, maybe, maybe discovered by his shrewdness and expedient legal strategy to convict him, to bring out the convictions and condemn him. From what we read in John 18, Annas' questioning didn't reveal too much.

You can keep a finger in Luke 22, and if you want to keep one in John 18, I'll go back and forth there a little bit. But what we read in John 18 with Jesus' first appearance before Annas, right after the arresting party arrived at the house of Annas and Caiaphas, Annas tried to question him. Starting in verse 19, "The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching." Remember, he's looking for something to condemn him with. "And Jesus answered him, 'I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple where all the Jews come together. And I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them. Behold, they know what I said.'

"When he had said this, one of the officers standing nearby gave Jesus a slap, saying, 'Is that the way you answer the high priest?' Jesus answered him, 'If I've spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong. But if rightly, why do you strike me?'" So Annas, done with questioning, okay, that's going nowhere, he sends him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest, Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Annas didn't have to send Jesus far away because as I said, he and his son-in-law lived in the same palace, the same place, each occupying his own wing of the high priest's house,

lived in their own quarters. So the house of Annas and the house of Caiaphas, those two houses are really one and the same complex.

So we come to a second examination by Caiaphas in the early morning hours of Friday, April 3. Mark and Matthew record this. You see in Matthew 26:57 and following, Mark 14:53 and following, this is the examination that they record, and they give greater prominence to it, sort of like a preliminary hearing in our own criminal justice process. But it's also really an informal and unofficial, and we could really say an illegal trial that's being held there in the early morning hours. The chief priest, scribes, lawyers, legal scholars, at least some Sanhedrin members are there as well.

They're examining Jesus, they're calling witnesses to testify against him, looking for some non-rebuttable evidence that deserves the death penalty for him. They go through all their witnesses, some of them contradicting each other. They can't get their stories straight. They're really coming up short. But there's a final thing that we're going to see next

week, as we see what Jesus actually says to make the case, their case against himself. But that's getting ahead of ourselves.

There's going to be a third and final examination, a formal and official examination before the full, gathered Sanhedrin. We read in Luke 26, or 22:66 that "when it was day, when the sun rose, council of the elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led him away into their council chamber." Both Matthew 27:1, Mark 15:1, they both refer to this third meeting, which is the formal, official meeting of the gathered Sanhedrin. This was a necessary legal step.

This was necessary to put this into the record of the minutes, that they had come together and officially and formally condemned Christ, passing a death sentence upon him. Because rabbinical law said no death sentence can be pronounced or passed in the middle of the night, so they had to wait until morning for the official judgment, the official sentencing, and then they'd go off to persuade Pilate to execute their sentence. All very by the book, you see, when you've got to commit murder.

Now all that to say, this is the scene that's set for Peter and the scene is set starting with the first examination by Annas and the second by his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Annas, the former high priest; Caiaphas, the currently serving high priest. And again verses 54-55 say this, "Now, having arrested him, they led him away and brought him to the house of the high priest, but Peter was following at a distance. And after they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter was sitting among them."

Now, how is it that Peter got into the courtyard of the high priest? How did he pass through the security? He didn't belong there. It's a secured area, protected by gates, guards, officers. You can't just waltz in there off of the street. Turns out Peter's not the only one who is interested in learning about the disposition of Jesus. His friend John, he also, one of the sons of Zebedee, he also is following along, too. Peter and John, as we know, have a special connection, but John in particular had a connection to the household of the high priest. He has a special connection, probably a family connection. If you're still in John 18, you can see, backing up to verse 15,

"Simon Peter, he was following Jesus, and so was," by the way, "another disciple."

That's how the Apostle John refers to himself, in the third person all the time in his Gospel. He doesn't actually name himself. He says "another disciple," or, he loves this one, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He just calls himself "another disciple," here, and, and, and now "that disciple," verse 15, "was known to the high priest and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest." But Peter, he's left standing at the door. Outside.

And so the other disciple who was known to the high priest went out and spoke to the doorkeeper and brought Peter in. That's how Peter got in. He was brought in because of the, the visa, the pass that John provided for him. Now what is Peter doing there? What is he doing skulking around, chasing after the arresting party, trying to find out what's going on? Peter and John as well, but Peter, after scattering along with the rest of the disciples, I'm wondering what is it that motivated him then to retrace his steps, catch up with the arresting party and

follow behind, tailing them to go into the courtyard of the high priest.

