



---

## JESUS AND PETER

---

### Part 91 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 22:31-34; 54-62 | September 25, 2011

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

<sup>31</sup> “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” <sup>33</sup> Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” . . .

<sup>54</sup> Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. <sup>55</sup> And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. <sup>56</sup> Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” <sup>57</sup> But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” <sup>58</sup> And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” <sup>59</sup> And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” <sup>60</sup> But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” <sup>62</sup> And he went out and wept bitterly.

### THE TESTIMONY OF PETER

This is the Word of God, and as we read it, it has truths, and those truths are declarations of who God is. It also has testimonies, which are demonstrations of what God does, and they go together, because God wants us to know who he is, and he wants us to see what he does, and today we get the great privilege of hearing the testimony of a man named Peter.

We’re in Luke 22, beginning in verse 31, looking at Jesus and Peter. The story of Peter commenced very early in the Gospel of Luke, where we learned that Peter was initially a businessman and a business leader, and he had a fishing company with boats, and supplies, and employees, and the like. Jesus came and called to him, “Follow me,” and so Peter left his business and followed Jesus. Up to this point, he’s been following Jesus for roughly three years, as a disciple, as a student of Jesus, learning from him.

Just by way of caveat, we see here that Jesus redeems all of his business experience. At Mars Hill we believe that oftentimes God will give people great experience outside of ministry and outside of church, even sometimes when they are outside of Christ, that he can then utilize to help them expand the ministry and the message of the church. So if you’re a business leader, we welcome you and want to invite you all to think about how your job skills and life experiences could be redeemed for service to Jesus, and Peter serves as an example of that.

As we look at their relationship today, these men are friends. They have eaten and traveled together for three years, and Peter’s been there for all of it. He’s seen Jesus preach, teach, heal, cast out demons, and walk on water. Peter has been there for it all. And today we’re going to hear the testimony of Peter in a profoundly dark moment in his friendship with the Lord Jesus.

### JESUS KNOWS WHO WILL FAIL HIM

The first thing that we learn is that Jesus knows who will fail him. We read this in Luke 22:31–34. “‘Simon, Simon,’” Jesus says. “‘Behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.’” Peter said to him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.’ Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.’”

Now, Peter’s name here has been changed. Here he is called Simon. We refer to him as Peter. This is because his name was changed by Jesus. In the Bible, when you pass from non-Christian to Christian, from spiritual death to spiritual life, the change is so dramatic, drastic, cataclysmic, that you are a new creation, a new person with a new identity, and a new mind, and a new Lord, and a new heart, and new passions, and pleasures, and longings, and thoughts, and ambitions, and desires, so sometimes God renames a person to show the magnitude of what it means for them to be born again. So, Abram becomes Abraham, and Saul becomes Paul, and Simon becomes Cephas, or Peter.

Here Jesus refers to him as Simon. That’s his old name. Peter is hearing from the Lord Jesus, “You’re going back to your old ways. You’re going to

think and act in a way that you used to before we met.” How many of you, that would be true? There are times in your life when you’re thinking and acting the way you used to, perhaps before you met the Lord Jesus and became a Christian or before you had a season of maturity and transformation. Sometimes we revert back, and those are discouraging times, right? Sometimes they can be disappointing and/or depressing times. Sometimes it could become so dark that people even wonder, “Am I really a Christian? Did I ever even meet Jesus? Am I just fooling myself and faking it?”

And Jesus looks at him and says, “You’re going back to your old ways, and you are going to deny me three times.” Jesus is God. He knows the future. He’s sovereign over it. He is here predicting, anticipating, prophesying, promising the failure, the denial of Peter, and Peter says, “There’s no way I will fail you! You can depend on me. You can count on me. I would go to prison for you. I’ll die for you. Don’t worry about me, Lord Jesus.”

We all need to know that God is fully aware of when we will sin and fail, and where and how. Some of you don’t think that sin is in your future. Some of you don’t think that failure is in your future. Some of you don’t think that tragedy is in your future. God knows the future. He knows exactly what tomorrow holds, and the day after that, and he knows who will fail him! He does.

And he says, “Peter, Satan has come to me, and he has asked to sift you like wheat.” To use our modern vernacular, this would be like saying, “Satan has asked to tear you apart!” You need to know that it’s not just you and God. You also have an adversary, an enemy, the devil, that great serpent, the dragon. He hates God, and he harms you. So, when things get tough, you’re being tempted, and tested, and tried, you can’t always just cast a shadow of judgment on God. “Where are you? What are you doing?” You need to also consider: where is my enemy, and is this from him?

