

# Peter's Fall

by W.F. Anderson

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*The sermon explores the factors leading to Peter's denial of Jesus, emphasizing pride, misconceptions, and the need for humility and devotion.*

**Duration:** 38:09

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Mark 14:26-27, Mark 14:29-32

**Topics:** "Peter's Denial", "Restoration Ministry"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Peter's denial of Jesus. He highlights Peter's courage and devotion, which ultimately led him to be in a situation where he denied Jesus. The speaker admires Peter's courage but also acknowledges that his denial was not excusable. The sermon also mentions Jesus' response to Peter's denial, which is similar to his response when the disciples argued about greatness. Instead of rebuking them, Jesus demonstrates humility by washing the disciples' feet. The sermon emphasizes the theme of restoration, drawing from the 23rd Psalm, and suggests that Jesus is our Restorer.

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## Transcript

Let's turn to Mark's gospel again this morning, and then I want to read a passage from Luke's gospel, but Mark chapter 14. And I want to give, have two talks this morning and tonight on our Lord, our Restorer. And I'm thinking of the word in the 23rd Psalm, He Restores My Soul.

Now, I'm encouraged to talk about that here, because a number of years ago, when I was in my mid-twenties, we had, speaking in Florence for a weekend, a visitor by the name of E. G. Matthews of Waterloo, Iowa. He's an old man, at least he seemed awfully old to me, he was about eighty. And I was already a father, but he was sitting on the couch beside me in my home that day, and he turned to me and says, Boy, and I was about twenty-five, he says, Boy, don't you think that when you get old, the flesh is going to be any easier to deal with? So I'm encouraged to talk about the Lord, our Restorer, because as I understand from Scripture and from a man like E. G. Matthews, it doesn't get any easier as you get older.

The flesh is still the flesh. So I want to read these two passages of Scripture. First Mark chapter 14, and let's begin reading at verse 26, And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives, and Jesus said to them, You will all fall away.

For it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter said to him, Even though they all fall away, I will not.

And Jesus said to him, Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times. But he said vehemently, If I must die with you, I will not deny you. And they all said the same.

Now Luke's Gospel, chapter 22, verse 28. You are those who have continued with me in my trial. As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, and that you is plural, all of you disciples. Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, and that word you is in the singular, for you, Simon.

I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren. And he said to him, Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.

He said, I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you three times deny that you know me. Verse 54, They seized him, that is Jesus, and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance, and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard, and sat down together, Peter sat among them.

Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, This man also was with him. But he denied it, saying, Woman, I do not know him. And a little later someone else saw him, and said, You also are one of them.

But Peter said, Man, I am not. And after an interval of about an hour, still another insisted, saying, Certainly this man also was with him, for he is a Galilean. But Peter said, Man, I do not know what you are saying.

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly.

The seeds of Peter's denial go way back to his own childhood, really. The first seed that I see sown, as far as the harvest of denial is concerned, goes back to the presupposition the people of Israel had about the coming Messiah, and Peter and the other disciples shared those presuppositions. You are aware that in the Old Testament there is a twofold picture of the Messiah of Israel.

There is the glorious, ruling Messiah, triumphant over all his enemies. With Israel they had not the tale of all the nations. There are those beautiful pictures of peace and prosperity throughout the whole world while the Messiah reigns in Mount Zion, and the law goes forth from there.

People coming from all over the world to Zion to hear the law of God. That is the picture that Israel emphasized. That is the one that they saw.

Alongside that picture, there is another picture of a Messiah who is betrayed, delivered up, killed, buried, and cast out. That is the Messiah they forgot about. By the way, that contrast is so strong that in the intertestamental period, after the close of the book of Malachi and before John the Baptist appears on the

scene, there was a teaching in the nation of Israel that there would be two Messiahs.

There would be a Messiah of the tribe of Levi who would suffer and die in keeping with that picture in the Old Testament, and there would be a Messiah of the tribe of Judah, a descendant of David, who would rule in righteousness and fulfill the picture in the Old Testament of that ruling glorious Messiah. But as the years went by, Israel tended to forget that picture of the suffering Messiah, and they saw only the picture of the glorious Messiah. And that was especially true in the days of our Lord, when they were under the heel of Rome.

And what they were waiting for was a Messiah to come and deliver them from Rome. They could hardly wait for the day when Israel would be the head and Rome would be the tail. They could hardly wait for that glorious kingdom to have its center in Jerusalem, and not a kingdom with its center in Rome.

