

How the Strong Can Backslide!

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of looking to God and His power for true strength, rather than relying on our own natural abilities.

Duration: 1:00:07

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Matthew 6:33, Acts 3:11, Romans 8:11, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:13, Revelation 22:13

Topics: "Backsliding"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by praying for the audience to have a deeper understanding of the word of God and to look beyond human speakers and ministries. The preacher then turns to Acts chapter 3, emphasizing the need to turn away from self-accomplishments and focus on Jesus as the only one who can bring victory in life and eternity. The sermon highlights the desire of God to make believers perfectly whole and to walk in abundance through the manifested presence of Jesus Christ. The preacher shares the personal testimony of finding strength, hope, and joy in Christ alone and encourages the audience to lay hold of this truth and stand with perfect soundness before God and men.

Transcript

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None of these messages are copyrighted, and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to friends. We love you, Lord. We love you, Lord.

Thank you for loving us, for coming and dying for us, and giving us life. I'm going to share with you tonight the secret, but it's not a secret. It's a plainly told truth all the way through the scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, but you have to have a certain type of a heart to be able to see it.

For those who have confidence in themselves, there's very little in the scripture that really speaks to the heart about the true nature of the manifested presence of Jesus Christ in a life that gives us a testimony of perfect soundness before God and before men. It is God's desire to make you and I perfectly whole and entire, to walk in an abundance that can only be found in Jesus Christ. I thank God with all of my heart tonight.

If I have found one truth in my life as a Christian, I thank God for this truth. The strength that I possess, the hope, the victory, the joy, everything that I have is not of me. Nothing is of me.

I found the truth as a living experience, the truth that Paul expounds upon when he says, in me dwells no good thing. And folks, there's got to come in each of us a knowledge of that, and until that knowledge becomes part of our practical experience at times, we will never know what it's like to walk in the victory that God has for us on this side of eternity. It will always be an elusive, almost like an intangible victory that we read in the scriptures, we hear somebody testify about it, but it seems it's always outside of our grasp.

Now that may be your experience tonight, but if you let the Holy Ghost open your heart and open your ears, God's going to speak a truth, it's a plain truth, it's in your word, you're going to see it very, very clearly. And I pray that God give you the grace to lay hold of it. I pray God give us all the grace to lay hold of it from this day forward until Christ comes.

That we can stand in our generation with a perfect soundness, not of ourselves, but of Christ who dwells within us. And we can stand before heaven, not boasting in any righteousness of our own, not boasting in any strength that we have, but we're boasting in the strength of Christ that rests upon us and in us. I thank God for the knowledge that everything I have comes from Christ.

Not just knowledge, but it's an experience that God graciously has given to me. And some of you are on the road to finding that experience. I'm going to show you tonight why strong men or strong women backslide.

I'm going to show you how it happens. And I'll show you the roots of why it happens. And I'm going to show you how God has it.

It's all in the plan of God. If you are strong in yourself tonight, hear me clearly, you're going to backslide. If you have come into this house and you're among those that say, I am strong, God's spirit is upon me, I'll not fail him, I'll not forsake him, etc., etc., etc., you can be almost sure you're going to backslide one day soon.

If you have a heart for the Lord, God's going to bring you through a process of understanding that true strength does not come from the natural man. You and I do not possess the wisdom, we do not possess the strength to walk this walk that God has called us to walk to represent the kingdom of Jesus Christ here among men. We do not possess the strength.

Our natural minds can't comprehend it. Our natural bodies cannot walk in it. Our natural zeal cannot long endure it.

It has to come from Christ and from Christ alone. Now, Father, I ask tonight in Jesus' name, Lord, you are bringing us into our inheritance. I thank you for this with all of my heart.

God, we will never be able to stand in our own strength. We can't stand now and we certainly would never stand in the future. Lord, you're bringing us into the inheritance that was purchased for us on Calvary by Jesus Christ, the living son of the living God.

Father, I thank you, Lord. I thank you that you love us so much that you will even let us fail. You love us so much that you will show us our glaring inconsistencies and our weaknesses that we would turn from looking in the mirror.

We would turn from looking at ourselves. We would turn from our lists of accomplishments and turn to the only one that can take us through in victory through this life and through into eternity. Jesus, thank you tonight that you're going to manifest your glory.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you're going to enable me to bring this truth in a manner that every person in this house can understand it. I ask you, Lord, to take these few loaves and fishes and multiply them and feed the thousands that you've gathered tonight to hear this word. Father, thank you for what you're going to do.

Lord, I rest entirely dependent upon you. Holy Spirit, if you don't come, what I preach is just a dead letter. No one would understand it.

You have to come and make it real to the hearts of the people that are here. God, help us to look beyond men tonight. Help us to look beyond anybody speaking, Lord, any ministry, and to look to you, Jesus, the author and finisher of our salvation.