Matthew 26:58 tells us that "Peter was following him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest. He entered in, sat down with the officers," and then he says a purpose statement, "to see the outcome," to see the outcome. So we're still left wondering what are, what are Peter's motivations? What's driving him in his heart? We're always on kind of shaky ground, when we're trying to get into the psychology of someone in Scripture when the Scripture doesn't plainly say. But we could wonder, perhaps Peter, maybe he was ashamed after initially running away in the garden. So he decides to put on a brave face and kind of steel up his spine, face his fears, go and find out what's happening. That's the least a friend could do, right?

Perhaps Peter was maybe more pragmatically minded here. Rather than seeing himself as fleeing the scene, he's not, no, I didn't run away. I wasn't scared. I was just making a tactical retreat in the moment because I, you know, I mean, what good is



it if both of us are arrested? Just going to get my bearing, and I'll follow along, tag along behind, figure out what's, figure out what to do next as we form our resistance. I think more straightforwardly, if you go back to Luke 22, more straightforwardly, I think Luke tells us Peter followed after Jesus because, really, that's what disciples do. They follow. Disciples follow Jesus.

In fact, Peter's been following Jesus ever since he dropped his nets and left them in the boat with his crew in Luke 5:11. Started following Jesus then, and he has been following ever since. Why would things change now? In fact, the verb Luke uses here, *akoloutheo*, literally follow after, physically, spatially, walking behind somebody else. But it took on a figurative meaning meaning, to follow as a disciple. In fact, it is the typical word *akoloutheo* is the typical word for discipleship.

It describes the discipleship between a student or a disciple and his master. It's often used in very warm and intimate terms and friendship terms of great respect between a, a disciple and his master. That's the word used here, word for

discipleship. You can actually go back to, as I mentioned, Luke 5:11. That's where he started following him as a disciple. But Luke 5:27, where Matthew, Levi, is called to be a disciple. Luke 9:23, "If anyone would follow after me," there it is again, "let him deny himself, take up his cross, follow me." Luke 9:59, Luke 18:22. It is the typical word for discipleship. The other Gospel writers use it, too.

So Peter is, and this is what Luke wants us to see, he is still a disciple of Jesus Christ even at this dark hour. Luke wants us to remember that. Even as Peter is on the brink of verbally denying his Master, Luke's trying to signal to us, here, it isn't true. He's not, not a disciple. He's just a failing one. Peter's interest in seeing the outcome, we have to see here. I mean, he's risking great danger, isn't he? There is a courage in him, we could say, on a, on a human level. But he's not coming after him and following after him and seeking merely out of tabloid curiosity.

This is deeply personal to Peter. He loved Jesus, even if he had failed to pick up on what Jesus was laying down most of

the time, even if he failed to understand Jesus' teaching and admonishments and, and warnings, very recent warnings. Back in Luke 22:33, while still in the upper room when Jesus alluded to Peter falling away for a time and needing to be restored, remember what Peter said? "'Lord, with you, I'm ready to go both to prison and death.'" Here, he's trying to show it. "'With you, I'm ready.'" Remember how Jesus responded? He didn't affirm him. He didn't affirm Peter's human enthusiasm and zeal. Instead, he predicted his denials.

Again, while they're on the way to Gethsemane to pray, Jesus predicted in Matthew 26 that they'd all scatter. Peter wasn't having it, then, when Jesus said, "'You are all going to scatter.'" He's not having that. He says, "'Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.'" Now, is that just pride? Is that seeing himself as better than all the others? Yeah, maybe. But it could also be, and I think it is, a strong affirmation of his love for the Lord. And yet once again, even then, on the road from the upper room down to Gethsemane, Jesus did not respond by patting Peter on the back and saying, Great job man, thanks for standing up for me. He didn't affirm him. Instead, he predicted

one more time, “Truly, I say to you this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny me three times.”