Satan is real. Demons are real. They’re created beings, angels who rebelled against God and are responsible for evil, and injustice, and sin, and death on the earth, and when we sin, we conspire with them in their war against God. Many don’t believe that. Many think that the spirit realm is only good. There is also evil. Many, even professing Christians, sort of dismiss those parts of the Bible. We don’t. Jesus says here that Satan is real, and we believe Jesus. Satan is also real, therefore, in your life and mine, and he works categorically in three ways: the world, the flesh, and the devil. This is what the Bible teaches.

The world is the external system that is opposed to God, that tempts you to rebel against God, and sin against God, and live a life of folly, and the world is filled with innumerable opportunities to fail God and to sin against him. Internally, we have the flesh. This is a predisposition toward rebellion, toward sin, toward folly, toward death, toward failure.

Working in concert with the world externally and the flesh internally is the devil. He’s our enemy and our adversary, and he’s going to come at you, friends, with temptations. He’s going to come at you with accusations, with second-person conversations: “You are a failure. You are unloved. You will never change. You should just kill yourself.”

He will come at you, as well, with lies. He is the father of lies. And if you believe his lies, he will destroy you. That’s why Jesus says you need to know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Furthermore, he will come at you with condemnations. “This is what you’ve done. This is who you are.” Even taking sins of your past that you’ve apologized for and moved on from, throwing them into your face, so that you feel condemned, and ashamed, and dirty, and destroyed, and devastated, and hopeless, and bewildered.

You need to go to the truth. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.” “Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.” “No temptation has seized you, except for that which is common to man, and when tempted, God always provides a way of escape.”

Jesus promises that we will fail him, that you will fail him, that I will fail him, that the enemy will have a victory at our expense. And Peter says, “No, not me!” And some of you have said or will say, “No, not me!”

## **EVEN THE BEST AMONG US FAIL JESUS**

Jesus’ second point is that even the best among us fail Jesus. And Peter’s the best! He’s a disciple of Jesus. He’s always listed first, because he’s the senior leader and the first among equals. He’s the best! Some time later, he writes books of the Bible. He is the best among us. But even the best among us fail Jesus.

Luke 22:54–61. “Then they seized him,” that is Jesus, “and led him away—” he’s being arrested— “bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl—” maybe a poor, powerless junior high girl— “seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely 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.’” There’s the second time. “And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’” His accent betrayed him. “But Peter said, ‘Man,’” third time, “‘I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” Imagine seeing Jesus’ face at that moment. “And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’”

Friends, Peter is the best among us! Here’s our leader! Here’s the highest human authority, after Jesus, spiritually speaking, on the earth. It’s Peter! It’s Peter, and he fails Jesus. He fails Jesus at his moment of most desperate need. Jesus has just been arrested. He has been detained. He is nearing his execution via crucifixion. Peter is his friend. Peter is his disciple. Peter is part of the inner circle of three. There are only three leaders that are close to Jesus, the closest to Jesus, and one of them is Peter. Peter was there when Elijah came down from heaven with Moses for a meeting with Jesus.

Peter is not suffering. He's not even facing certain suffering. He's facing possible, potential suffering. The servant girl is absolutely powerless. In that culture, to be a woman is to be powerless, to be a young woman is to be even more powerless, to be a young servant woman is to be the most powerless or the least powerful. She has no authority. She has no power. Peter is a grown man. It's not illegal for him to have been a disciple of Jesus. There's no assurance that anything will happen to him, just the hypothetical possibility.

We could look at Peter and say, "That is so shameful." And how many of us did it last week at work? Somebody is badmouthing Christianity, we don't say anything. "I'm not one of those Bible thumpers. I'm not one of those born-againers. You know, I'm not going to force my religion on you." Which is another way of saying, "You can go to hell, as long as you don't think I'm mean, 'cause I'm not gonna say anything about Jesus, because if I say something about Jesus, somebody may not like that, and that may have a negative consequence for me, and I love myself more than them, so I will remain silent."

This young girl looks at him. "You were with Jesus." "No, I was not!" "No, I think you were, and you've got an accent that sounds like you were from that same region of Galilee that he was, and he's arrested right here. And why would there be another Galilean outside, if you were not with him?" "I do not know him!" "Are you sure you don't?" "I swear I've never met him!" He's lying. He's lying. This was the first man to confess, "Jesus, you are the Christ!" "I never met him. I don't know who you're talking about."