God in heaven, do an eternal work in many lives tonight. Father, I ask you to set people free, free in Christ Jesus. And I ask it in your precious name.

Amen. Now, Acts chapter 3, beginning at verse 11. I'm going to have to move quickly, so you're going to have to have a finger maybe in the index of your Bible.

Well, actually, I'm going to be in the Gospels most of the time. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, verse 11, Acts 3, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, You men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Why do you look so earnestly on us as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his son Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go.

But you denied the Holy One and the just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God has raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses. And his name, through faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yea, the faith which is by him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Now, when we look at Peter in this portion of Scripture, we envision a man of seemingly unshakable strength. Peter, the apostle, boldly challenging the unbelief of a crowd, which he knew to be capable of murder. You think of this same man, just a few days before, running in fear, cowering, hiding, even denying the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now he's standing, and the same crowd that murdered Christ, he no longer is afraid of them. He is boldly challenging them, he is telling them, you denied the Holy One, and you desired a murderer. In other words, he's saying, you killed him.

God raised him from the dead, and through faith in him, you see this man standing perfectly sound in the presence of you all. He's challenging their unbelief, and placing an accusation of denying God right at their doorstep. A human vessel, Peter, through which the power of God had just healed a man who was lame from his birth.

Can you imagine that? A man born lame, at the gate of the temple, in Acts chapter 3, looking upon Peter and John, expecting to receive something from them, and what he was received was a wholeness that he had never had all of his life. I can imagine how many for so long had looked up to Peter. I'm sure Peter was the type of personality that people just simply naturally looked up to him.

Before you came to Christ, now some of you may have been like that in this world. You may have that kind of a personality, that when you walk into a room, everybody just simply automatically looks to you. When there's a decision to be made, it's as if you're the first one to jump in with an idea.

Now, you may not be that type, but certainly you do know some people who are like that. Even if you're saved tonight, and you are working in some kind of a business environment, you for sure know somebody who's like that, just like Peter. First one in, strong personality, strong ideas, a very natural leader.

Not necessarily always leading in the good direction, but nevertheless a natural leader. Go to the book of John with me, chapter 1. Just following along on this particular thought. Now, John chapter 1, verse 40, we're introduced to Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

And it says, one of the two which heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. And now, this is, he first findeth his own brother Simon, verse 41, and said unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is being interpreted the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus, and when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jonah.

Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone. So the very first thing that Andrew did when he found Jesus and believed him to be the Messiah, is run to get his brother Simon Peter. I believe that Andrew looked up to his brother.

I believe that he admired his brother's strength. Peter was a natural leader. We'll see that as we go on throughout the scriptures.

He had, in Andrew's mind, at least anyway, Andrew's thinking, Oh, Peter has got to be part of this. I see a kingdom coming. We have found the Messiah, and surely Jesus needs a man like Peter.

And so Andrew runs to get Peter. Peter comes, and immediately, Jesus, meeting this man, makes an incredible pronouncement upon him. He said, You are Simon, the son of Jonah, and you will be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone.

In other words, Christ was saying, Peter, you are a rock. You are solid. There's going to be a solidness about you that is not going to be shakable.

I'm going to do something with you. I'm going to build on you. Can you hear Andrew's thoughts? I knew it.

I knew it. The Messiah recognizes a leader when he sees one. My brother is a leader.

But little did Andrew realize the true meaning of what Christ was saying. Christ didn't say you are a rock to Peter. He said, Thou shalt be called Cephas.

Your name is Peter, but you shall be called. He was speaking prophetically. He was not speaking about something that Peter was at that particular time.

Not now, he says, but later. But I believe very few caught that at that moment. It is obvious that Peter was physically strong.

In John chapter 21 and verse 11, after Jesus was risen from the dead, and they were on another one of their futile fishing expeditions, when Christ told them where to cast the net one more time. They did in obedience. And John 21 11 says that Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes.

In other words, when God gives you a fish, it's not a minnow. God gives a good size fish. This net was full of great fishes.

In other words, these were whoppers. Nobody had to exaggerate when they were talking about the size of the fish they caught that day. 153, and yet for all there was so many, yet was not the net broken.

So we see the fish being in the net. Everybody is standing back and just admiring this great miracle of God one more time. Yet Simon Peter, always the first one in to the work, heads out and all by himself pulls in 153.

Let's assume they were four pounders. That's not a very big fish, really. A four pound fish.

And he's pulling them in and he has at least 600 pounds of fish in that net and all by himself he pulls it into the shore. He was a very strong man. A very strong and a very determined man.

Peter appeared throughout his life, especially his early ministry with Christ to have a quickness to respond to truth as it confronted him. Again in Luke chapter 5 and verse 8 another fishing expedition when the nets are cast out on the side of the boat they had fished all a long time and caught nothing and yet in obedience to Christ they cast out the nets. They brought in a great multitude of fishes.

They were astounded at the size of the catch. And Luke chapter 5 verse 8 says when Simon Peter saw it he fell down at Jesus' knees saying Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord. We don't see anybody else doing this at this particular time.

