

**PETER'S FAILURE**

Mark 14:66-72

**Intro:** I mentioned last week various illustrations from Scripture where we see the failures, sometimes very grievous failures, of some of the Lord's people. And often these are the failures of leaders. But God never does this because He delights in making their sins known. As I explained from 1 Corinthians 10, God does this to warn us so that we will not do what they have done. People like Moses and David and Peter did not live in sin, but they fell into sin on particular occasions. However, they did not live lives of sin. On the other hand, they are even greater examples to us of godliness. But they were weak, like we are, and they failed the Lord in times of temptation and trials. We don't all have the same weaknesses, but put in situations which are peculiar to our weaknesses, we will all fail apart from the grace of God. That is why for all of us, our confidence must not be in ourselves, but in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

There is a background to our text for today, and so I want to begin by tracing in the Gospel of Mark what is revealed in this Gospel alone about Peter. We have no evidence that Mark, or John Mark as he is also referred to in the Gospels, ever personally knew the Lord Jesus Christ when our Lord was here on earth. He is first mentioned in Acts 12:12 where we are told that when Peter was released from prison by an angel, he went to the home of "Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark." So the first reference to Mark in the Bible was in connection with Peter. In 1 Peter, which many of us are studying on Tuesday mornings, the Apostle Peter referred to Mark as "Marcus my son" (1 Peter 5:13). We know that Mark was acquainted also with the Apostle Paul, and that Paul in his last epistle asked Timothy to bring Mark with him to be with Paul in his final imprisonment, saying concerning Mark, "for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11). So Mark had a close connection with both Peter and Paul, but his relationship with Peter must have been similar to Timothy's relationship with Paul. And NT scholars believe that much, or even most, of what Mark wrote about our Lord's ministry on earth was through what he had learned from Peter. That fact is particularly interesting when we focus upon the facts given to us in Mark's Gospel about Peter. It would seem that John Mark not only wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, but that he had Peter's approval in what he wrote about Peter. But what did he report concerning Peter?

The first thing he recorded of Peter is that he and his brother Andrew were fishermen, and they were the first two the Lord called to be His disciples. But we learn this while Peter was still being called by his original name, Simon. Cf. Mark 1;16-18.

The second thing that we learn about Peter is that he was married. The Lord went to his home where his mother-in-law was sick with a fever, and the Lord healed her. Cf. Mark 1:29-31.

We also learn from Mark 1 that Simon is mentioned as one of several who accompanied the Lord in His ministry, and they saw Him work many miracles.

In chapter 3:16 we are told how the Lord called twelve men to be with Him in His ministry, and the first one mentioned was Simon whom the Lord surnamed Peter. “Surnamed” simply means that the Lord changed his name. Mark doesn’t tell us that Peter means *a rock*, but it obviously was an indication of the work that the Lord planned to do in the heart of Peter, making him rock-like spiritually. This was in reality a prophecy of the work that the Lord was to do in Peter in the days ahead. And note that although Peter was very self-confidence and boastful about what he would do and what he would not do, and gave the appearance of being like a rock, experience would show that spiritually he was in reality very weak.

In chapter 8, verse 27 and following, we have Peter’s great confession of Christ, but immediately afterwards when the Lord started to tell them that He would suffer and die at the hands of the Jews, Peter rebuked Him. And the Lord charged Peter with being the mouthpiece of Satan.

At first we might feel that Peter was being very courageous by openly rebuking the Lord, but actually this was an indication of Peter’s weakness. If Peter really believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and, as Matthew reported, Peter had gone on to say that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God, then he had no business arguing with the Lord, and actually telling the Lord that He was wrong in saying that He was going to die! To apply it to ourselves, we may not like what the Lord is doing with us, and it may not fit into our ideas about what the Lord should do, but it is a sign of spiritual weakness, not spiritual strength, if we object to anything that we find in the Word of God. We are not to sit in judgment on the Word of God; the Word exercises judgment upon us. Peter believed that Jesus

was the Son of God, but he needed to take that faith and apply it to what the Lord was saying. He should have reasoned in his own mind and heart, “Well, this is not my idea of my the Messiah came, but if He says that He came to die, maybe I had better listen to what He is saying and learn what He is trying to tell all of us. Isaiah had said many years before this, that God’s ways and thoughts are different from our, but he also said that they were higher and better. So if you argue about anything in Scripture, it shows your immaturity, not your maturity. Let’s keep this in mind as we watch the development of Peter.

