

What if I Fail in the Time of Trial

by William Carrol

The sermon explores the importance of faith and trust in God, even in the face of failure and trial, and warns against the dangers of dead religion and a lack of vulnerability and openness to God's love and guidance.

Duration: 57:43

Scripture: John 21:15

Topics: "Spiritual Restoration", "Gods Love"

Description

This sermon delves into the theme of failure in times of trial, focusing on Peter's denial of Jesus and his journey of restoration. It emphasizes the importance of coming to God in honesty, acknowledging our failures, and receiving His love and grace. The message highlights the need to embrace God's love, not hide from Him, and allow Him to strengthen and guide us through struggles, leading to a deeper relationship with Him.

Transcript

I have a message that the Lord has laid on my heart, and it's a very prominent message on my mind right now. I've found ways to squeeze it into pretty much everything that I've been teaching over the last couple of days. I want to talk to you on this basic question.

The question is simply this, what if I fail in the time of trial? What if I fail in the time of trial? We talk a lot, especially as we go into economic difficulty and things of that nature, about the day of trial. And I've been studying with our Friday night group on the idea of being able to stand in the evil day. And as I teach on standing in the evil day, there is this one thing that comes across, one thing that comes over my mind.

And that is very simply, what happens if when a significant trial comes into your life? What happens if you don't stand? What happens if you fail? What happens if things don't work out the way that you hoped that they would, or the way that you planned that they would, or even the way that you insisted that they would? So I'd like to take that into consideration tonight as we consider the word of the Lord. Would you pray with me, please? Father, in the name of Jesus, we stand in awe of you. You are a good and a holy God.

We put all of our faith in you, all of our trust in you. And we ask, oh God, that you be glorified in the midst. Lord, we need you to speak to us.

We need you to trust us with your heart. Lord, we know that there are many people who try on some level or another to delve into your truths just to use them against you and against your body. But God, we ask that you would trust us with your truth.

Lord, trust us with your heart. Lord, open your heart to us. It's not enough for us to do another Bible study.

We want to hear from you. We want to embrace you. We want to love you that much more.

God, would you simply stretch out your arms now and embrace us? Draw us to yourself and speak to us, oh God. We believe you for this, and we thank you for it. Amen.

Amen. Praise God. You know, in the Bible, there is the very famous story of Peter, the apostle, and how the Lord is beginning to prophesy to him about a day of testing, a day of trial.

He tries to talk to Peter, to some degree, about the trial that the Lord himself would go through, but Peter wasn't really willing to listen. I think it might have sounded a bit too extreme to him. It was something that he wasn't really able to grasp, where the Lord was basically saying that for a little bit of time, I'm going to allow my own glorious name to be mocked, to be disrespected, to be disregarded, and I am going to allow my glorious person, my glorious presence to be mishandled and mismanaged by thieves and by liars and by murderers.

And Peter just could not grasp that concept. It might have gone on through his mind, but Lord, by nature, you are glorious, and by nature, you are to be exalted. I can't even think that there would come a time in the future, and in this case, it was in the very near future, that your name would be reviled, that your glory would be mocked, and that you yourself would allow it.

But the Lord went on to say to him something about his own trial that Peter himself would go through. And he said, Peter, Peter, the devil has asked to sift you as wheat. And he said, you're going to go through a kind of a trial, and for a moment, you are going to experience failure.

Now, that's a strange thing for someone who puts their faith in the Lord to even begin to understand, or to even begin to feel might be possible. But what Peter needed to understand was that there was a level of faith that he had placed in the Lord, and there was also a level of faith that he put in himself. And a level of trust that was based upon what he believed to be his own strengths, and his own desire to do the right thing.

Now, the Lord says to him, Peter, this is going to happen. The devil has asked to sift you as wheat. I've given him permission.

And he said, but don't worry, I've prayed for you. And when you are converted, in other words, when you become a different kind of person, then you will be in a position to strengthen the people around you. Now, what Peter does is strange.

He begins to make promises, and he begins to make vows before the Lord. And he begins to say, Lord, I promise you that this is never going to happen. Now, one time he had already taken Jesus by the lapels when Jesus was trying to talk about his own cross, and said, far be it from you, Lord, this is never going to happen to you.

Now he's saying that about his own life. This is never going to happen. He said, I don't care what else happens.

I don't care how many people turn their back from you. I don't care how many people fail in this difficult time. I will never fail.

He said, I will follow you right to the cross. Now, you gotta understand, he didn't believe that the cross was coming. So he's making all these promises about following Jesus to a cross that he never expected to happen.