How many of you have made a vow? He just made a vow previously, right? We read it. "Jesus, I'll go to prison. I'll go to death. I promise you, you can depend on me." How many of you have made a vow? Any of you been married? What happens in a Christian marriage, we put the husband and the wife on the altar. They face one another, and they exchange vows. "I will love you." How's that going? "Like Christ loves the church." We don't even need to ask that. "I will be faithful to you." How is your vow going?

Baptism is a sort of vow as well, correct? In baptism, we are publicly declaring, "I belong to Jesus, and I'm going to follow him, and I'm going to worship him, and I'm going to serve him, by the grace of God." How's it going?

Any of you a church member? It's a vow. "This is my church. I'm going to give here, I'm going to serve here. This is where I'm going to make a difference." How's the vow going?

You ever looked a friend in the face or called him on the phone? "Look, I'm here for you. I know this is a hard season, but you can depend on me." You're like, "Yeah, I haven't even been praying for him. I haven't called him. I haven't followed up on him. I just forgot."

Jesus knows who will fail him, and even the best among us fail him. You have failed him, I have failed him, we have failed him, Peter has failed him. Some of you failed him last night. Some of you failed him last week. Some of you failed him last month. Some of you failed him last year, and some of you are here today, smugly, proudly declaring in your heart, "I'm glad it's not me." Wait 'til tomorrow. Jesus knows when you will fail him.

How do you feel about that fact? Here's how Peter felt: Luke 22:62, "And he went out and wept bitterly." Have you had that day? Peter is a grown man. Grown men don't cry a lot, but when confronted with the depth of their sin, it is a righteous thing for a man to be broken. And Peter here, if you could just get the picture, he had just denied him. "I don't know Jesus! . . . There he is, looking me in the eye, hearing everything I've just said, as he's going to suffer, and I denied him." I could just see Peter's face in his hands, just weeping, bawling bitterly, uncontrollably. "What have I done? What have I failed to do?"

Have you had that moment? You said something, and as it just came out of your mouth, you just saw it absolutely destroy someone. They were obliterated, incinerated right in front of you. You can't take it back. "What have I said?" How many of you, you've had that moment. You sinned. You did it! The thing you said you'd never do or you said you'd never do again, and you did it! And it hits you. The Holy Spirit, he hits you, and you're devastated, because who you truly are, apart from the grace of God, is fully revealed. Oh, my gosh. You feel sick to your stomach. You feel ashamed. You feel dirty. You feel embarrassed. You're mortified.

This is Peter demonstrating repentance. If there's any good news in this account, it is that Peter didn't wait a long time to repent. It doesn't say, "And five years later, Peter came to his senses." It's more like five seconds later, Peter came to his senses. Dear friend, how long have you been waiting to look at Jesus' face, to see your own sin, and to weep bitterly? Some of you, it's been too long. Your heart has grown cold and hard. Let this be the day that you weep bitterly. Ecclesiastes says that a sad face is good for the heart, that sometimes the bitter weeping is partial cleansing for the soul, through the tears of the broken.

Around this same time, there was another disciple who betrayed Jesus. Do you remember him? Peter's not alone in betraying Jesus in this season. Who else betrayed Jesus? Judas Iscariot. Peter and Judas denied, betrayed, failed Jesus! Both men feel bad. Peter has repentance. By the grace of God, he wants to change and return to Jesus. Judas does not have repentance. He only has remorse. He doesn't return to Jesus. Instead, he commits suicide by hanging himself. See, two people can sin. Two people can feel bad. The Christian repents and runs to Jesus. The non-Christian only has remorse and runs toward destruction. It's not enough, dear friend, to feel bad about your sin. You have to repent and look Jesus in the face, because you've sinned against him.

## JESUS FAILS NO ONE

It's horrible, isn't it? The best among us failed, failed miserably, failed publicly, failed shamefully. And if this were all we had in the Bible, if this were where the story ended, it would be completely devastating, utterly depressing. But the reason it's so dark is all we've talked about is Peter and us. See, we haven't talked about Jesus yet. What's he gonna do? What's he gonna do?