In chapter 9 we follow the Lord with Peter, James, and John up on a mountain which has become known as *the mount of transfiguration* where they say the Lord in His glory, in the visible display of His Deity. They also saw Moses and Elijah. It was obviously a time for the disciples to look and listen and learn. But Peter, after expressing how good it was to be there, started to tell the Lord what they should do. Mark tells us that he didn’t know what to say, but he said it anyway. He wanted to build three booths – one for the Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. What he had in mind I don’t know, and if you know I hope that you will tell me. But all of a sudden “a cloud overshadowed them,” and the voice of God came out of the cloud. What did He say? He said, “This is my beloved Son: **hear Him!**” When we get through the book of Proverbs in Sunday School, we are going to study the next book which is Ecclesiastes. I feel very sure that Peter had been taught Ecclesiastes as a young Jew. But he forgot one thing that Solomon said in that book. You probably can guess what I am about to quote from Ecclesiastes. It is in chapter 3:7b. Taking the two words “there is” from verse 1, Solomon added in verse 7 “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” From what God said out of that cloud, this was a time for Peter to “keep silence.” It was another time when Peter should have been listening and learning. Peter still had not learned from the mistake he had made in Caesarea Philippi.

Peter was not the only one who had this problem, but we are seeking to learn from Peter’s experience this morning. It is possible to learn what not to do from a bad example as it is to learn what to do from a good example. I heard Dawson Trotman of the Navigators say one time, “I never met a man who didn’t teach me something.” If we will learn to look and to listen, there is a great deal that we can learn.

Now let us turn to this 14<sup>th</sup> chapter which we have been in for several weeks. Please look with me at verse 27 where the Lord is speaking. He

was making a prophetic statement which he backed up with Scripture. We considered this verse just a short time ago, but it will do us all good to go over it again. Let me read it to you. **(Read Mark 14:27.)**

The Lord Jesus was speaking. That should have been authority enough for all of the disciples to listen and learn. It is so easy for us to forget Who He is! When the Lord Jesus spoke, there should have been no hesitation by anyone to immediately accept what He said as the truth. “All ye shall be offended because of me this night.” The Lord put them all together by what He said. He said that He would be the One over whom they would stumble. And then, as though His Word were not enough, He said that the Scriptures say what He was saying. As I pointed out to you just a few weeks ago, the Lord was quoting from Zechariah 13:7. Let me read it to you, and along with it, verses 8 and 9:

7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

8 And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein.

9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God (Zech. 13:7-9).

Zechariah’s prophecy had to do with a time that is yet future, but the Lord used it to show the disciples that even they, who had been so close to Him during His ministry, would forsake Him and flee when it looked like the enemy would be victorious.

What was the Lord seeking to teach them all? Two things: 1) how weak they were; and 2) how true His words are.

Who responded? It was Peter again. What did he say? He said in so many words, “I wouldn’t be surprised if Your words come true with the other disciples, but You can depend upon me.” What was it that Solomon said about statements like this? “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). Pride not only causes us to exalt ourselves, but it causes us to put others down. Listen to people talk, and you won’t have to listen long before you will hear the evidence of

pride. It is really the root sin because the fruit it bears is sin of every kind. In every sin you will find the evidence of pride. It is so difficult for us to be humble that it is only by the grace of God that we can be humble.

What did the Lord tell Peter after that? He said (and I am paraphrasing His words), “Not only will you deny Me, but you will deny me tonight. And you will not do it just once, but you will do it three times!”

Did Peter believe the Lord’s words? Absolutely not! His response was, “If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise.” Jesus was God. Jesus is God. “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

Now go with me as we follow Peter, James, and John as they accompany our Lord into the Garden of Gethsemane. The account is given by Mark in the verses immediately following those we have just been considering: Mark 14:32-42.