But he said, I'll follow you to this cross. And Jesus says to him, Peter, before the rooster crows three times, you will deny me three times. Or before, in other words, in the space of 24 hours, before the morning comes, you will have denied me.

Now, understand what's going on here. Peter is making these empty promises to God. Now, they're not empty from his perspective.

He means everything that he's saying. Peter was not a man, you must understand, that was afraid to die. Peter drew his sword against the temple guard.

That would be like taking out a peace shooter against a SWAT team. I mean, the man was not afraid to die. He was afraid of the cross.

He was afraid of that kind of death because there was no blaze of glory there. There was shame. There was ridicule.

And there was this idea of being under God's curse. This idea of being someone that God is displeased with or someone who must acknowledge that there is something about them that God does not agree with. And so he was afraid of the cross.

Now, understand he's making these promises to God that are exactly contrary to everything that God is saying to him. So God is saying, this is going to be the situation. You're going to be tested.

You're going to be tried. And there is an element in you that is going to fail. I need that to happen so that you can be a strength to your brothers.

And he's saying, no, Lord, that's never going to happen. And in essence, he's saying, Lord, that doesn't have to happen. You see, Lord, if you had known me a little bit better, you would understand that I don't need to go through this trial.

I don't need this hardship. In fact, he might've pulled out his TV guide and pointed out pastor such and such and so-and-so and said, pastor so-and-so said, I don't need this kind of trial. I never have to go through this kind of difficulty.

But the Lord said to him that you will go through this and you will fail and then you will be in a position to help someone. Now, understand again, the same man now making these vows and making these oaths about how he's going to walk with the Lord and he's going to follow him all the way to the cross, give him a little bit of time, few hours later. And here he is, he's sitting at a fire.

He's warming his hands while his master is being beaten and flogged and so on and so forth. And somebody comes to him and they say, I know you. You used to walk with that Jesus, didn't you? Now, of course, this man, because he was who he said he was, he rose up and said, you better believe him.

And not only that, but I am willing to go with him to the cross. If anybody is willing to take me, come and take me as I am. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

That's a different translation, a different version. But the one that we read, the one that we read, we hear him, the same man who made all these oaths and vows beginning now to make more oaths and vows. Now all of a sudden he's making oaths and vows that are saying, I never knew this man.

And the Bible says with the same vehemence, if you will, that he made oaths and vows about how he's going to do this and how he's going to do that and how he's going to be able to do this and how he's going to be able to do that. Now he's making oaths and vows that says, I never knew him. Call him down.

Oaths on himself. If I know this man made this happen to me or made that happen to me. You see, that's the power of making promises to God.

Especially when God is trying to make a promise to us and we contrary to his promises begin to make promises going in the exact opposite direction of the promises that he's making to us. See, his promise to us is you're going to struggle, you're going to fail, but I'm praying for you. I'm making intercession for you.

I'm standing on your behalf and I guarantee you, you will make it through this. And when you make it through, you will be a better person as a result and you'll be in a position to help other people. Hallelujah.

And so, as you know, Peter fails. But instead of him recalling what the Lord said, he became, I believe, overwhelmed with his failure. He became utterly overcome by the fact that he wasn't who he thought he was.

He wasn't as strong as he thought he was. He wasn't as desperate as he thought he was. He wasn't as dedicated as he thought he was.

He wasn't as capable as he thought he was. And so the Bible kind of gives us some insight into the way his life went immediately after that failure. The Bible says, for instance, initially when he began to deny the Lord, the Bible says that the Lord looked at him.

As the Lord is being taken from one mock trial to another mock trial, beaten, bloodied, and being led. And Peter, warming himself by the fire, looks at Jesus. And the Bible says Jesus turned and looked at him, and I don't know exactly what the look was that Jesus gave him, but I'm taking it for granted that the look that Jesus gave him was the same look that he had always given him.

A look of tender love, a look of acceptance, a look of a father concerned about the welfare of his son. And I think when Peter saw that, I think if he had seen a look of scorn on Jesus' face, he might have been able to handle that like a man. You understand what I'm saying? You know, if he'd have got some good rebuke, some good reproof, you know, he'd have just come to the altar and maybe, you know, and everything would have been all right, you know what I'm talking about? But now, he sees a look of great love and tender compassion, and it just broke his heart.

I think it was this look that caused Peter to weep bitterly. I think he saw in Jesus' eyes that Jesus was not shocked by his failure, that Jesus didn't buy his platitudes for one moment. All of his I will this and I will that and so on and so forth, Jesus didn't buy that for half a second.