That brings us to a happier point: Jesus fails no one. Peter failed Jesus: yes or no? Yes! You failed Jesus: yes or no? Yes! Jesus failed Peter: yes or no? No! Jesus fails you: yes or no? No! Second Timothy 2:13 says it this way, “Even when or though we are faithless, he remains faithful.” That’s the essence of Christianity. That’s the essence of Christianity. Even though we’re faithless, he’s faithful. Do you know what holds your relationship, my relationship, Peter’s relationship with Jesus together? Faithfulness. But it’s not ours; it’s his.

So, what’s Jesus going to do? What’s Jesus going to do? Well, I’ll tell you what he’s going to do. He’s going to go the cross. I mean, at this point, he is hours from the cross. Jesus is arrested. Peter denies him. Jesus goes to the cross where he suffers and dies.

Our God becomes a man. He does not sin! We deny him. He does not deny us. We are faithless. He is faithful. Peter should go to the cross and die. Jesus should have been set free. Jesus had not sinned, but Peter had. And what does Jesus do? He goes to the cross. He is beaten, mocked, flogged, and he has a series of false trials. He is absolutely brutalized beyond recognition; railroad ties and spikes are used to crucify the carpenter, God, through the most sensitive nerve centers on the human body. God suffers, God bleeds, God dies for his friend, Peter. The death that Peter should have died, Jesus dies. And Jesus is on the cross, and he says things like, “Father, forgive them.” Because he’s going to pay the penalty for sin, he makes that prayer possible to be answered. And he says in a loud, triumphant cry, “It is finished!”

Three days later, Jesus rises from death, and he conquers sin and death, and the word gets out. “Jesus is alive, Jesus is alive, Jesus is alive!” And they run to the tomb, and who’s the first one there? Peter. “Oh, I’ve got to see him. I have to see him.” And Peter runs, first one, into the empty tomb of Jesus. Peter failed Jesus. Jesus didn’t fail Peter. You fail Jesus. Jesus doesn’t fail you. I fail Jesus. Jesus doesn’t fail me.

Do you know what that is? That’s good news! That’s good news! And what I love is Jesus doesn’t just give good advice. This world is filled with good advice. Turn on the television. Good advice. Turn on the radio. Good advice. Pick up the magazine. Good advice. Buy the book. Good advice. Talk to your friend. Good advice. Go meet with a therapist. Good advice. Do you know what we need? Good news! Good advice is, “Maybe you could do this or try that?” Jesus says, “How about, it is finished!” That’s good news!

Good news is about what Jesus does. Good advice is about what we need to do. Jesus is not just another therapist. He’s not just another counselor. He’s not just another professor, or a teacher, or an author who gives good advice. He’s a good God and Savior who died and rose to give good news, and the good news is we all failed God, and God fails none of his children. That’s good news!

So, if you’re here today, and you say, “I used to be a Christian, and I don’t know where I’m at today,” or “I have failed God so many times, how could he take me back?” And some of you might even ask, “Have I lost my salvation?” That’s the wrong question. You can’t lose your salvation. The question is not, “Have you lost your salvation?” The question is, “Has Jesus lost a Christian?” Some of you say, “But I’ve been so faithless.” Yeah, but he’s so faithful.

If you’re not a Christian, Mars Hill is not about giving you good advice, but good news. Jesus forgives sinners. Jesus pursues sinners. Jesus loves sinners! Jesus changes sinners! And you’re welcome, you’re welcome, you’re welcome to follow him! Friends, it doesn’t matter what you’ve done. You are not beyond the good news. And I tell you this. Some of you are going to sin in the future, and you’re going to have that bitter weeping moment, and you’re not beyond the good news. See, I have complete hope for you—not in you, but for you. You can depend on Jesus, especially when you’ve failed him, because Jesus fails who? No one. That’s amazing.

C. S. Lewis says it this way: “Though our feelings come and go, his love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to him.” See, Jesus is relentless to love you. He is relentless to pursue you. He is relentless to forgive you, and he knows when you will fail him, and he will be there on the other side of that failure, because he is faithful, even to those who are unfaithful.

## THE REMEDY FOR FAILURE IS FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS

The last point then is the remedy for failure is friendship with Jesus, right? Luke 22:32, back to the early initial discussion between Peter and Jesus. I want to revisit these words, “. . . when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Jesus says, “You will deny me and fail me.” Peter says, “I will not.” “Yes, you will. When you do, you will also return, repent. You’re going to turn around. You’re going to feel bad. You’re going to say you’re sorry. I’m going to forgive you. Your life is going to change. When you repent—” “When I repent? I haven’t even sinned yet.” “You will. Trust me. You’re going to sin, then you’re going to repent, and when you do, tell your story, so that your brothers may be strengthened.”