He was physically strong and yet there was a natural passion within him that when confronted with any kind of a truth he didn't understand what it was but he knew it was beyond him. And he fell to his knees and he cried out Oh, depart from me I am a sinful man. And that type of a person often times is quick to respond to the word will be esteemed and looked upon to be a leader.

Lastly, Peter had an impassioned love for Jesus Christ. He had an impassioned love. That was, I suppose, the earmark of his life.

I believe that's what enabled him that's what enabled Christ to say about him You're going to be a rock. Not because you're perfect and not because there are not some things that I have to show you and allow you to go through to show your inconsistency and your inability to walk with me but you have an impassioned heart for me. And because of that impassioned heart that was in Peter Jesus was able to say you're going to one day be a rock.

You're going to be a stone in my house. An unmovable place. In Matthew chapter 14 when the disciples were on the water in the midst of the storm and Christ appeared walking on the water to them where everybody else thinking it was a spirit was sitting back in the boat horrified full of fear not knowing what to do it was this heart and this man, Peter that caused him to rise up and he cried out over the waves and the

wind Lord, if it be thou bid me to come to thee on the water if it's you God, I want to come.

He so had an impassioned love and an impassioned heart for Jesus Christ. And so looking at Peter we see a man who was first to the work at hand he was first off times to his knees and he was first to places that were seemingly impossible to other men. A leader.

You couple this aspect of Peter's nature with the promises of God for his life. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 16 you know it well and I know it verses 18 and 19 he said thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And then he said to Peter I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Now, can you just picture for a moment the other disciples as Jesus is saying these things to Peter here's a man I'm sure some of the others felt small in comparison to this man because it seemed to be that Christ was saying such magnanimous things about him that he was not necessarily saying about others. They saw the strength of this man they saw the passion of this man they saw his willingness to do and to go places maybe that some others of them might have been hesitant to go and to do. They heard the words of Jesus and I'm sure that Peter was reaching out and laying hold of every promise that God the son of God was making to him and in their minds perhaps some may have been thinking surely this is the man that one day is going to lead a great, great he's going to be a great, great leader in the church and they were looking at all of the physical aspects and the physical characteristics of this natural man saying these must be the things that are necessary to become a great leader in the kingdom of God.

And I think that many of the other men probably felt very insignificant. Maybe John who was a lot younger and a lot weaker maybe John who didn't have the courage at that moment to get up and walk on the water all he could do was lean his head on the breast of Jesus at the last supper wondering what his place was going to be in the kingdom of God. I wonder how many felt paled in comparison to the to the zeal of this man the strength of this man the courage of this man I wonder how many felt so small in his comparison.

It appears looking at Peter that there were the makings of an unstoppable leader from time to time in the church of Jesus Christ over the centuries and I suppose over the years and perhaps even today men and women rise up they have a lot of the same characteristics that are displayed in the life of Peter and it appears to many of us when we look at them God certainly this we look at just like Samuel looked at the first born son Eliab of Jesse and said surely the Lord's anointed is before me and we see such natural strength and such natural zeal and esteem them to be such wonderful leaders and we look at all the characteristics that they possess and then we sad to say look at ourselves and say oh God I wonder if I will ever amount to much in your kingdom I don't I'm he's so strong and I'm

so weak he's so dedicated and I'm so wishy-washy he's so impassioned and I I seem to have a hard time making up my mind of times which way to go and how even deeply to get involved but in Peter there was resident something which the Lord would have to reveal and to deal a death blow in order that he might become the man that God had destined him to be folks it is a great and a tragic mistake when we get our eyes on men it is a tragic mistake if I can put anything across to you tonight other than what the Lord is going to have me speak on get your eyes off of men get your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ men will fail you there is nobody who has a natural strength and zeal that will take them through and be the leader that God wants them to be in their own strength and I'll show you this in a

moment because if our eyes are on men when those that we esteem to be strong fail then the tendency of many Christians who see themselves as weak is to think what hope is there then for me if Peter can't make it then what is going to happen to me he's so strong he's so full of zeal so impassioned for God all these promises that were spoken about him all the things that were said and I'm sure it went like a shockwave through the followers of Jesus Christ the things that Christ had said to this man if he fails then what hope is there for me I couldn't get out of the boat I could never have pulled those fish into the shore I couldn't fall to my knees because I couldn't make up my mind about what was wrong and what was right if he falls if he fails then what hope is there for me but folks I

want to show you something tonight it was this natural strength and passion in Peter that would have to be dealt with if he was ever to become the man that Jesus destined him to be the scripture says in 1st Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14 the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God they are foolishness to him and neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned now go with me to the book of Mark chapter 14 I'm going to show you how the Lord the stage was set for the decline of this natural man oh folks thank God thank God that the natural man has to die in order that the spiritual man might be born thank God that the old things have to pass away so that all things can become new thank God aren't you thankful tonight that Jesus Christ doesn't save us and