It's like that one prodigal son who kind of comes back home and he's weeping and he's crying, he said, I'm gonna do this and I'm gonna do that and I'm not worthy of this and I'm not worthy of that, and the father really didn't enter into any kind of conversation with him. He simply loved him. He simply embraced him.

And I think when Peter saw that, he got a kind of glimpse into himself and he realized something. All this time I'm thinking that I'm impressing the Lord and all this time I'm trying to live this life that says, you know, this is what I am when I really know this is what I am and I'm trying to live in the future today and I'm trying to convince myself that I am what I will be already, he said, and I'm trying to convince the Lord of it, you know what I mean? I'm trying to say to the Lord, I'm already like this, you don't have to do these things in my life, I'm already like that, you don't have to make changes in my life, I'm already like this, you don't have to bring me through any kind of difficulties or trial. Now he realizes that the Lord never bought any of those lies.

He might have been thinking that the Lord did, you know how it is, sometimes you get in your prayer closet and you start lifting up all these highfalutin type of prayers and so on and so forth and you dash, you know, a couple of these and thous and you know, a couple of, you know what I'm talking about? And then you notice as you look into God's eyes, the minute that you fail, you realize he's not looking at you any differently than he did when you were making all those promises. Because he knew, he saw. So now Peter looks into the eyes of this great Savior and his heart just breaks.

He says, I could have dealt with some reproof. I could have dealt with some other thing. I could have dealt with if he had just turned away from me and ignored me.

I could have dealt with all that, but I can't deal with this relentless love. I can't deal with the fact that he won't leave me. He won't forsake me.

I can't deal with that. Hallelujah. I can remember times when I was out in the street and acting a fool even though I knew what the right thing was.

And I would say to myself, well, if I do this, I know God is gonna, I know he's gonna turn his back on me now. You know what I mean? I know he ain't gonna be there. You know, I know he's not gonna concern himself with me.

I know it. You know, if I could just shake him, I done shook everybody else. You know what I'm saying? And my thought is, if I could just shake him too, then I can go on and do whatever I want and there won't be any guilt, no compunction, no sense of condemnation, no sense of conviction, nothing, nothing, nothing.

I would just tell myself everything is all right now. But I couldn't shake him. He would not let me go.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Praise God.

Praise God. And this is where Peter was. And I wanna say to you that he probably went from that stage to the stage where they went when they kind of locked themselves in.

Remember, they locked themselves into a room and they were hiding, basically thinking that the same people that crucified Christ was gonna come and try to crucify them. And so they were hiding away from their responsibilities, hiding away from the public, hiding away from the call of God on their life and hiding from the Lord. You know, that one portion of scripture in the book of Revelation, we're talking about the Lord knocking on the door and asking for people to open the door to him.

I imagine he must've been knocking on the door wherever they were, where they were hiding before he finally just walked right through the door. You know what I mean? Because they just would not let him in. And that means they wouldn't let anybody else in either.

Remember what the Lord said, you know, I was hungry. You know what I mean? And you didn't feed me. I was thirsty.

You didn't give me anything to drink. I was lost. I was in prison.

I was naked. You didn't take care of me. And this is where they were.

If you and I don't let Christ in, we're not letting anybody in. Now, there are times in our lives when we fail. And the first thing that strikes us is the fact that God knew it all the time and he was never ever impressed by our platitudes, by our highfalutin statements, never impressed by them because he knew what was going on.

Another time is when we fail, we find ourselves hiding from our responsibilities and hiding from people around us, becoming less and less vulnerable and more and more impervious to other human persons and to the Lord himself, hiding behind these closed doors. And it's like God can't get through and other people can't get through because somehow we've convinced ourselves that because we failed, everything has changed. But the reality of it is nothing has changed and the failure is only proof of that.

The failure is saying to us, I know who you said you are, but let me show you who you actually are and let me show you where you need to change. Let me show you where you need to grow. So we have sometimes a church full of folk who have these doors up because they think that everybody else is doing perfectly and they're the only one that's going through a struggle and they don't want anybody in, anybody to see.

And so Peter found himself behind closed doors and not only was he behind closed doors, but everybody in the community, everybody in the believing community at that stage was behind closed doors. They were closed off from the public and I assure you, they were closed off from one another because that's what happens when God is trying to bring a thing out in us and we, because of this identity that we've erected in our own minds, can't seem to allow him to do it. We find ourselves hiding.

The next thing that went on was even after witnessing the resurrection, even after recognizing what Christ had done, in fact, let's go back one step before we go there. There is another case where people come to Peter and come and says, the Lord has risen from the grave and for some reason, Peter and the rest of the disciples just won't believe. And so they say to these people that you're out of your mind and so on and so forth.