In order for us to tell the good news, we need to tell the bad news about our own life. What this world doesn’t need is another Christian who tells the story, “Jesus made me a winner; he can make you a winner, too.” Right? The story is, “I failed. He’s faithful. Yay, Jesus.” Right? That’s how we tell our story. However we tell the story of God’s involvement and investment in our life, that has to be the plot line: “I failed. Jesus didn’t. Yay, Jesus.”

And that’s what he tells Peter. “You’re going to repent, and when you do, tell the truth, right? Don’t let them just write a biography that says, ‘Peter was a fisherman. Then he became a disciple, and he changed the world, and he wrote two books of the Bible. *Peter*, coming to a theater near you.’” Because Peter isn’t the hero of his life. He’s the villain. Jesus is the hero. You’re not the hero of your life. I’m not the hero of my life. We’re the villain. Jesus is the hero. Jesus says, “Tell the truth so that all the other villains and failures come to me, instead of praising you.”

So, what’s Jesus going to do? There is one gospel—we’ll leave Luke and go to John for a moment—that records this repentant restoration meeting between Jesus and Peter. It says this in John 21:15–17. “When they had finished breakfast—” now let me just pause real quick. The Jehovah’s

Witnesses say Jesus never rose physically, bodily; that he only rose spiritually like an angel. No, he didn't. He had breakfast! Angels don't get up and eat breakfast, right? There's no angel mom telling an angel kid, "It's the most important meal of the day." Me: chorizo sausage, eggs, green chiles, coffee, to the glory of God and the joy of all people.

When they had finished chorizo, eggs, and coffee, "Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved, because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything.'" We kind of just proved that. "'You know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'"

How many times did Peter deny Jesus? Three. How many times does Jesus ask Peter, "Do you love me?" Three. And these men here, the God-man and the mere man, they're face-to-face. Peter's looking Jesus in the eye, and Jesus is looking Peter in the eye. And let me say this. If you want to have a real friendship with someone, when there's sin between you, you need to get face-to-face, not just a letter, not just an e-mail, not just a call. You've got to get face-to-face. You need to look them in the eye, if you're the one who's sinned, and just say it. "This is what I did, and I'm sorry." If you're the one who's been sinned against, you need to look them in the eye and say, "I forgive you," and mean it from the heart.

These men are friends. Three years together, meals together, journeys together, life together, memories together. They're friends. They're face-to-face. And in the Bible, that's the language of friendship. The Bible says that Moses saw God face-to-face. He was a friend of God. See, earlier, Peter had looked at Jesus' face, right as he was denying him, and their friendship was potentially damaged or even destroyed. So, they need to come face-to-face again, and Peter and Jesus need to look one another in the eye, and they need to get beyond this sin.

Who do you need to apologize to? Who do you need to go look in the eye? Who do you need to say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me" to? For those of you that have been sinned against, who have you refused to forgive?

Peter not only denied Christ, in Christ dying for his sin, to some degree, we could say that Peter murdered his friend. And here his friend says, "I love you." The Bible says that one day, 1 Corinthians 13, we will rise from death and see Jesus how? Face-to-face, face-to-face. The key to overcoming sin is to get face-to-face with Jesus.

What I love is that Jesus doesn't look at Peter and say, "Your real problem is you're a coward," though that was accurate. He doesn't look at Peter and say, "You have deep-seated fear of man issues," though that's true. He doesn't say, "You're a liar," and that's true, too. Instead, he gets to the root, and he looks at Peter, and Peter can tell in the face of Jesus, that Jesus loves him, and so Jesus asks him three times, "Do you love me?"

Why does he ask him that question? Because sin is not just the breaking of God's laws. It's the breaking of Jesus' heart. When you sin, you're sinning against your friend. You're sinning against a God who loves you. You're sinning against a God who wants to do life with you. You're sinning against a God who calls you by name and treasures you as a friend. And so when Jesus asks him, "Do you love me?" he is in essence teaching Peter, "If you love me, you're not going to lie. If you love me, you're not going to deny me. If you love me, you're not going to be a coward. If you love me, you're going to live for the glory of God, not for the approval of others."