And this was in the mind of these disciples when they first came to Jesus, and it persisted during all the years that He was with them. And one of the fascinating things you see in the interaction between Jesus and His disciples is that they were constantly trying to bring Him round to their way of thinking. Their idea of the Messiah was running at cross purposes their idea.

And it's an amusing thing in one way, that here are disciples trying to straighten Him out. You remember that occasion when they finally discovered who He was, and Peter made that magnificent confession, You're the Christ, the Son of the living God. And then immediately Jesus began to teach about His coming death.

And Peter takes Him and rebukes Him. No, Lord, this be far from Thee. He's trying to straighten Him out.

You don't understand. Hey, we've got to teach you a few things. You misunderstand what the Messiah is supposed to do.

And you find this all the way through the public ministry of our Lord. They're trying to straighten Him out. They want to bring Him round to their way of thinking.

And all the while the Lord is trying to bring them round to His way of thinking. And this thing goes on all during the three and a half years of His public ministry. But their ideas, their presuppositions are so fixed in their minds that all they can see is that ruling Messiah.

And they are simply not prepared for what takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the high priest's palace, in Pilate's judgment hall, and out on Calvary's hill. They are totally unprepared for that. They shouldn't have been, but they were.

Our Lord clearly spelled out in Mark's Gospel, chapters 8, 9, and 10, the details of His betrayal, His arrest, and His crucifixion, and His resurrection. But they weren't listening because their minds were already filled with the idea of this glorious kingdom that's to come. And I think that is the first seed that was planted that brought the harvest of Peter's denial that night in the courtyard of the high priest.

A misconception. Now when I say a misconception, understand it's only a matter of sequence and timing, not of fact. They were right that He's the Messiah.

They were right that one day He will rule from Jerusalem. They were right that one day there's going to be a universal kingdom over the whole world. They were right, but they were wrong as to sequence and

timing.

They thought since He is the Messiah and He's here, the kingdom should come now. And that was their mistake. But that presupposition filled their minds and was one of the seeds in the harvest of Peter's denial.

There's a second seed I see planted that brought about this harvest of Peter's denial. And I hate to use the term, but since we're so much like them, there was a great deal of pride in these men. When they discovered that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, and the kingdom they thought was about to appear, their response to that was a very, very selfish one.

James and John with their mother come to Jesus with a request. She says, I want you to give my sons the chief seats in the kingdom. One on your right hand and the other on your left.

I don't think, I know they don't, they didn't know what they were asking. Our Lord talks about a cup and a baptism, because before there will ever be two thrones, one on his right hand and one on his left, there have to be two crosses, one on his right hand and one on his left. But what they wanted was the chief seat in the kingdom.

Peter wasn't foreign to that idea either, because you remember when they did that, the other ten were indignant. I wish I could say that I get the feeling as I read through it. They were indignant at the spiritual immaturity of these two men, but that wasn't the point.

They were indignant because these two beat them to it. They all had that idea, only these two sneaked in with their mother and got ahead of them. But that's the request that was in the mind of all of these men, and James and John beat them to it.

You can see that in Peter. You remember after our Lord talks about when the rich young ruler had come and our Lord talked about the difficulty of a rich man getting into the kingdom and all the rest of it, trusting in riches and the need to give these things up to follow him? And Peter turns to Jesus and says, look, we've left everything, and if I could roughly paraphrase what he said, the idea is what's in it for us? What are we going to get out of all this? And when he confessed our Lord as the Messiah, as in chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel, and then our Lord announced his death, Peter says, no, you can't do that, because in Peter's mind was, hey, you can't destroy my dream like that. Man, when we've discovered that you're the Messiah, you know what's coming next is the kingdom.

And you know who's going to be there with you as the chief magistrates of the kingdom? Us guys. And here he could see it. He could already feel those robes on him, you know? He could already feel the crown.

He could see himself just getting comfortable in that throne, and dimly through all that picture there come words about crucifixion and death and Calvary and all. He says, look, don't do that to my dream. And his whole response to the Lord was really a very selfish one.

And there was a great deal of selfishness in these men, a great deal of pride. What they were looking for was the chief seats in the kingdom. And that's the second reason they were totally unprepared for what happened to our Lord Jesus that night.

But by the way, you saw the words here in Luke's Gospel. To these men our Lord says, you are the ones who have continued with me in all my trials. I like that.

These men were totally unprepared for what happened. They were baffled by the Lord. Though they had confessed him as the Messiah, they did not understand him.

And his insistence on going to Jerusalem with all the dangers inherent there, knowing that people were going to kill him. You remember their words? Let's go and die with him. They could not understand him.

They couldn't figure him out. But there was one thing about it, they loved him. And they stuck with him.