say ok with all your natural abilities and all your natural talents your natural zeal your natural strength go for it and I hope you make the finish line fighting against a host of hell demonic forces we can't understand fighting against powers and principalities that come against us fighting like Paul said fighting is within fear is within even fighting against our own weaknesses and our own inconsistencies and somehow trying to make it through and fall over the finish line at the end into the kingdom of God thank God this is not what God asks of us I want to show you how this strong man backslid now I realize that this was the days prior to his receiving the Holy Ghost but I want to tell you something it may have been in the scripture the day prior to his receiving the Holy Spirit but

the procedure is exactly the same I have seen men go the same way that Peter went and for the very same reasons Mark chapter 14 verse 27 we see the stage being set for Peter's fall Jesus said something and Jesus said unto them all ye shall be offended because of me this night in other words you're all going to be afraid something's going to happen he said you're all going to run for it is written I will smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered but after that I am risen I will go before you into Galilee but Peter said unto him although all shall be offended yet will not I here's stage number one to a strong man backsliding boasting of his dedication and in his heart estimating his own loyalty to be greater than all those around him he was speaking of Andrew James John Philip

Thomas all the other disciples were in that room with him and he was saying he was standing up before Christ the Son of God who had just told him something about himself but he was unwilling to hear it Jesus was telling him you are weak just like every other man in this room is weak and Peter stood up and said no though all and when he said all he's referring to everybody who was in the room he was elevating himself above all that were around him pride goes before a fall and a haughty spirit comes before destruction he was manifesting the very same heart that Jesus condemned in his parable about prayer when he said the Pharisee came into the house of God and he said oh Lord thank you that I am not like other men are thank you God I fast I tithe I'm so holy I'm so pure I'm so dedicated to

you I'm not even like this publican in the back of the church who's just smoothing his breasts but oh God though others forsake you I shall not forsake you that is always and ever always will be step one to

backsliding always when if we ever allow a root of pride to get into our hearts and we begin looking to the left and looking to the right and saying thank God I'm stronger than you and I'm stronger than you and I'm stronger than you and others around us perhaps fall into sin and something gets into the heart and say oh I would never do that oh sir you'll never find me in a place like that you'll never find me speaking like that no sir though all may fall I will not fall folks that is the beginning of backsliding that is self confidence at its highest level esteeming the flesh and

losing the sense of our littleness in the sight of God losing the understanding that Jesus was saying you will all because you are all the same that's why Isaiah could say all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God that's why when he was lifted up into the presence of God he said woe unto me I am undone in other words everything I thought I was everything I thought I had everything I thought I had achieved is gone because now my eyes have seen the Lord I've seen the Holy One of Israel hallelujah he said I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips I have unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips now I want you to watch with me the downward spiral from this point the moment that the heart gets proud the moment we begin to trust in ourselves really he

was not trusting in Christ but he was trusting in himself watch the downward spiral from here you see trusting in self is the root of losing a sense of dependence upon God the next scene that we go to from Peter standing up and making this bold declaration now as a leader unfortunately he led everybody else to make the same declaration Jesus said no Peter before this night is out you're going to deny me three times but he spake the more vehemently no sir, no sir, no sir if I should die with you I will not deny you and it says likewise also said they all he was a leader but he was misled at that particular point and in his misleading he was drawing everybody in with him yes, yes, we will not we agree with Peter isn't it incredible they had a choice they either agreed with Christ or they

agreed with Peter when you look at it at that particular moment they chose to agree with Peter and not with Christ who had taught them for three years they knew he was the son of God he's the Messiah you've come from God Jesus himself made that not Jesus but Peter himself made that declaration you're the Christ the son of the living God Jesus says you're all going to fail me no, no yes you will Peter no I won't and the rest are drawing in no we won't either and then you see the end result of trusting himself Mark 14 verse 34 Jesus said to them my soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death tarry ye here and watch he was telling them pray we are going into a battle that you are not going to understand unless it is given to you of God you are going into a place that flesh can't go and he went

forward a little and fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible this hour might pass from him and he said Abba Father all things are possible unto thee take away this cup from me nevertheless not what I will but what thou wilt and he cometh and findeth them sleeping and said to Peter Simon sleepest thou could you not watch one hour and he said watch and pray lest you enter into temptation the spirit truly is ready in other words you do have a genuine desire but the flesh is weak and again he went away and prayed and spake the same words and when he returned he found them asleep again for their eyes were heavy and they didn't know what to answer him Peter although clearly warned his self-dependency kept him unaware of the urgency of his own need the very first thing that you

will find happening to a man or woman that begins to trust in themselves is they will begin to find themselves less and less and less and less and less in the closet of prayer because the closet of prayer is a place of dependency it's a place where we go to get our daily bread we go to get our strength that's what he said give us this day our daily bread we go to get our protection from evil lead us not into temptation but

deliver us from evil it is a place of bowing down before God saying Lord I am Lord I don't I don't know how to live this Christian life I don't know how to face the enemies that I'm going to face tomorrow but you do because you're already there though God give me your mind Holy Spirit give me your strength grant to me a desire to walk with you in spirit and in truth for