Again, this is the same Jesus that told them over and over, I will rise again, I will rise again. They go to the grave, they run to the grave and then Peter runs inside and he looks and he sees the swaddling bands and so on and so forth and the Bible seems to suggest that when people tend to believe things about

themselves that God is trying to disprove, they can get to a point where they begin seeking, if you will, the living among the dead and they can get caught up. You know, another group of people went to wrap his body, you know, they were going to anoint his body, they were going to, you know, do all the things that you do to a dead Jesus and Jesus spoke to them and basically said the same thing, why do you seek the living among the dead? You see, when the Lord is trying to do things in our lives and we're not ready to receive those things, we can get ourselves lost in religion, in dead religion because we're trying to cover up what God is trying to do in our lives.

He's trying to say, look, I've allowed you to struggle, I've allowed you to fail so that you could recognize that you cannot do this on your own. You can't do this in your own strength. It was never God's intention that we should do this in our own strength but instead of us acknowledging it and saying, okay, Lord, I acknowledge that, we run, as it were, to dead works and dead religion and we do whatever we can to make, as it were, a dead religion smell sweet because that's basically what they were going to do.

Their idea was, I'm going to go, I'm going to find a dead Jesus because there is no living Jesus, he said nice things and so on and so forth but when I go to this place of religion, I know what I'm going to find, I'm going to find a dead Jesus but that's okay, I got my perfume with me. You know what I mean? Because when we choose not to allow God to enter in here and make some changes and do what he wants to do, we find ourselves getting involved in dead religion and doing what we can to make it smell sweet. Well, after that, the Bible suggests that Peter says, having seen all these wonderful things, you know what, I'm going fishing.

Now, the Lord had already come to Peter's ship and told him follow me and I'll make you fishers of men and so on and so forth and they had already followed the Lord for years and after all of these signs and wonders and miracles and resurrection and so on and so forth, Peter says, you know what, look, I'm going to tell you what he didn't say first. He didn't say, I don't want to be a Christian anymore. He didn't say, I'm not going to church anymore.

He simply said, I'm going back to business as usual. He might have said something to this effect. Initially, I was expecting some wonderful things to happen.

I was expecting this to sit on, you know, one of 12 thrones as he said and so on and so forth and I was expecting, you know, that the kingdom was going to be brought back with power and majesty and I was expecting this thing and I was expecting that thing and because it didn't happen yet and because it didn't happen my way because he hasn't been changed in here yet, he said, I'm just going to go back to normal. It's not that I'm going to stop going to church. I'm just, you know, it's just that I'm not, I'm not going to have these high expectations anymore.

You know what I mean? It's like that song we sing, you know, spring up a well within my soul, you know, you know, we get that from that passage of scripture where it says spring up a well, but I think we've, you know, we've kind of grown into a church culture where we stand in front of a dry well, you know what I mean? And we come with enthusiasm and we say, spring up! And then we say, oh, well. You know what I mean? You know what I mean? It's like, I'm not going to get caught up in this. You know what I mean? If it's not going to happen today, that must mean it's not going to happen.

If it's not going to happen my way, that must mean it's not going to happen. And so that's what Peter was. But you see, that's what the Lord was trying to bring out.

That's what the Lord was trying to deal with. He said, I go fishing. And of course, because of his position of leadership, all the other disciples says, I go fishing too, because that's the way it is.

When you have influence in people's lives, you know what I mean? And you don't allow God to change your life, you influence people in ways that are not the best. And so they said, we're going fishing with you. But an awesome thing happened during that time.

The Bible says, and this is another indication of what happens when we allow failure to shock us and surprise us, as opposed to causing it to draw us into the presence of the Lord, they began toiling again all night long and finding absolutely nothing. You know how it is where you go from that place of rest to that place of toiling? Because somehow you're trying to solve your own problems. What did I do wrong? Where did I go wrong? And so on and so forth.

How can I undo it, and this, and the other? Where the Lord is simply trying to draw him into his presence. And they toil all night again. I can imagine the darkness of it.

I can imagine the desolation of it. And they weren't eating. They didn't eat anything all that night.

Because Jesus asked them later on, children, do you have anything to eat? And they said, no. So all night long, they're toiling. All night long, they are exerting themselves.

All night long, they're trying to make something happen. Because that's what happens when we fail ourselves, as it were. When we don't live up to our own standards, in our own power, and our own promises.

When we don't live up to that, we will starve ourselves sometimes. Because now we don't find ourselves entering into the presence of the Lord. We don't find ourselves opening up our Bible, because we're punishing ourselves.