Peter, Peter again doubled down, and “he kept saying insistently.” It's an imperfect verb, so it's like a, a continual, saying insistently. Mark 14:31, “Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you.” Whatever's motivating Peter, man, he's put it all out there, hasn't he? Though he scattered in the garden with the rest of them, he's just got to return. He's just got to get close, find out what's going on, see what's going to happen to his Lord, to his friend. And yet, we have to say, there's a footnote, there, Luke gives us. We see another impulse at work in Peter, an impulse that's compromising his loving devotion. Peter followed as a disciple, yes, *akoloutheo*. But “following,” Luke says, then he adds, “at a distance.”

So there's something there, compromising him. There's something there, a hint of weakened resolve. And whatever that small little thing is, it becomes the most prominent thing. It's exploited by the enemy, it's made manifest, and it takes center

stage and becomes much more prominent. This little hidden thing in his heart becomes way more prominent than his verbal outward bravado. I'll just add a footnote, here, for you, beloved. Those little, tiny little voices whispering in your heart, you should pay really close attention to them because sometimes those are the very chinks in the armor that the evan, enemy will exploit to expose you. Deal with those little whispering voices. Take them to the Lord in prayer.

After making it past the doorkeeper and through the gate, Peter enters the courtyard, starts milling about. John 18:18 says he's there "with the slaves and the officers who were standing there." So he's, he's there hanging out with them. "They'd made a charcoal fire, for it was cold." They're warming themselves. This is about the same time of year there as it is right now for us. And you know that even though it could be warm during the day here, at night it gets rather chilly. Nice to have a fire.

So Peter's standing there warming himself, says John 18. Luke says he got even more comfortable and more familiar, says,

"After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together," look where Peter is, "Peter was sitting among them." Kind of an echo, isn't it, of Psalm 1? "How blessed is the man" who doesn't do that, "who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of the sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers." And if you have any question about whether these guys are truly going to be characterized as wicked, sinners, and scoffers, just let your eyes scan to verses 63-64. The men who were holding in, Jesus in custody were mocking him while they beat him. Oh, they're mockers, all right. Peter's hanging out with them. What are you doing, Peter?

Well, this is the scene. This is where it happened. Now let's consider a second point: the slide. The slide. And don't think of, like, a little kid's slide, like a little, you put, might put your toddler on at the park, you know, nice gentle curves, and it kind of curves around, and it's pleasant and everybody's giggling and laughing. Think of this as a slide, like at that pitch right there, and it's got grease on it.

Number two, the slide. This is how it happened. A characteristic feature of sitting around a campfire, as we all know, it provides warmth to the body, especially in the cold hours of an early morning. But another feature of a campfire, along with giving off heat, it also provides light. Verse 56, "A servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the fire light and looking intently at him, said, 'This man was with him, too.'"

Now if we compare this again with John's account, this is the second encounter, actually, that Luke is reporting. It's the second encounter with this same girl, John 18:17. After John, the Apostle, John his friend got, got access for Peter, we find out in John 18:17, the slave girl who kept the door said to Peter, "'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I'm not.'" Let me through. And evidently, this girl who had examined him coming through the door, doing her job as a doorkeeper, she's not satisfied by Peter's brush-off. She has someone take her place, stand at her post by the door. And she goes and finds Peter at the fire, sitting with her friends, her fellow slaves, sitting with the officers.

As she comes close, she leans in closer and studies his features very carefully. And that's the verb that Luke uses, *atenizo*, to look intently, as in to stare at somebody. You ever been stared at? Maybe you're sitting there eating at a restaurant, and all of a sudden you're like, What? Why do I feel weird? You look up and there's someone just staring right at you, and they're at the next table. You're like, What?

That's what's going on here. Must have been awkward. And especially for Peter, who's hoping at this point to keep a very low profile. He wants to stay covert, remain discreet. She's here blowing his cover. What are you doing, girl? She speaks directly to Peter in the first encounter, which Luke doesn't record. But we know from Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:67, that she said, “You, too, you too, were with Jesus the Galilean, Jesus the Nazarene.” Peter denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you're talking about.”

So she turned to others who are sitting there. This is what Luke records for us, a second encounter. “She said, ‘This man was with him, too.’” She's not going to be put off his scent.