See, friends, all of your problems and mine, they really come down to two things. We don't really believe that Jesus loves us, and we don't really love him; and even if we do, sometimes, in a moment, we choose otherwise, and that's why we sin. So, the key to overcoming sin is a friendship with Jesus. Right? It's a friendship with the real living God, who's not just an idea, but a person, a person named Jesus, who loves us.

## **"TEND MY SHEEP, FEED MY SHEEP"**

Jesus looks at Peter, and he says, "Tend my sheep, feed my sheep." Who are the sheep? The people of God are the sheep, and Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and there are wolves that try to devour and hurt the sheep. And then God appoints some as leaders to be shepherds to protect the sheep, to love the sheep, to feed the sheep.

And for me, I'll be honest with you. As I was praying, and studying, and considering this, that's the part that really broke me, that Peter would have an opportunity to love and to serve God's people and to feed them, and the way that a pastor feeds his people is by teaching the Scriptures. Jesus says we don't just live on bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The Bible says it's like milk, and it's like meat, and it's like bread. It uses that language to say, you know, this is what people need in order to grow in godliness and be strong. They need to be fed the Word of God.

I was thinking about it this week. Grace and I had an opportunity to go over to a place we'd not been in about nineteen years. I went to college as a non-Christian with a bad temper, running around, messing around with a pastor's daughter, who thought he was a really great guy and didn't need a Savior, because he didn't really have any sin. Okay, that was me. And at the age of nineteen in college, Jesus saved me, and I became a follower of Jesus. And, you know, what I deserve is to be a crash test dummy or a punching bag and then sent to hell. That's what I deserve. And instead, I get to feed the sheep, and I get to tend the sheep.

So Grace and I had this opportunity to go back this week and to look at the first church where I got to attend as a Christian, where I was baptized in, where we were first fed the Word of God, that helped me to grow; not that I don't have growing left to do, but that's where I started getting fed the Word of God. We got to meet with my old pastor and his wife and say, "Hey, thank you for tending the sheep, and we were among that flock." And Grace and I got to go back and look at the place that we lived as a brand-new Christian married couple. And to think of all the grace that God has poured out. I'm not just a man who's undeserving, but ill-deserving. It was really overwhelming, and I'm still processing it.

It's amazing that Jesus would not only forgive people, but allow them to communicate the message of forgiveness; that Jesus would not only love people, but allow them to be agents of his love; that Jesus wouldn't just allow people to become sheep in his flock, but shepherds of his flock, and this includes elders, and deacons, and Community Group leaders, and Redemption Group leaders. And some of you God is calling to be a leader, and some of you would say, "But my sin is so dark and so gross." Yes, but your Jesus is so faithful and so good. And once he's gotten you a little more mature, your story could be powerfully used to encourage others in the faithfulness of the loving Jesus.

I am amazed that God would use a man like Peter. I'm more amazed that God would use a man like me or that God would use a man or a woman like you. That's amazing. "Feed my sheep, tend my sheep, feed my sheep, tend my sheep." Do you know what Jesus cares a lot about? The church and the people of God.

That really hit me this week when Grace and I went back to our old college town. We never made it to the college. We never even set foot on the campus. We met with a couple that has twelve kids and was one of our first mentors. We met with the pastor and his wife. We went around to see God's people. It's not that I didn't like college, but the best part of college was God's people and God's shepherds. In the end, it's the most important thing we give our life to. It's the people of God and the church of God. It's the place we get to tell the story, "This is how Jesus has been so faithful to me," and then encourage others just like Jesus told Peter, right, "Tell your story, and others will be strengthened." Some of you say, "My story is not good." Meet with Jesus, and then I promise you, you'll have a good story to tell.

And what happens next? Jesus ascends into heaven! There's Peter watching his friend go. That had to be weird, right? "Bye." And then everybody looks at whom? There were 120 or so Christians left in that day, meeting. They all look at whom? Peter. "It's all riding on you, buddy!" "Ah! "It wasn't that long ago, weeks ago, I denied Christ, and now I'm in charge. Oh, Holy Spirit, come quickly."

And then the day of Pentecost comes. See, Luke writes Luke and then Acts, which is the sequel. It tells the story of how the news and the work of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, continue. And all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit drops, and people are being saved, and the church goes from 120 to thousands! And who steps forward to preach the gospel? Who talks about Jesus? Peter! And Christianity is unleashed on the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the good news of Jesus goes out from Peter, and the world has never recovered, and there are billions of us today who claim to be Christians and follow Jesus!