And we think that if we open our Bible, immediately it's going to fall on one of those judgment passages. You know what I mean? And so we try to close it. Or we try to go to those ones that we know we like.

You know what I'm talking about? Even if we got to cut and paste and make our own little version of the scriptures. Because we think if we pray, God's going to say something mean to us. And God is going to be like, oh, man, I thought you were better than you are.

I am absolutely surprised at you. God is not surprised at us. You know what I mean? He knows what we're about.

He's trying to change us. And now, so they toil all night, and they don't eat anything. And the Bible says that Jesus prepares a meal for them.

And particularly, it's breakfast. We talk about the Lord's Supper. This is the Lord's breakfast.

It's the same meal. Do you know what I'm saying? It's the meal that bears witness to the covenant relation that God has with his people. And he prepares a breakfast for them.

And the reason why I like the term breakfast as there, it's because breakfast in our language basically means to break a fast. It means to begin to eat. Now, there are good fasts, where we're standing before the Lord.

And then there are kind of fasts that are not healthy. You know, we're talking about, you know, when Pastor Carter mentions about Paul, and when they're on the ship, and they're moving toward a shipwreck, and they're being reeled to and fro, and they won't eat. And Paul comes to them with a word of encouragement, and he says, eat.

It's the first commandment that God gave to human persons, eat. Before he said, of this tree, don't eat. Before he said that, the Bible says, and the Lord commanded the human person saying, saying of every tree of the garden, you must certainly eat.

First, he said to them, eat. Then he said, don't eat. For us, there was this thing where we remind ourselves that God has given us an invitation to eat.

And what he wanted Peter to understand was, Peter, if you and I are together in the holy place, if you come and you sit with me, if you partake of who I am, if you partake of what I offer you, then everything else is secondary. The primary consideration is that you stand with me in the holy place, that you agree with me. If the Lord says yes, it's yes.

If the Lord says no, it's no. You must, as Pastor Carter reminds us, you must agree with God. If God says that this is the case, we can't call it by some other name.

And so Peter cannot call the pride that he was still holding on to, he cannot call this religious zeal. It wasn't religious zeal, it was pride. He kept saying, oh, I'm gonna do this, and I'm gonna do that.

But the bottom line was God was saying to him, no, you're not gonna do this, Peter. Not yet, you're not gonna do that, Peter. And Peter simply needed to say amen.

Instead of making a bunch of promises to God, his only thing that he needed to do was to receive the promise of God, which is yea and amen in Jesus Christ. To sit with Christ at the communion table of covenant relation. And so the Lord calls him into this place of covenant relation.

He says, come and dine. Come and have breakfast. In other words, I know you haven't been eaten because you've been feeling guilty.

I know you haven't been partaking of the Lord in the way that you know you ought to because there's some blockage there. I know you haven't been singing your songs with your hands raised because you think that God is mad at you. And you think that God was surprised when you failed.

You think that God was surprised when you didn't have the strength that you thought you had. But he was never surprised. He already had this meal planned for you.

He already had this meal prepared for you. So now he says to Peter and to the disciples, come and eat. Now, understand what's going on.

He asks them first, before he invites them to eat, he must make a certain thing clear with them. And he asks them, do you have anything to eat? So now he's coming to somebody who failed him and he's asking them a very simple question. Do you have what you thought you had? Are you who you thought you were a year ago, two years ago, three years ago, when you thought you would be able to fight this fight in your own strength? When you thought you might be able to, like we sometimes fill up at a gas station, you thought you might be able to fill up on a Sunday or at a devotional service and then kind of make it through

the week.

Or are you hungry? Do you have a sense of need? Do you recognize how serious these trials are and how much you need to be at the communion table with the Lord? Do you have anything to eat? And their answer was no, Lord. Now you have to understand, they weren't just fishermen, but they were providers for other people as well. They were professional fishermen, which means they caught food, not just for themselves, but for other people.

And they had to acknowledge, I don't have anything, anything for myself or anything for anybody else. Now, John recognized something that even Peter didn't recognize at the time. He recognized that it was the Lord when the Lord said, take the net and put it over the right side of the ship.

And when they put it over the right side of the ship, they caught more fish than they could handle. And John recognized it, even though when this had happened prior, it had happened on Peter's boat. And John had to tell Peter, it is the Lord, because Peter was still under a cloud, I believe, of his own failure.

So he didn't see it quite as clearly as John saw it at the time. Because sometimes when we're under a cloud of our own failure, we have a distorted revelation. And we don't see Christ for who he is.

We don't see him with the clarity that we would ordinarily see him. And so sometimes he had to speak to us through the Lord. Through other people.