Lord I know in these things you have promised that I am going to have all the protection that I need it is inevitable that if a man or woman begins to trust in themselves they will be drawn away from prayer how can you pray how can you ask God for things how can you stand before him in a position of dependency if in your life you're trusting in yourself and so when Jesus is saying to Peter pray watch and pray you have a willing heart but your flesh is weak he can't pray because he's trusting in himself he has made a declaration I will not fail you but God the Son of God now has to bring him to a place of understanding that you are all weak there's not one strong among you no matter what your testimony or confession might be in yourself and of yourself you don't have the strength to fight

this warfare this is the end of side one you may now turn the table the garden even with a very clear instruction of Christ they're unable to pray and a deep slumber comes upon them if you find that's happening to you in your prayer life cry out to the Lord ask God please help me forgive me Lord for trusting in myself forgive me God for the boasting that wants to get into my heart and sometimes it comes to those who have walked the longest with the Lord I have I remember one night I met a man coming out of a church service and I asked him I said did you enjoy the service tonight and he looked at me and there was such an arrogance in this man's face he said I've been in the way son 40 years and I said well yeah but did you enjoy the service and he said he looked at me again and said I've

been in the way 40 years and I thought man that is certainly the truth you have been in the way for 40 years Peter gets himself in a place of spiritual slumber he's not praying anymore he's not praying because he's lost a sense of his dependency on God he's trusting that because for three and a half years three years rather this thing has worked out fairly well that it's going to go on this way forever he's trusting in his natural zeal he's trusting in his natural strength he's out of the prayer closet he's not seeking God for strength then all of a sudden he wakes up and John if you go with me to John chapter 18 he wakes up in the middle of an incredible battle that he is powerless to understand he has not been seeking God he wakes up out of a slumber in John chapter 18 beginning at

verse 7 and when he wakes up a horrific battle has gathered around him people have come with sticks and spears and torches an angry mob a murderous mob has gathered around verse 7 Jesus is speaking to them then asked he them again whom seek ye and they said Jesus of Nazareth Jesus answered I have told you that I am he if therefore you seek me let these go their way that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake of them which thou gavest me none have I lost then Peter again Simon Peter having a sword drew it and smote the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear the servant's name was Malchus then said Jesus to Peter put thy sword into thy sheath the cup which my father has given me shall I not drink it then the band and the captain and the officers of the Jews took Jesus and

bound him here's Peter waking from his slumber finding himself in a battle he didn't understand and that he didn't know how to fight what did the apostle Paul say the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the tearing down of strongholds and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God bringing into captivity everything to the obedience of Christ he talks about casting down imaginations his natural strength his natural zeal his natural passions his natural brave declaration have all failed him here they've all failed him you can just see Peter rising up he has been told of Christ before

he went into a spiritual slumber put on a sword because the scripture had to be fulfilled about him never taking the time to ask what scripture or why he just

grabs a sword and puts it on he's asleep in the garden while he's been sleeping a huge battle has gathered around him the conflict really you could say of ages has gathered around him Peter wakes up and he's now in a conflict that the natural man cannot fight and folks that's what happens to people who backslide they end up in a conflict that the natural man cannot fight they take out their own sword and they start hacking at this and hacking at that I'll just do this and I'll do that and I'll do this a little better and they start trying to fight in the flesh a battle that cannot be won in the flesh it can only be won in the spirit but he is cut off from God he's cut off from the source of his strength so he doesn't understand how to fight this battle you can see the confusion when Jesus

has put your sword away Peter's standing there thinking to himself well he told me to put on a sword what in the world do you put on a sword for if you don't use the sword he watches Jesus pick up the servant's ear and put it back on the side of his head and completely heal him he watches the crowd bind up Christ and carry him away and there's Peter left standing there with his sword in his sheath and in a moment of confusion in a moment of terror he flees and he runs just like Jesus said he was going to do he runs from a battle that he cannot understand because it is a spiritual battle and it cannot be revealed to the natural mind the next stage after this is that in Mark chapter 2 in Mark chapter 14 verse 54 let me just read it to you it says and Peter followed him afar off the word for

afar in the original text means at a great distance even into the palace of the high priest so he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire now go with me to Luke chapter 22 while we're Luke chapter 22 this is the last stage of the backslider he begins to follow him afar off I'm still a follower I'm still a follower I'm still following but I don't understand this thing I thought this was victory I thought I was a rock I thought the gates of hell couldn't prevail against me and now it seems like I'm overwhelmed my own fears it seems like it seems like nothing I do is right everything I do is wrong I thought I was so strong what happened to all the promises of God and then you can you can just understand what's going on in Peter's mind as he's watching Jesus back off mocked spit