If this were a Hollywood story, it would just show Peter riding off in the sunset, right, with a woman at his side. "And he rode off in glory, never to sin again, never to fail again! Thankfully, that was behind him!" True or false? False. We love Peter, 'cause he's like us!

Some time later, the good news gets out to non-Jews, Gentiles, you and me. And they don't want to be Jewish. They just want to love Jesus. So, the guys don't want to get circumcised for theological and obviously practical reasons. And they'd been enjoying ham, and pork, and sausage. And they're like, "You know, Jesus doesn't care. We're going to keep eating that stuff."

So, Peter, being a Jewish Christian, he knows that those who obey the Old Testament Jewish laws will not be real happy with their new Gentile friends, who say, "We're free in Christ. The law has been fulfilled. Please pass the pork product." And so what happens is when the Jewish Christians come to town, the Bible records that Peter would look at the Gentile Christians and say [*whispering*], "Hey, I'll see you guys later. I'm going to go meet with the Jewish guys. Don't tell them I've been eating ham sandwiches."

And then he goes over, and he meets—and you know what? He's being a hypocrite, and he's treating some people as second-class Christians, and Paul says, "I had to confront him to his face." "Here we go again, Peter. Jesus went to heaven, but he sent me. What are you doing? Look me in the eye!" Peter repents. "You're right. Heck, I'm doing it again. I'm a coward. I'm a liar! I'm a denier who writes books of the Bible." How many of you have been a Christian for a long time, and you thought, "So glad that's behind me. What?" And Jesus was faithful to Peter. That's why he died. And over time, we do see Peter grow and change by the grace of God.

Now, we don't find this in Scripture, but here is how Peter's life ends, as recorded in history. As an elderly man, an older man, he's been walking with Jesus for many years. They come to him and arrest him, just like they arrested Jesus, and they tell him, "Peter, you must deny Christ! Say you didn't know him! Say you didn't follow him! Say you didn't love him! Deny him! You did it before. Do it again. And if you deny him, you will not suffer. You'll be set free. Your life will be easy."

Peter had an opportunity to sin, to fail, to deny yet again. But after all of those years of faithfulness from Jesus and the grace of God, Peter became faithful to Jesus, and history records he looked at them and said, "Then crucify me, crucify me, but I'm not worthy to die like Jesus did. Hang me upside down!" And they did, and Peter never denied him, not at the last, and Peter closed his eyes in death, and he opened his eyes on the other side of death. And whom did he see? He saw Jesus. "Peter, do you love me?" "You know that I do."

## PRAYER

Father God, I pray for my friends, this wonderful, glorious flock that is Mars Hill Church. Lord Jesus, I thank you that you take a failure like Peter and a failure like me, and you allow us to be used by a faithful God to shepherd a flock of sheep. God, I am Peter, they are Peter, we are Peter. We are faithless, and we are failures, and Jesus, you are faithful, and your faithfulness to us, it not only forgives us, it changes us. Lord Jesus, I thank you for the story, the testimony of the life of Peter. I ask for those who are here and not Christian, that they would not come to the church, or to the Bible, or to Jesus, seeking good advice on how to fix their life, that instead they would receive the good news that Jesus is faithful.

For those who are here, Lord God, and this is their bitter weeping season, life is hard, things are dark, they are discouraged. Lord Jesus, I pray that they

would see your face at this moment, as Peter did, and that that would be the beginning of their change, their transformation, their redemption. Lord Jesus, I pray for those of us who are here, and we are discouraged, because it feels like the enemy has sifted us as wheat. Like Peter, we have had success only to be met with failure. We have sinned, and then we have had victory over sin, and then we sinned again. Lord Jesus, help those beloved people to remember, even when we are faithless, you are faithful.

Jesus, thank you that you are the hero of the story of the life of Peter. Thank you that you are the hero of the story of our life. Thank you that Peter did change, and he did grow. And in the end, he loved you well, as you loved him well. He loved you in his death, as you loved him in your death. And Holy Spirit, we invite you to give us the grace to finish well in the love of Jesus, finishing well, loving Jesus. And so Lord God, as we transition now, we want to take Communion, saying that Jesus is faithful, and we want to sing as a way of demonstrating that Jesus is faithful, because, Lord Jesus, you are, and we are glad. Amen.

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*