And what came to the point when they saw he was determined to go to Jerusalem and they knew all his enemies were there and his enemies were determined to kill him, their response was, let's go die with him. They were not very intelligent, but they were very devoted. And it seems to me what our Lord would rather have is devotion than intelligence.

Now let's have both, but if it comes to a choice, let's have the devotion. And these men stuck with him. You are they who have continued with me in all my trials.

In Luke's account just prior to this, in the upper room, when they had observed the Passover and our Lord had instituted the Lord's Supper, do you remember what these men were doing on that occasion according to Luke's Gospel? Imagine, here they are, going to the Passover and then our Lord instituting the Lord's Supper and all his words about, this is my body given for you, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, shed for many for the remission of sins. All that, all that was in his mind while this was the topic of his discussion. You remember what Luke says these men were doing as they were reclining around that table where all this was going on? They had a discussion going.

And Luke tells us they were arguing about which of them was going to be the greatest. Right there, while he was talking about his coming death, while he was telling them the purpose for it. My body which is for you, my blood shed for the remission of sins.

All that was going over their heads. They were arguing about which of them was going to be the greatest. The Bible is a thoroughly human book.

Don't you put these men up on pedestals, you know, where they're not human. They were thoroughly human. But there's something that I enjoy about that.

You'll have to forgive me for enjoying the wrong things, but I sometimes do. I have a perverse way about doing that. I enjoy the wrong things.

But I remember sitting in the auditorium at Emmaus. We had a visiting speaker who was talking about this. And of course, reading from Luke's Gospel about the account of the Lord's Supper.

And talking about the terrible spiritual condition of the disciples and as he read it, something hit me. And right in the middle of it, I wanted to shout, Hallelujah! When you go to someone else's house for dinner, how do you behave at the table? Aren't you on your best behavior? Don't you remember your manners? Aren't you very kind in your speech so that your wife isn't quite sure who you are? Isn't that true? Is that the way you are at home? I can hear wives saying, unfortunately, no. But are you like that at home? Do you speak to your wife with the same courtesy at home as you do around somebody else's table? You

ought to, but I'm saying, do you? Now, I can talk this way because my wife isn't here.

But do you? No. I use the illustration of my kids. That's a whole lot more comfortable than talking about myself.

And when they were smaller, you know, we'd go off to somebody else's house for dinner. And as we sat there at the table, I'd look around at my kids and say, are these mine? Who are these kids? They're well-mannered. They're polite.

They use their knife and fork properly. You know, where do these kids come from? At home, what happens? They act as though they don't know which hand to put the knife and the fork in. And if one says something, the other doesn't like, wham, there it goes.

And as I look at this account of Luke's gospel, I say, these men were at home with him. They'd never have done that at a Pharisee's table, but they could do it at the Lord's table. They were so much at home with him, they went ahead and argued.

Now, I'm not justifying what they did, but I'm saying they were tremendously comfortable with him. I'm not saying they should have done that. Of course, they shouldn't have.

But it's one indication of how much at home they felt with him. What kind of a man is this? Not just that wind and sea obey him, but the disciples can argue in his presence. Well, why not? No, I'm not saying they should.

You understand, I'm not saying they should, but I'm saying why not. You can fool a Pharisee, but you can't fool him. You can put on your best manners in the house of a Pharisee and he's impressed by them.

But our Lord knows when they're just manners, when they're just put on. One of the most stupid things we try to do is to fool him, to hide something from him. You can't hide anything from him.

You can't pretend in his presence. He knows what's really there, and we can fool each other, but we can't fool him. And these men argued, but what they were arguing about was which of them was the greatest.

The third seed that I see sown that brought the harvest of Peter's denial is an unfortunate self-confidence. And that night when our Lord said, all of you will fall away, all of you will fall away. Did you pick up what Peter said? Though they all fall away, yet will not I. Right away, Peter's making a distinction between him and the others.

You're right, Lord, I can understand how you say that about these ten guys. I understand that. You're right.

They probably will. I know these men, but not I. You and I, Lord, we're aware that I'm different. They will, but not I. And then when our Lord turns specifically to Peter and says, Peter, you're going to deny me three times tonight.

I'll die before I'll do that. Now, Peter was honest, but he was overconfident. None of us in that situation would say, that's right, Lord, that's what I'm going to do tonight.

I'm going to sit out and deny you three times. Nobody intends to do that. We don't start the day out by saying, now let me see, what would be the best way to deny the Lord today? I wonder how I could vest in against him today.

None of us starts out to do that. We may end up doing that, but we didn't start out to do it. Look, all the exhortations in the New Testament to Christians about different kinds of sins.