upon by the accusers and by the soldiers and he's he's warming himself now at the fire because he's confused and that's exactly what happens in the life of every backslider waking out of a spiritual slumber trying to fight a battle that has come upon you that you're not able to fight in your own strength the next thing you end up is walking at a distance and beginning to accuse Christ literally beginning to accuse him of not being faithful beginning to doubt every promise that he's ever made to you having questions in your mind about the legitimacy of every promise that he's ever spoken to your life and to your heart and it's at this place of warming himself by the fire of those who don't know God this is the end result of every backslider in heart will end up at some hotel some bar some

place warming himself around the fire of those who don't know God and it's in this place that people begin to ask him you're a Galilean aren't you nope don't know what you're talking about you were with this man weren't you no no I don't know him he was actually speaking the truth he knew who he was but he didn't yet really know him and somebody else comes to him and says your speech gives you away you're one of them and one of the pastors in the New Testament says he cursed with an oath and said I don't know the man and in Luke chapter 22 verse 60 it says and Peter said man I know not what thou sayest and immediately while he spake the cock crew and the Lord turned verse 61 and looked upon Peter and Peter remembered the word of the Lord how he had said unto him before the cock crew thou

shalt deny me thrice and Peter went out and wept bitterly folks I want you to travel with me for one moment just to the place where he was outside the judgment hall and hear the cries of an anguished soul who has seen his inability to serve God in his own strength can you hear him Jesus looked at him and all of a sudden he still loved Christ with all his heart and all of a sudden the promises not that God had made to him but he had made to the Son of God all came back to him and you can hear them just like you hear the apostle Paul in the book of Romans oh wretched man that I am the things I want to do I can't do the things I don't want to do I always find myself doing who will deliver me from this body of death who will set me free all the promises I made you Lord all the bravado and

when it came down to the crunch when it came down to the time that it really mattered when I really could have been a testimony for you so I backed out afraid and I ran the things that I feared the most came upon me they overpowered me sores of hell began to compass me all about God forgive me for failing you and folks I want to tell you something we have all failed him we have all failed him in this room tonight but every one of us we have failed him the Lord said through David God if you marked iniquities who could stand I have failed him and you have failed him but the truth of the gospel is that salvation is not about us it's about him it's about Jesus Christ yes we have failed him and we may fail him tomorrow we may make mistakes as we walk this walk with Christ but the truth of the

gospel is he has not failed us look at John chapter 20 with me just for a moment Peter has not seen Jesus up to this point he's assembled in a room with the rest of the disciples they've shut the door they're full of fear they're afraid that the Jews are going to come and kill them like they killed Christ not only that can you imagine what's going through their minds we've all failed him we failed him he needed us at that particular moment we ran I can see Andrew maybe looking at Peter his brother that he admired all his life and thinking if Peter couldn't stand I will never be able to stand what hope will there be for me I see the younger John and Thomas who had doubts in his heart for the scripture tells us that clearly looking at this man Peter saying if he failed then how will we ever

stand he told us where to go and tell the whole world he told us where to evangelize and bring the good news how? how? how? then the same day at evening being the first day of the week in verse 19 when the doors were shut that's in chapter 20 of John where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews came Jesus and stood in the midst and said unto them peace be unto you can you imagine all of this turmoil all of the doubts all of the failure Jesus didn't walk into the room and said okay boys let's talk about your failure he walked into the room appeared in their midst and the very first thing that he said was something they were very familiar with because he had told them my peace I give you my peace I leave you not as the world gives give I unto you he had said earlier let not your

heart be troubled in my father's house or many mansions I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also he had talked about these things and they were familiar with them and he walks into the room and he says peace be unto you and what he was saying to Peter what he was saying to the rest of the disciples I have not held you to account for your past failures you are forgiven this whole thing is not about you it is about me I have gone before you I have shown you the pathway to victory it's not in trusting yourself it's in a daily seeking and dependence upon your God upon God the Father upon the indwelling Holy Ghost it's about a life of prayer it's about a confidence in a God who cannot fail it's nothing to do with you left to yourselves you will all fail and you

will all be weak he had already told them and they had already experienced it peace he said peace then in verse 22 verse 21 he said peace be unto you as my father has sent me even so send I you I am sending

you now I can imagine some of them thinking how? how are we going to do this? and then he answers it to them verse 22 it said when he had said this he breathed on them and said unto them receive ye the Holy Ghost not by might not by power but by my spirit saith the Lord he will be your strength to be a living testifying faithful witness of me he will be your strength to obey it will not come from you that was the whole lesson it will come from me this was the message of Christ all through the Old Testament this was the message that he had spoken through the prophet Ezekiel talking to