And when Peter recognized that the Lord was still with him, and the Lord was still speaking to him, and the Lord was still working miracles in his life, why, he took his coat and he put it on because I think he recognizes the impropriety of his own life, and he put his coat on. And now that's a strange thing. Ordinarily, if a person had a coat on, they would take it off and then jump into the water.

He put his coat on and jumped into the water. But you have to understand, there's still a little bit of Peter working in there. Because remember, this is the same one that said, I don't care if everybody else fails, I'm going ahead.

And so he leaves all of his brothers in the boat and he swims out ahead of everybody again. Probably because he thought to himself, man, oh man, okay, okay, I failed, that's true. But the Lord is still loving me and the Lord is still blessing me.

That must mean I'm doing something right. That must mean that my way of life has had some fruit. Because sometimes that's the way it is with us.

God is trying to correct us, but at the same time he's being gracious and merciful to us, so we misinterpret that to say that God is pleased with the way that I've been acting, let me do it again. So he jumps into the water, leaves his brothers behind, and in his zeal again, he's basically making the same statement that he made before. But he gets to the shore and Jesus feeds him.

Strangely, Jesus says to him at a certain point, he says, take the fish that you have, or some of the fish that you have, and then again, we see Peter's zeal, he goes out, they're trying to bring the fish in, you know what I mean? He goes out and he takes the whole thing, you know what I mean? And he just puts it over his shoulder and brings all the fish in. Because again, he's starting to get happy again. His idea is, yes, yes, God is still with me.

He's still working miracles. I remember the last time I threw that net over the right side of the boat and it was filled with fish and oh yes, I know God is trying to work in my heart and he's trying to do this in my heart, but let me do what I do again. Let me get some more fish and let me swim really hard and let me show some zeal and maybe God will forget all the stuff that he's been trying to do.

Let me get into some religious thing. Let me throw myself into some ministry. Let me do this, let me do that.

Let me hand out some tracts and let me sing some songs and let me preach some sermons and maybe, maybe, maybe God might forget that there's some things in my heart that need to be dealt with. So he gets back, you know what I mean? He gets back on his Peter mobile and starts doing all the stuff that he thinks is going to impress God. And God invites him to bring his little fish, you know, and put it on the fire, even though the provision is already there.

Whatever little fish he got, he got miraculously because the Lord was merciful to him. And then he sits down with him and he eats. Sort of a take and eat, this is my body, broken for you type of thing.

And basically what he's saying to Peter is, Peter, you don't have to impress me. I know who you are. And he says to him, I love you.

So that communion table meant you don't have to be afraid of God. You don't have to run from him. You don't have to hide.

You don't have to lie to him. You don't have to impress him. You don't have to make him love you.

He already does. And the idea, hallelujah, hallelujah. The idea was he's going to invite this same Peter, the same one who denied him to sit with him and to dine.

Now, as this is happening, he takes Peter aside after he had nourished Peter, after he had filled Peter, after he had given Peter what Peter needed to be able to engage in this next conversation because we can never, ever engage in the kind of conversations that God needs to engage us in if he doesn't give us the grace. He gives us the nourishment, but not only that, he reminds us of this unbroken communion. And then he says to Peter, do you love me more than these? Because again, Peter's still trying to prove himself.

Peter doesn't say, I love you more than these. He simply says, you know that I love you. And then he asks him again, after saying, feed my lambs, he asks him again, do you love me? Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? And Peter says, you know I love you.

And then he asks him a third time, and the Bible says that Peter was grieved. His heart was broken. Because I think he understood something.

The Lord was not asking Peter to express to him his own version of affection, his own version of love. So Peter reached deep inside and he said, Lord, you know everything. Now Peter could have been, again, lifting up some sort of theological platitude and said, oh Lord, you're omniscient and you're omnipotent and this, that, and the other and so on and so forth when he said you know everything, but I don't think that's what he was doing.

He wasn't making a theological statement. He was making a very personal statement. Saying, Lord, you know everything that there is to know about me.

You know my ins and my outs. You know my ups and my downs. You know my successes, you know my failures.

You know where I'm strong, you know where I'm weak. I don't have to lie to you now. He said, you know everything about me.

And yet, you know this. You know this. Watch and all, everything that I am is yours.

He said, you know that I love you. You know that I love you. And then the Lord says to him, feed my lambs.

In other words, he doesn't say to him, Peter, if you love me, prove it by feeding my lambs. He says to him, Peter, since you love me, now you're in a position to feed my lambs. Now remember what he had said to him in the earlier stages.