You know what they tell me? I am capable of committing any one of those sins, or else there wouldn't be exhortations warning me against them. Now, my own particular tendency means that I am more liable to commit some of those sins than I am to commit others, but I am capable of committing any of them. And it's best that we come to grips with that.

And when another Christian falls, if I say, how in the world could he do that? All I'm saying is, I count myself better than him. I'm like Peter. I would never think of doing something like that.

No, I might never think of it, but I might do it. And if I ever want to ask, how in the world could a person do a sin like that as a Christian? All I have to do is stand in front of a mirror and say, that's how he could do it. They all may fall away, but not I. Dear Peter, how often I've echoed your words, not I. Now, do you see what Peter was fighting against when he said that? He was fighting against the prophetic scripture that said, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

Now, the scripture said that, the sheep are going to be scattered. And he's fighting, secondly, against our Lord's own words. All of you will fall away tonight.

And Peter is putting himself against the Old Testament scriptures and the words of Jesus Christ. Now, that is an overweening self-confidence. I don't know what it is.

Look, take the word of God seriously. When it talks about those sins, when it talks about those evil tendencies within us, take it seriously. We've got them.

What should Peter's response have been? Lord, you're right. If you leave me to myself, that's exactly what I'll do. But please don't leave me to myself.

Some of the most terrible words I read in the Old Testament are about a king of Israel, really a king of Judah. God left him alone to test him, to see what was in his heart. And I read that and I cry, O God, don't ever leave me alone to test me to see what's in my heart, because he fell.

That should have been his attitude. Now, I want to begin the work of the Lord as I restore it today. And we'll finish it up tonight, because I want to look at that passage in John about Peter's restoration to service.

But let me say a word in Peter's defense. It sounds like I've been awfully hard on Peter, and I haven't meant to be. And it's not that I'm trying to say that we're just like Peter, or Peter is no better than we are, or we're as good as Peter, not at all.

But I'm trying to see what happened in Peter's life. Now look, the only reason, I shouldn't say the only reason, but the only way Peter could deny the Lord three times that night is he had more courage than anybody else. The reason the other ten couldn't deny him three times is they didn't have the courage to be in a position where they could.

Where was it that Peter denied the Lord three times? Right in the courtyard of the high priest. Who was the instigator of our Lord's arrest that night? Who manipulated his betrayal through Judas, the high priest? He was the brains behind the whole scheme. And where was Peter that night after his Lord had been arrested by the high priest's guard? In the courtyard of the high priest.

And when they have captured the chief of the band, who do you think they'll be looking for next? The second in command. Who was the chief spokesman for that band of disciples? Peter. Who's the man they're looking for next? Peter.

Who wielded the sword in the guards of Gethsemane that night? Peter. Whose ear did he cut off, trying to split his head open? The servant of the high priest. Do you think the high priest doesn't know about all that by this time? And when Peter goes into that courtyard, if he's recognized, not only as the chief spokesman of that band of apostles, but the man who wielded the sword in resistance, who tried to kill the servant of the high priest--and that's not just a common servant, by the way--tried to kill the servant of the high priest, who do you think is in the most danger? It's Peter.

Give the man credit for tremendous courage. He wouldn't have been there except for his courage and his devotion to Jesus Christ. It was his devotion that put him in a predicament where he could deny the Lord.

I admire the man's courage. Now, suppose you were the second in command of what amounts to a guerrilla band in a foreign country, at least that's the way they're treated. Your chief has been captured, and you're going into the courtyard of the individual who plotted the whole thing and carried it off.

How are you going to go in there? Are you going to go in there with a sign on you saying, I am Peter? You're going to sneak in there with your collar turned up and your cap pulled down so nobody recognizes you, right? And what happens? Hey, you're one of those, and his cover's blown. He's recognized. Now what do you do if you're recognized? You get out of there as fast as you can.

Not Peter, he stayed. And it was Peter's courage and devotion that put him in a situation where he could deny the Lord. That does not excuse what he did, but it helps me to see the devoted heart of this man.

Now, what's our Lord's response to all this? Well, it's very similar to his response in the Upper Room, when these men were arguing about what should be the greatest. What'd our Lord do? Start a long lecture. You wicked disciples, how backslidden you are.

How little you understand. Is that what he did? No. Sitting over here is a jug of water and a basin of towel.

That's been sitting there all evening. Nobody has touched it. For whatever reason, whether by design or accident, the slave who usually provides that service when guests come into the home did not do it.