Most of us know the story of Gethsemane. What happened in Gethsemane is basic to what happened in our text at the end of the chapter. The Lord took all of His disciples with Him to Gethsemane. According to the Apostle John, they had been there many times before. It was a place where the Lord loved to go to pray. *And it was there that He wanted them to pray, especially on this occasion.* As strange as it might seem to us that the Son of God would desire their fellowship in prayer, but He did! But that was not all. He wanted them to pray for themselves. See His solemn words in verse 38. He knew that they all meant what they said when they said that they would die before they would deny Him, but He also knew what they had not yet learned – that “the flesh is weak.” All that we have in us by nature is not sufficient for us to stand up against the tempter and the trials of life. But what did the apostles do? Did they pray? No! What did they do? They went to sleep. It had been a very busy day, a very stressful day, and they were tired. So they went to sleep. They didn’t watch. They didn’t stand guard. They slept. They were to be sorely tempted that night. The Lord knew that, but they didn’t know it. May the Lord not only teach us how to pray, but may He impress upon our hearts when we need to pray. Isaiah 40:31 is a good verse which tells us that we are strengthened by prayer. “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew (exchange) their strength . . .” In our weakness we call upon Him, and He answers by strengthening us.

But the disciples did not pray that night. Peter didn’t pray. Finally, the

Lord said, “Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth Me is at hand.” And those words were hardly out of His mouth before Judas and the Jews arrived to arrest Him.

Peter, determined to let them all see that he meant what he said, took out his sword, only to hear the Lord tell him to put it away. After cutting of the ear of Malchus, Peter could thank the Lord that the crowd did not attack and kill him. But they didn’t because the Lord was protecting His disciples.

But a trial followed immediately. Peter followed “afar off.” He was playing it safe. But suddenly an attack arose from a source that he never anticipated that it would come.

Peter was clearly visible because of the light of the fire. Mark tells us that “one of the maids of the high priest,” probably meaning one who was the high priest’s servant, looked at him and recognized him as one who had been with the Lord. See v. 67. Note his response in verse 68. He meant that he did not know what she was talking about – which was a lie. And then the cock crew, or crowed. But Peter paid no attention to it.

Another maid came along, and she saw Peter and said, not to him, but to others who were around, “This is one of them” (v. 69). And he denied the second time that he was one of the Lord’s disciples.

The third time it was several who said to him, “Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto” (v. 70). Then Peter “began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak” (v. 71). Could this be the same man who had told the Lord, “If I die with you, I will never deny you.” You see, from a human standpoint the disciples were in about as much danger as the Lord was.

But then the cock crowed a second time, and suddenly Peter remembered. Isn’t it amazing that Peter did not remember after the first maid accused him of being a disciple? But He didn’t remember. And neither did he remember the third time until after his third denial he heard the cock crow. I am told that once a cock starts to crow in the morning, it doesn’t stop. But this one did. And it only resumed it crowing after Peter had denied the Lord the third time. The Lord even had control of the crowing of the cock, and used the second crowing to cause Peter to remember what the Lord had told him. And then Peter began to cry. All four

Gospel writers record this. But only Matthew and Luke said that Peter wept “bitterly”! This means that he wept inconsolably. His grief struck him in the depth of his being. He had done what he had said he would never do, and there was no way that he could call his words back.

But one thing that we can say about it, is this: This was the making of the Apostle Peter. The Lord let his pride run its course, and it brought him down in abject humility before the Lord.

**Concl:** We are not told how Peter must have prayed after that. He had not committed a sin like murder, or adultery, sins which would have brought disgrace upon his head. But nevertheless it was sin which made him hang his head in shame. It was sin which made him realize how he needed to listen to the Lord. It was sin which made him know his own weakness in the face of temptation. It was a sin which made him realize how much he needed to trust the Lord every day, and in every way. It was a sin which made him realize how much he needed to grow in the Lord.

At this time in Peter’s life he was an example to teach us what we must not do, as well as to learn what we must do. Peter teaches us what a devastating effect sin can have upon us. How important it is for us to walk each day in fellowship with God, conscious of our own weakness, and seeking His strength each day through the Word of God and prayer.