She is good at her job. She is used to studying faces. She does it for, I would say a living, but she's a slave. So she does it for her food and her board. She knows him. She knows him for sure. And she informs the others, "'This man was with him, too.'" And Peter denied it, verse 57, saying, "'Woman, I do not know him.'" Shocking, isn't it? Bold-faced lie. Morality cannot be abandoned and ignored even when you're on covert operations.

But the lie was only a cover for the more shameful and cowardly sin that he was committing in this moment, whatever his justification was, the cowardly sin of disloyalty. And it may seem ironic, but it's actually rather fitting, I think, that Peter's sin of denying Christ, of lying about knowing him, is exposed by a wee slave girl, a girl of no social standing, a girl with no real power or authority at all in this social context, in the first-century Middle Eastern context.

And just think about it. It didn't take a muscled, grizzled veteran soldier holding a sharp sword to Peter's throat to cause him to fold. It didn't take a trained religious inquisitor, one of the scholar's lawyers, to put Peter through an intense

Spanish-Inquisition kind of a thing. All it took to get Peter to crack and to fold and deny his friend, Jesus, to deny his master, the Christ of God, is the stare of a little girl, of a slave girl just trying to guard the door, just trying to do her job.

And it's as if in this providence that in the kindness of God, it should stop him up short, for Peter to stop and realize, Dude, you're not fooling anyone. Give up the James Bond act. Just confess Jesus already as his disciple and be content and even rejoice at the abuse. He didn't do that. Instead, he kept the charade going. He lied, he denied, "'Woman, I do not know him.'" It's interesting, a couple of commentators point this out, that the, that's the exact expression that was used as an idiom, the exact language of Peter, there, is used as an idiom in the synagogues to excommunicate someone. It's what the synagogue would say to the people, the person being excommunicated, We no longer know you. We no longer have anything to do with you. You are dead to us. This is no slight denial on Peter's part. Peter has cratered.

So Luke tells us in verse 58, "A little later another saw him and said, 'You're one of them, too.' Peter said, 'Man, I am not.'" Peter's answering a man, there. It's very apparent in the language. It's the gender; it's not female, but male. This was a man, but by comparing this with the other Gospel accounts, we know that it is the doorkeeper girl, she is kind of behind this guy's inquisition, this guy's question. She's out there stirring up her friends. After all of her uncomfortable staring and her uncomfortable questions, the other accounts tell us that Peter got up from the fire in the first instance. He got up the from the fire, and he went through the gateway to the porch. He's trying to get away from her, trying to put some distance there.

"And another servant girl saw him," according to those other accounts, "and began telling everyone else, 'This is one of them. This is, this man was with Jesus of Nazareth.'" Now, Luke doesn't record that denial, which came with an oath. He took an oath before God that he didn't know him. Luke just records the very simple denial, "'Man. I'm not.'" He's blunt. He's very short, curt with this man, not wanting to engage with any further dialogue. He just wants this to stop already. Just leave me alone.

Second denial, followed closely after the first denial, Luke says in verse 58, "It happened a little later." So the girl at the door, man, she's really making some trouble, isn't she? Yeah, I'll tell you what. I want to hire her for my security. She's stirred up trouble, so much so that Peter's trying to separate himself. He, but he's followed, badgered, troubled by others who are also trying to, trying to identify him. Quite the picture, isn't it, of the way sins operate, the way lusts and temptations operate, chasing us, pursuing us, nagging at us, bothering us. And it seems that once one of them is stirred up, man, they all wake up, don't they? Start pursuing and bothering and troubling and badgering and baying for our blood and chasing us from one fall after another, or chasing us into a fall, one after another?

Then in verse 59, we see the disruption quiet down a little bit as about an hour passes by. This, too, is a picture of temptations. They make a big noise, temptations do, and for an intense season, in a period, and they don't seem to leave us alone. But then without any warning, without any explanation,

they just, temptations fall silent. Oh, when arrows stop flying, Christian, be on your guard.