Israel he was saying to them you have profaned my holy name everywhere you went he said but I'm about to do something not for your sake but for my namesake I'm going to do it there's a day coming he said I'm going to send my spirit upon you I'm going to fill you I'm going to cleanse you with pure water I'm going to give you a new mind I'm going to give you a new heart in other words I am going to come to those who know their weakness to those who know they have failed God to those who know that they do not have the strength to walk this walk in their own power their own ability I will come to failure after failure after failure and I will fill those who know they need me I will raise them up if the spirit be upon you that raised Christ from the dead he that raised him from the dead

shall also quicken your mortal body he will quicken you and give you life from the dead the power to walk with God does not come from within us ironically if you can hear me tonight I believe that the weakest in the body of Christ are farther ahead in their walk than those who are still strong in themselves because in order to appropriate the power of God the strong have to be made weak and so the weak are in effect farther ahead unless your focus is continuously on your own weakness look away from it look away Jesus said I came to give you life I came to give you an abundant life I came to raise you up I came to let my power flow through your life I came to make you whole, I came to make you sound I came to make you a testimony I came to make you a living witness in Jerusalem, Judea,

Samaria all the parts of the earth I came to raise you up, not a strong people in yourself I came to raise up the weak I came to raise up the foolish I came to raise up the nobodies, the nothings I came to raise up those that know they have failed I came to raise up lepers I came to raise up prostitutes I came to raise up drug addicts I didn't come just for the strong I didn't come just for the wise I came for those who know that without me you can do nothing nothing absolutely nothing hallelujah oh folks if you can lay hold of that truth if you can lay hold of it the kingdom of God can begin to move in your life in unprecedented power if you can lay hold of that truth and look away from yourself look away from your strength if you have any look away from them because there will only be a

hindrance to your walk with God look away from your weaknesses because it has nothing to do with us it has everything to do with Jesus Christ it has everything to do with the battle that he won it has everything to do with his cleansing blood that washes us free from all of our sin and opens our heart that the Holy Spirit of God may come upon us and cleanse our conscience from dead works that we may serve the living God hallelujah Acts chapter 3 one more time Peter had a new testimony now a new testimony just a few days after his failure I want you to hear this because it can change your life Peter said in verse 6 an astounding thing to this lame man at the temple gate he said silver and gold I have none but such as I have I give you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and

walk Peter was looking away from himself now he knew his own weakness I don't have anything that's what he was saying don't look to me I got nothing to give you but I do have something that was given me and I can give this to you in Jesus name get up and walk I often wonder do we have too many strong men and women in the body of Christ today is it because we have not come to the knowledge of our own

weakness that the power of God oft times cannot be fully manifested through our lives verse 12 the people come and what do people want to do if somebody stood in this public tonight and started praying and blind or seeing the lame are leaping what's the natural inclination oh what a man of God everywhere he goes I'll go every tape he preaches I'll listen to every conference he's at I'm going

to be there what a man of God and you walk out of the door talking about this man of God but what did Peter say and when Peter saw it he answered the people in verse 12 he said you men of Israel why marvel ye at this or why do you look so earnestly on us in other words Peter is saying why do you look at me you see if he had not ever experienced weakness in his life he would have very well received their admiration and he would have nurtured it well yes when everybody forsook him oh I stayed with it I stayed with it man I sliced off that servant's ear I went into the inner court I stood in his defense everybody forsook him but I stood and because of that God has put his power upon my life oh yes he would have taken it all to himself and placed something upon the people that they would

never be able to walk with God unless they could be like Peter you see but God doesn't want us to be like Peter he said why do you marvel at this or why do you look so earnestly on us as though by our own power or holiness we have made this man to walk he said the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob the God of our fathers has glorified his son Jesus whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate when he is determined to let him go now here is where it really gets interesting in verse 14 he said but you denied the holy one and the just you denied him now here is a man that just days before had denied him and he's standing with a renewed moral authority you know sometimes we fail and it's as if we feel that because of our past failure we can never stand and ever make a

declaration along those lines again I could preach on anything but if I was a thief I could never talk about stealing other than to use my life as a bad example but Peter never said I denied him it was a knowledge in his heart that all are weak without God he had a renewed moral authority because he was not presenting anything of himself before the people he was presenting Christ it was not his faithfulness but God's not his righteousness but Christ's not his strength but that of the Holy Ghost and God not only cleansed him from his sin this is what happens when we come to Christ he not only washes away your sin but cleanses your conscience from all past guilt Peter had a moral authority not of himself if he was still trusting in himself he could not have made the declaration he would

have bumbled and stumbled over it but he was not presenting himself the moral authority he had was given him of God because the blood had done its perfect work he had been forgiven and the guilt of the past was gone he had the right, the moral authority given him by God to stand there and say you have denied the Holy One you've denied him he was a man who would never again boast of his own strength but as Jesus said in John 21 he would rather as a lamb stretch out his hands to be led in weakness that the power of God may rest upon him Jesus asked him, Peter do you love me? three times Peter said you know I love you and then at the third time he said to him, Peter when you were young you dressed yourself and you went wherever you wanted to go in other words Peter you were strong when I met