He said, when you are converted, strengthen your brothers. But he goes on before that and says, I've prayed for you. As in, I've provided for you.

I've fed you. I've strengthened you. I have befriended you.

And since you have received that, since you've accepted my love, and since you know that that is the basis of our relationship, since you know that I'm not looking to be impressed by you, I'm simply looking to love you. I'm not looking to be bedazzled by your weak. I'm looking to bless you and love you.

He says, since you know that, go forward in this, as the Lord said to Gideon, your strength. Because if you receive my love, you embrace my love, and you know that my love fully embraces you, warts and all. I know you.

then you will be able to bring my message of good news, my gospel of peace to all men and women. And they'll hear you as a person who has truly embraced the love of God. Because you and I are gonna talk to them, and we're gonna say to them, no matter where you are, no matter what your struggle, no matter what your difficulty, there is a Jesus who loved you and died for you.

And what they're gonna say is, how do you know? And you're gonna say, because he loves me. And he died for me. Wherever I happen to be, whatever I happen to be going through, whether I have times of success or times of failure, he loves me.

Now, at a certain stage, the Lord said to Peter, there was a time when you pretty much set your own agenda. You went where you wanted to go. You did what you wanted to do.

He said, but now you're gonna be a person who is, in essence, a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Paul called himself, a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He said, some people are gonna bind you by your hand.

They're gonna take you where you don't wanna go. He said, but by this, you're gonna glorify God. And there comes a time in our lives where we, like Samson, could break pretty much any bond that a person puts on us.

If we don't like it, we just snap the bonds and go back into a provocative lifestyle. We don't like the way it's going, we just break the bonds and then go back and fellowship with the Philistines. But there comes a time when God will put bonds on you and on me.

The bonds of love. At any given time, you and I, this is the way the bonds of love work. At any given time, you and I can break them.

At any given time, you and I can say, thanks, but no thanks. And I'm not talking about a person deciding that they don't wanna be a Christian anymore, you know what I mean? That's a much, much greater decision. I do believe that people can make that decision, but very few do, having loved the Lord.

But what I'm talking about is when God is trying to work on a specific thing in your life or in mine. And every time he tries to bring us to that place where we're gonna give glory to his name, we always have the power to say, no thank you. But we also have the power to put our hands out and say, Lord, lead me where you want me to go.

We have the grace to do that, why? Because we've eaten with him at the communion table. We don't have that, see, I'll say this and then we'll close. Peter thought his strength was in his power to break bonds.

He hears that an enemy is gonna come and try and put him, you know, and he says, nah, that's not a biggie for me. Why, I'm Peter, I mean, I can break any bonds. But what Jesus said is, that's not your strength.

Your strength is that you are in a position where you can allow God to bring you wherever he wants to bring you, even if he sometimes has to use an enemy to do it, so that you can grow in him, even though at any time, you can decide, I'm not going to go through this. That doesn't mean that you can decide you're not gonna go through a struggle. It only means that you can decide you're not gonna learn through it.

You can decide you're not gonna grow through it. You can decide you're gonna be bitter as a result of it, or you're gonna be as stubborn as your enemy or as your adversary. Or you and I can decide that we're going to allow God to get glory out of this.

I can pray either God get me out of this or God get glory out of this. And if I choose to pray God get glory out of this, it is for this reason only, because I have been with him in the holy place, because I have allowed him to feed me, because I've allowed him to share his life with me, to break the bread and to pour the wine, if you will, and to make it so that I can live this life. I cannot do it in my own strength.

I don't have the power. So in answer to the question, what if I fail in the time of trial, the answer is simply this, come and dine. If you fail in the time of trial, don't run from him.

Don't hide from him. Don't lie to him. Don't pad your answers with him.

He is not impressed. He loves you. I tell my little daughter all the time, I'm never gonna be shocked or surprised by anything you do.

She might think I'm shocked and surprised because she's drawn a picture in her own mind and presented it before daddy and said, this is who I am. So when she does something bad, she thinks it shocks me. I'm like, no, no, no.

What I rejoice in is the fact that you're not afraid to come and give daddy a hug. Tell him the truth and tell him that you love him. That's what Peter did finally.

What was Peter's strength finally? He was not ashamed to give his daddy a hug. To come to him and say, I failed. I'm sorry, but I love you.

And this is where I belong. Now there's someone in this room who hasn't lived up to their own self image. I'm not saying that you're not a godly person.

Peter was a godly man. But you set some standards and you haven't lived up to it. And you've been avoiding God as a result.

I don't say you stopped coming to church. Obviously you haven't stopped coming to church. Although somebody might be listening online and maybe they have.