"After about an hour," verse 59 says, "after about an hour had passed by, another man began to insist, saying, 'Certainly, this man was with him, too, for he is also a Galilean.'" In the passing of that quiet hour, without any questioning, pursuing, any assailants, no hassle, that has lulled Peter and dulled him into a false sense of security. It was as if he thought in that hour, well, I guess the danger's past. I guess my denials have silenced them, and they're not after me again. Oh, but they were working behind the scenes. They were talking among themselves, they were comparing notes, gathering evidence. Same thing with sin and temptation. When you think sin is quiet, temptation has fallen silent, that your initial resistance has been enough, and you can take your rest and take your ease, be on your guard.

John Owen says this, "As sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so it is that our contrivances against sin are to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even

when there is the least suspicion." While the devil was regrouping, planning another run at Peter; yes, the devil's at work here.

Remember Jesus' warning, Luke 22:31, "'Simon, Satan's demanded to sift all of you like wheat.'" That's certainly happening right here, right now, isn't it? But while the devil is preparing for another strike, how is Peter using that hour of reprieve? Is it like the song says, "Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer"? Is he praying? Is he reflecting on his actions, his words? Any hint here of self-examination, re-evaluating his spiritual strategy? Well, if the hour passed without any careful self-reflection, the next test comes to him with an opportunity embedded in it.

The man says in verse 59, "insisting." The verb means to insist strongly, firmly, almost to demand, like he's under deep conviction. He knows what's true. He's not going to be easily put off. "'Certainly, this man was with him, too, for he also is a Galilean.'" Matthew 26:73 says it's Peter's accent that's given him away as a Galilean. He's just a, just a Galilean

hayseed, he's a rural guy. He's one of those, fly-over country. He's not a sophisticated citizen of the city of Jerusalem.

But embedded in that trial, the identification of him as a Galilean, it's a reminder of his origin, isn't it? Where he's come from, where he got his start, where he first met Jesus, where he first started following him. I mean, if he's forgotten his true spiritual identity, maybe it, maybe his native Galilean accent, which is impossible for him to shed, is going to jog his memory. Maybe that'll clear his head, remind him who he really is. Wrong again. Verse 60, "Then Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you're talking about.'"

In Mark's account, he's so emphatic in this final denial that he begins cursing, swearing, which I suppose makes sound, someone sound more truthful. We see, hear that in our politics these days. Somehow they're more convict, convicted and convinced and convincing. Peter tried that. Well, if Peter is not one of Jesus' disciples, it seems hard to explain what a Galilean is doing here in the courtyard of the Judean high priest at this hour. Everyone knows except for Peter, it seems.

The only reasonable explanation for any Galilean to be here at this hour, at this time, in these circumstances, is that Jesus the Nazarene, a Galilean, he's been arrested, he's standing trial. Why else would another Galilean be here? What's he doing there, two, three, four in the morning? Peter's answer strains credulity. Everyone knows it except for Peter. That is, until the rooster crows.

So we've seen the scene, where it happened. We've seen this slide into sin, how it happened. Third, number three in your outline, the sorrow, here's why it happened. We'll start at the end of verse 60, where it's the crowing of a rooster that reminds the once-crowing disciple that he has now inexplicably fallen silent. He's cowering when of all times he ought to be crowing about his relationship with Jesus the Christ, right? You see the irony, there? Peter strutted around like a rooster, but now he's exposed, reminded, condemned by a rooster. As we acknowledged from the beginning, it's so easy to sympathize with Peter, right, because we wonder if we would have fared any better than he did. Probably not.



But all sympathy for Peter is eclipsed as Luke brings Jesus back into focus in these last few verses, and I'm so glad he did. "Immediately," verse 60, "while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today you will deny me three times.' And he went out and cried bitterly."

The rooster's crow snapped Peter to attention, reminding him, perhaps even convicting him at this point, especially so, though, when the Lord turned, looked at Peter. That look at Peter, the intensified form of the verb *blepo*, which means to see or to look at, but it's *emblepo*, meaning not just to look at, but to fix one's gaze upon. So when Peter saw the Lord looking at him in that way, notice no longer is it the proper name, Jesus, here, Peter's familiar friend, fellow Galilean. No, now it's *ho kyrios*, the Lord, the master himself.

And when that look comes, immediately, he's stricken with shame, recognizing his guilt, remembering the word of the Lord mere hours before. He predicted this would happen. He told him,

warned him, cautioned him, “‘Before a rooster crows today, you'll deny me three times.’” No wonder Peter goes out, weeps bitterly, loudly, uncontrollably. He is absolutely gutted here. We get it. Who wouldn't be?