you Peter you were your own man you were a natural leader but Peter I've made you now a spiritual leader and he said when you're going to get older there's going to be such a change in you now you see now Peter was about to become Cephas, a stone part of the foundation of the church that Christ was building he was saying to Peter I've made such a change, there's going to be such a change in your life that you're going to gladly stretch out your hands and let others lead you and take you where you don't want to go you would rather be weak from this point on in your life that the power of God may rest upon

you and that you may honor me all the days of your life what a wonderful testimony what a wonderful he was still a little bit of an extremist all his life God doesn't take away our

character and our personality, we all have little twists and some of them stay right to the end history says when he was about to be crucified he has to be crucified upside down that was just Peter, it wasn't necessary that was just Peter but he was a different man he was a different man how it would be to God how it would be to God in Times Square Church that there could be a multitude of people that lay hold of this truth that when I'm weak then I am strong there are people here tonight that you have failed God in some area of your life and you are overwhelmed with your own sense of failure you've cried bitter tears and you've felt hopeless in the sight of God not really understanding that this is the pathway to strength if you're going to be strong then God has got to take away

everything that you thought you were and every strength you thought you had and show you your weakness that he can become your strength you've looked to man some of you and you've seen the weakness of those who are supposed to be strong and a fear of failing God has begun to plague you I know many many people over the years as strong evangelists fell and pastors that thought got into their heart oh God if they can't stand how can I stand now tonight I hope that the Holy Spirit has shown you why they failed almost every man of God that has failed their testimony has been I got out of the prayer closet I stopped seeking God my dependence came upon my own preaching ability or my own knowledge of the scriptures the legacy of my past faithfulness and I got away from God the next stage what

happened to them they found themselves in a battle that they could not fight and they could not win and when they fell because men's eyes were on them and not on Christ many went with them and there's others that tonight hear me clearly you are boasting of your dedication and your resolve to follow Christ remember please tonight what Paul said that when I am weak then I am strong don't boast of yourself Paul said if I'm going to boast I boast in the cross I boast in Christ and what he has done not in myself some others you are not seeking God in a day to day dependence you used to but something has happened and you're not seeking him the way you used to and prayerlessness is threatening to bring you into defeat I beg you in Christ's name tonight to humble yourself before God and turn from

this there's some others that you are fighting in the flesh you've woken up in a horrible spiritual battle some former sins are coming back on you old lusts, old patterns, old habits and you're trying to fight and you don't know how they're overwhelming you, you're weary, you're confused I hope tonight the Lord has shown you why that's happening to your life there's some others that you're following at a distance you used to be so close, you used to love him with all your heart and now you're following but you're at a distance and you're starting to warm yourself at the fire of those who don't know God and lastly there's some others you have denied Christ you are sitting here tonight and you're overwhelmed if I were to ask you to stand and give you a testimony you could say, Pastor, I

once knew God, I walked with him I loved him with all my heart there was nothing I wouldn't do, there's nowhere I wouldn't go it just seems that the whole thing works for other people but for whatever reason it didn't work for me and you've gotten to the place where people ask you, are you a Christian?

I don't know I'm not sure you've come to the place that in your heart you begin to deny Christ but my word to you tonight is just this God has been leading you to this place he's not angry with you you may forsake me he said in this book but I will never forsake you he is waiting tonight at this altar to speak peace to you, peace let's not talk about your past failures let's not talk about your sins peace I have a place I want to

send you now I have some power to give you that you've not ever been aware of I want to raise you from the dead I want to give you life and use you for my glory this is a very serious and sober altar call tonight and I apologize I preached a little longer than I intended on preaching tonight I don't really ever like to get you out of here past nine o'clock but I have felt God moving in a very very sovereign way because I really feel it's life and death for some that have come here tonight I'm just going to say this as we stand in a moment if the Holy Spirit has spoken to you I'm going to ask the choir if you could sing that song tonight with Jesus I can make it with Jesus I can make it and if the Holy Spirit has spoken to you up in the balcony, the main sanctuary as we stand would you slip out of your seat and come to this altar ask God to strengthen you to help you hallelujah we're going to pray together tonight and I believe God for a miracle I always do at this altar believe for miracles in people's lives let's move in closely and give everybody an opportunity to come if the Holy Spirit has spoken to you if you're backslidden if you don't know Christ as your Savior you can come you thought you were strong you thought you failed God but you really didn't you're right on the path that God needs you to be on to give you strength He loves you with all His heart He's not going to point a finger in your face and talk about your sins you may have failed morally or some other way and He will renew your authority you're not going to spend the rest of your life apologizing to everybody you meet about your past sin because it's going to be gone not from the record of heaven only but from your conscience, gone a renewed authority to stand and speak the word of God This is the conclusion of the tape

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