But you've been kind of skirting around these words. You've been finding certain ones that you like and so on and so forth. And in the prayer closet, you've been very, very timorous.

You've been kind of walking on eggshells in the presence of the Lord. Because you think God is mad at you. I want to tell you tonight, God is not mad at you.

God is not mad at you. God is not mad at you. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. It doesn't mean that he doesn't want to bring some issues up in you. It doesn't mean that he won't talk about a thing or two.

But he loves you so much. Now tonight, we're going to pray at this altar. It is an invitation to simply come and dine.

God, very simply put, he just wants to meet with you. He wants to eat with you. He wants to provide for you.

He wants to embrace you. He simply wants to remind you of how much he loves you. Let's stand together in the house of the Lord.

If you haven't lived up to certain standards that you've set, or even standards that he set, because you try to live it in your own strength, and you've been hiding as a result, you've not been as tender with him as you know you're supposed to be, as you know you've been in the past. Your prayer life has not been as sweet. Your Bible studies have been more sporadic.

You've been timorous in the church, in the house of the Lord. There's been walls. Kind of gone back to business as usual.

God is here tonight, and he just wants to embrace you. He wants to eat with you. He wants to remind you of how much he loves you.

If God is speaking to your heart tonight, come to the front of this auditorium. We'll pray together. We'll meet with God in this holy place.

We'll rejoice with him. We'll eat with him. And then we'll go on and do this thing that God has called us to do.

I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of Glory died By which the Prince of Glory died Precious gain I count but loss And poor contempt on all my rise See from his head, his hands, his feet Sorrow and love flow bingled down Dear, such love can sorrow be Or thorns from both souls reach the ground Oh, the wonderful cross Oh, the wonderful cross Gives me hope and life And mind that I may truly live Oh, the wonderful cross Oh, the wonderful cross All who gather here By grace drawn near And bless your name Richer prime Half world small Love so amazing So divine My soul, my life, my all Oh, the wonderful cross Oh, the wonderful cross And mind that I may truly live Oh, the wonderful cross And mind that I may truly live Oh, the wonderful cross And mind that I may truly live Praise the name of Jesus. It's a wonderful thing to concern yourself with the cross of Christ. There is no Bible writer who writes more eloquently, in my opinion, about the cross of Jesus than Peter.

It was a big issue with him. Every time he had a serious struggle with Jesus, it was about that cross. And now he learns to embrace it because he said, it's my only hope.

And there are some people who are standing here, the Lord spoke to my heart and basically said that the enemy is trying to parade your sin in front of your faith. And even as you're standing here and trying to embrace the Lord, the enemy is trying to tell you why you don't have the right to. But I suggest to you that you use that against him by first acknowledging your failure before the Lord and simply confessing your sin to him.

Confess your fault to him. And then allow him to draw you so near to him and to embrace you and to love you and say, you're my son, you're my daughter, I know you. He said, I plucked you out of the fire with my own hand.

You're mine. Tonight, the hand of God is upon you to strengthen you, to encourage you, to embrace you. Father, in Jesus' name, we rejoice in you, oh God.

We don't rejoice in our own strength, we don't rejoice in our own accomplishments, and we will not be condemned by the lie of the devil. We acknowledge where we fall short, but we recognize that you never fall short. That your love never falls short.

We join you at the table of covenant relation. We join you at this table and we partake of the bread and of the wine. We partake of your life poured out.

We partake of your sacrifice on Calvary. We partake of you, oh God. And as a result, Lord, we are able to be who you have called us to be in this generation and for this generation and for your name's sake and for your glory.

Lord, you said that we would glorify your name in the earth if it involves being bondservants of the Lord and it does, then so be it. That we won't lift ourselves up, we won't lift our strength up. We lift you up, Lord.

We lift up your name and glorify you, oh God. And we ask in Jesus' name, oh God, that your hand be on each one. Spirit of God, embrace each one.

God, just embrace each one. Embrace each one, oh God. God, invite each one to the table, to the table of communion.

Sweet, tender love. God, in Jesus' name, touch each one. Let no one walk away from this place un nourished, unrevited.

For God, in Jesus' name, Jesus' name, strengthening, courage, empower for your own name's sake. According to the covenant that you made with the heavenly Father, let the glory of God be poured out by the Holy Spirit. And now, Father, in Jesus' name, we thank you.

We thank you for your son. We thank you for what he did for us on Calvary Street. Jesus, your sacrifice is enough.

And Holy Spirit, we thank you for feeding us, for strengthening us, for encouraging us. And now we ask that your name be blessed, be praised, be glorified. We love you.

We bless you. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

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