Peter's had this feeling before, though. You know that? Here he is again and he finds himself once again having resisted the Lord, having failed again, and this reminds him perhaps of one of his earliest encounters with the Lord in Luke 5, when, when Peter tried to tell the Creator of fish how to fish. I got the expertise. I got time on the Sea of Galilee. I've been doing this all my life. That's my boat, by the way. That's my crew in the boat. And my friend John, James, his brother, they're my partners in this fishing business. We've been out on the lake, we've been all night, caught nothing, but it's your word, all right, you're Lord. And what happened? Such a catch of fish they couldn't contain it in the boat. In the end he's falling down at Jesus' feet saying, “‘Go away from me, for I'm a sinful man, O Lord.’”

We can all put ourselves in that position, right? Remember how Jesus responded then to the penitent Peter? So gracious, so kind. "Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't fear because from now on you'll be catching men.'" Jesus hasn't changed his program for Peter. Even though Peter's fallen, even though he's failed, he hasn't changed. In fact, go back to those verses and take note of a few things. Take note of a few things, first in Peter and then in our Lord. Regarding Peter, we need to see that Peter, he's a true believer, and though failing in his following, as we said earlier, he was following, and when the Lord turned and looked at Peter, that tells us, when Peter noticed, that it's because Peter had been looking at the Lord. He's there not out of facile curiosity. He's there because of genuine love. He's, he's deeply concerned. He wants to see what's going to happen to Jesus.

Yes, Peter was for a time blind to his true danger. The true danger was not the arresting soldiers; it wasn't the powerful religious leaders. The true danger, as we noted, was within. The susceptibility to the temptation, following, yet at a distance, that's the small little voice of temptation that was in his heart that he didn't deal with. He didn't see within him

the susceptibility to that temptation, that entering into it, he's on the slide to the fall, full-throated denial. He didn't see it. He didn't see within his heart the capacity to commit heinous disloyalty, shameful cowardice, shocking reversal, precipitous fall, all covered over with lies. He didn't see that in his heart. He didn't see what we read earlier in the service in Psalm 51. As David says, "I was born in iniquity. I'm saturated with sin."

Back in Luke chapter 12, verses 4-5, Jesus said, "'I say to you, my friends,'" and this is addressing Peter's little voice of following at a distance. "'I say to you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear the one who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.'"

Peter's learning a bitter lesson this night. It's a lesson found way earlier in Scripture, in Proverbs 29:25, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." Peter was ensnared by the fear of man because he was not watchful, and

he was not prayerful. He entered into this temptation and sinned a dreadful sin. And that sin also is named in Luke chapter 12:8-9: "'And I say to you, everyone who confesses me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God. But he who denies me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.'"

And Peter, don't, don't diminish what Peter did, here, in denying Christ. When he denied Christ, he denied God. He offended God the Father who loves his Son, who wants his Son exalted and magnified and known and boasted over. Peter refused to do that. And we say, oh, but he was afraid. Oh, but what would you do. Right! He was afraid, and that's not okay. What would you do? I know, we're of the same stuff. Rather than expressing sympathy for the devil, let's express sympathy with our God, who says, confess, my son. He's the one who's offended.

Peter, here, has snapped out of his madness. His eyes are suddenly opened to his blindness, and he looks around to see what's happened to him. What's happened, what, what, what happened to his loyalty? Like a true believer, like a true

believer, a true follower, a true disciple, he's stricken here. He's grieved. He's broken. He's shattered. This is a penitent man. Peter's a true believer. And that's what we see here at the end. Even though he is, he's cratered, he's fallen, he's committed a, a vile, horrible sin, it is not the unforgivable sin. It's a terrible sin. And yet this is a true believer. That's Peter.

Couple points about our Lord. I mentioned the look, the intense look of the Lord, fixing his gaze on Peter. And as we noted, that's the sense of the verb there, *emblepo*. There's only one use of that word that I can find where that intense look of Jesus, that piercing gaze is focused on and aimed at unbelieving people. It's in Luke chapter 20, and, and we find out it's, it's the, the, the look is at, in verse 1, it says "the chief priest, the scribes, with the elders." That's the same group of religious leaders who have now arrested him, who intend to try and convict him and then crucify him. Those guys.