And if there is no slave, then the householder does it, and he hadn't done it. Nobody had washed the feet of the guests as they came into the home. And there sits the jug of water and the basin and the towel.

That's the work of a servant. Now, there are all these men lying around, reclining around this table, and if you're arguing who's going to be the greatest, you're not going to get up and touch that water and that towel. Right then, you've admitted you're not.

And if you're in contention for the chief's seat, you're not going to take the place of a servant. Well, since our Lord didn't have to contend for anything, he got up and did it. And I wonder what went through those disciples' minds when the Lord got up from that reclining position as the host and took off that outer tunic and walked over to that basin of water and put that towel around him like a slave and poured the water into that basin and picked it up and started toward the disciples.

And he knelt down and washed their feet. That's how he handled their argument about who was going to be the greatest. He washed their feet.

What was the lesson he so often tried to get across to these men? In the things of God, everything is reversed from our normal human judgment. We count those who rule as greatest. In God's kingdom, it's those who serve that are counted greatest, and we can't get that to our heads.

I can't. I know what those words say, but I don't believe them. And the one who was really greatest did the greatest thing that night when he washed their feet.

And I remember the illustration that Robert Little gave that helped me tremendously in seeing the significance of this. And I'm not going to get to our Lord starting to restore these men. But you realize, as I mentioned the other day, that in the seating arrangement in a Palestinian home when you had guests coming in, and they reclined, of course, on their left elbow with their feet out from the table.

They weren't sitting in chairs, in a low table, and then ate with their right hand. And where you were assigned a position in regard to the host showed your relative importance in that company. And when our Lord watched the religious leaders on one occasion scrambling for the chief places, and you've got that picture, by the way, in that parable of the rich man and Abraham and ladders in Abraham's bosom.

He was in Abraham's bosom. That's the chief place. Reclining so that your head is right there at the breast of the host.

You're reclining right beside him. Our Lord watched all this, and he used that as a picture, things in his kingdom. And Robert Little said it like this.

The host hasn't come in yet, and here we are as Christians all scrambling for the chief places, and I've got you elbowed out of the way, and I've got that place right next to where the host is going to be. And we leave, of course, we leave that low couch vacant, and I've got that place right next to me. And finally, after all our scramble, the poor guys who didn't have big enough elbows and weren't husky enough, they're way down at the end.

Or some of those people who didn't think the scramble was worth it and just came in and took those low seats, while the rest of us scrambled for the chief seats. Finally, we're all in place. And then our Lord walks in, and he goes and sits down at the bottom of the table, and he's turned everything upside down.

He's just totally reversed our order. And that's the way his kingdom is. In his kingdom, the servant is the greatest, not the ruler.

Now, I think in one sense that was the start of the Restoration. The other, he says to Peter, here in Luke's Gospel, we'll pick it up from here tonight. When he says, Satan has desired to have all of you that he may sift you as wheat.

I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith fail not. Before the denial ever occurred, the Lord had already been praying for Peter. That was the start of the Restoration.

Do you remember what John says in 1 John chapter 1? If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father. Right? Yes. We have an advocate with the Father.

Note, it's not if any man confess, we have an advocate with the Father. It's if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father. His advocacy does not begin when we confess, but when we sin.

Peter, I have prayed for you, before the thing ever happened. I have prayed for you. Prayed what? That you might not fall? No.

I wrote again as a supreme realist. He will not artificially manipulate things. Peter, you're going to fall.

He will not interfere with the workings of Peter's will. He will not make a robot out of Peter. He thinks too much of Peter to do that.

But I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. When Peter sinned and went out and wept bitterly, what do you think he was thinking? What do you think when you sin grievously against the Lord? Overwhelmed with remorse like Peter, going out and weeping bitterly, what do you think? What's your reaction? What's your response? He's through with me now. I'm finished.

He'll never have another thing to do with me. Any possibility of service is gone. Your confidence in the kind of Savior Jesus Christ is begins to waver.

And Peter would think, oh, right there to deny him in the moment of his greatest need. How can I ever look him in the face again? That's what the Lord prayed about. That your faith fail not.

That Peter, you'll still be able to trust me. I haven't changed. That's what he prayed.

What a Savior. Thinking of the hurt to himself in Peter's denial? No. What's he thinking about? Peter.

That's the one he's thinking about. Not himself, Peter. I have prayed for you.

That your faith fail not. Let's pray. Our Father, again we want to give you thanks and praise for our Lord Jesus.

To worship such a Savior. One so interested in us, so concerned. One who is now our advocate.

Lord, we thank you. When we fall, you do not turn against us. You pray for us.

Thank you. In your own worthy name, amen.

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