They came up to him, in Luke chapter 20 verse 1 and following to stop him, to silence him, to embarrass him, to

discredit him. They couldn't do it. All through, all through the chapter we see that. Jesus silences them. He rebukes them. He warns them by telling the parable of the tenants, they being the wicked tenants, who are going to forfeit their right to care for the Lord's vineyard. And Jesus, it says in Luke 20:17, "Jesus looked at them intently," *emblepo*, piercing them with a stare of indignation, as if to warn them, do not reject the chief cornerstone. The one that you want to cast out, that's the very one you need to hold on to. So there's one example of *emblepo*, that word, that intense look used in a very piercing, convicting, even condemning way.

But that's not the only use of this word. There are other uses in the Gospels. In his encounter with the rich young ruler, Mark 10:21, "Jesus looking at him," *emblepo*, "looking at him, he loved him." Not a condemning gaze, but a loving, affectionate gaze at the rich young ruler. That young man went away grieved. He loved his stuff more than Jesus. The Lord explained this to his disciples, "'How hard it is for a rich man to be saved. Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.'" And they're

astonished because that, that scrambled with the way they thought this thing worked.

So Jesus in verse 27, Mark 10, "looked intently at them." Same word, *emlepo*. He's fixing his gaze upon them, and again, not with condemnation, but with affectionate love. And he says, "'With men it's impossible," that's true, "but not with God. All things are possible with God.'" And he's looking at them as men who've been saved. Peter's not an unwealthy man. He owns a fishing business. James and John come from a pretty prominent family, own a fishing boat as well. They're not, they could be categorized with the rich who can't enter into the kingdom of heaven, and yet here they are. They're kingdom citizens.

Why? Because God does the impossible, and he's looking at them with that intent gaze, saying, "I love you. You're with me because God has done the impossible with you." And after that, he goes on to assure Peter of his place in the kingdom: future reward, manifold blessing. That gaze is a loving gaze. And now, when Peter saw that look, that intense look of the Lord, his conscience stricken, "Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how



he told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you'll deny me three times.'" But remember what else the Lord said on that occasion. "'Simon, behold, Satan's demanded permission to sift you like wheat, but Simon, I've prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'" "

That look of the Lord when he turned and fixed that gaze on Peter, not a condemning look. That was an affectionate look, a loving look. This is the look of the Lord whose word just came true. Peter, his word can't stand. His word is mutable, inconsistent, unreliable, unfaithful. Not the word of the Lord. His word is immutable, his promises are sure, his love is never failing. And so that look of the Lord for his man, for his Peter, is one of loving affection, as if to say, Peter, I got this. In fact, Peter, this is what this whole arrest is about. This is what all these unlawful judicial proceedings are about. It's what my rejection, this betrayal, the arrest, condemnation, crucifixion, the beating I'm about to get, that's what it's all about. It's about taking your sins, Peter, on myself, including these three shameful denials, so that I can die for your sins,

so that I can be buried in the grave, so that I can rise triumphant over sin and the grave and death, Peter, for you.

I prayed for you. I prayed for you. And though you failed, and though you failed miserably and terribly and shamefully, I forgive you. I will restore you. In fact, I'm going to use you to strengthen your brothers. They failed, too. I'm going to use you to strengthen them. You cratered further than them. I'm going to use you, lift you up, and build you up, and use you to minister to them. Beloved, that's the look that our Lord gave to Peter. That's the gaze that our Lord fixed on this erring disciple. Let that comfort you in your failings.

No doubt that look had conveyed a number of thoughts. This is what I warned you about. This is what I prayed for you, why I prayed for you. This is why I must go to the cross, for exactly these kinds of sins. But most of all, most profoundly, that look said, Peter, I love you. I got this. Fascinating, isn't it, that in the middle of his trials, while he's in custody, while he's in the belly of the beast, I mean, it would have been more tolerable for Jesus' pure spirit to be in a prison, a dank, dark

prison in the Antonia fortress with the Roman pagans, than to be at the height of hypocrisy in the high priest's household and in custody there.

You get what I'm saying? The religious element to this, the false religion, the hypocrisy was even more intolerable. Here he is in custody, and he's being moved by guard from one place to another in the course of these trials in the night, in the early morning. And our Lord's mind is at peace. He's unafraid. He's submissive to the father's will. He comes across to the religious leaders, in fact, as we're going to see, comes across to Pontius Pilate, it comes across to Herod, he's utterly uninterested in his release, like he couldn't be bothered to defend himself, prove his innocence. He goes just as the Scripture says, "like a lamb to the slaughter."

It's because none of that's on his mind. He's doing exactly what the father wants done. He's orchestrated this himself. Want to know what's on his mind? See where he fixes his intense, penetrating gaze because where his eyes go, that tells you what's on his mind, tells you what's on his heart. He loves his

disciple Peter, and his concern is for him in that hour, in that moment, under all that pressure. It's nothing to him. What's going on with Peter, and beloved, what's going on with each one of you, that's what's on his heart.

For the unbelieving, the intense gaze of the Lord, it's like the sun that hardens the clay. The intense gaze of the Lord like this merely hardens the heart. It's what happened with the rich young ruler. It's exactly what happened with chief priests, scribes and elders who were recipients of the same gaze. Just became harder, took his grace for granted, spurned his love, rejected him. Here they are, persecuting Jesus, not worshipping him. They shed no tears. They feel no remorse. They continue to presume on the grace of God. That is the unbelieving response for the love of Christ.

But for the believing, and especially for the broken and the contrite of heart, for the penitent, for those who are humbled and sorrowing over their sins, even over grievous, terrible, shameful sins, it's the kindness of God in Christ that leads them to repentance. The kindness of Christ breaks the

heart of every true believer in a far deeper, far more penetrating way than any scolding, finger-wagging, I told you so. Do not interpret that in the look of Jesus to Peter. Why did this have to happen? To humble Peter, to teach him to put no confidence in the flesh, to deepen his love for the Lord, who died on the cross for his sins, all of them, including these.

Fitting, isn't it, that one of the chief Apostles and the foundation of the church should err so significantly. It gives us hope, too, doesn't it, to realize that even deep sins, great sins, shameful sins, cowardice, lies to cover it over, all can be forgiven when we bow before him, repent of our sins, and put our faith and trust in him. It's how the Lord uses our sins, too, beloved, to lead us to repentance, to teach us to worship him, to love him, to adore him, to give our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength to him, to let nothing get in the way of that.

And then in restored service to him, to see what went wrong, what little temptation did we not actually address? What did we let go? What were we slothful in? Where did we err? And

for us, by his grace, to do better when we take another run at the same trial, the same test. That's why this is here. It's what explains Peter's fall. It's what explains why this account is in all four Gospels. It's for us. The Lord wants us, too, to know he loves us, each one of us, and he died to pay for the sins of all those who will believe and come to him with a broken and contrite heart, because a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Let's pray.

Our Father, we are so grateful for the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ in his incarnation, he comes to show us you, he is God in the flesh. And so whatever he does and whatever look he gives or whatever kindness in his touch and healing in his touch, it's conveying your compassion for sinners. And boy, we need it. We confess to you that we have let you down. We've not confessed you as we should or confessed your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, with the same strength, with deep conviction, with boldness.

Many of us have cratered, too. We've, we've been under, under less extreme circumstances, we've failed, sometimes just

being embarrassed. Oh, Father, forgive us, please. Lord Jesus, forgive us for sinning against you. There's no reason why we should not shout your name and your work from the mountaintops, on every street corner, in every shop, in every place, in every school, in every setting. Help us to stand for you.

But we'll only do it by your grace. We'll only do it as we take rest in your forgiveness, find comfort, consolation. We thank you that you've given it. We thank you that you died for our sins. We look forward to this next week of meditating on that, celebrating your death, burial, resurrection, what you accomplished to redeem us. And we pray, Holy Spirit, that you would drive these truths deep into our hearts, and let us not be unaffected. Let us not be hardened, but let us be softened, pliable, and help us to change. We love you so much. We thank you for your grace in Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen.