

# Following Jesus at a Distance

## The Cross (Part 10)

Mark 14:66-72 (Mt.26:69-; Lk.22:54-65; Jn.18:15-27) 10/8/2022

*When is it okay to protect yourself, and when does it fall into the kind of self-saving that Jesus forbids? We'll learn from Jesus and Peter what it looks like to lose your life to save it rather than saving your life and losing it.*

Harmony	12
Introduction: Plan B	2
Following at a Distance	2
Examples of Distance	3
Following at a Distance Saps Your Strength	3
A Tiny Test.....	3
Opportunity for Witness .....	3
Big Man vs. Little Girl .....	4
Following at a Distance Increases Fear of Man	4
Not Prepared for an Easy Test.....	4
Vulnerability.....	4
Seeking Human Approval.....	4
Following at a Distance Clouds Your Understanding	5
Following at a Distance Dulls Your Conscience	5
First Rooster Crow.....	5
Following at a Distance Isolates You from the Body	6
Second Denial: "One of Them".....	6
Denying the Church.....	6
Safe Distance from the Church.....	6
Lone Rangers Are Dead Rangers	7
Following at a Distance Creates Even More Distance	7
Snowballing Sin.....	7
Following at a Distance Ends in Disaster	8
Losing What You're Trying to Save.....	8
299 The Rooster .....	8
370 (475) He Wept .....	9
Going After the One Lost Sheep	9
380 (390) Repentance.....	9
479 (770) Restoration .....	10
Remembering Christ's Words	11
Looking Toward Jesus	11
Conclusion: Afraid of the Rock	11

## Introduction: Plan B

Last Sunday our church did a song called Death Was Arrested. See what you think of this verse: Our savior displayed on a criminal's cross  
Darkness rejoiced as though heaven had lost  
But then Jesus arose with our freedom in hand  
That's when death was arrested and my life began  
What do you think of that line, "Darkness rejoiced as though heaven had lost"? Was Satan happy when Jesus died?

In Revelation 12, John tells the story of a woman and a dragon. The woman is Israel, she gives birth to the Messiah, and the dragon wants to devour the child. Does the dragon succeed? Does John say, "The dragon devoured the child, but then, three days later God turned the tables"? No. The dragon failed. Satan's effort to destroy Christ was not in crucifying him; it was in *preventing* the cross. That's what would have destroyed the entire mission of Christ. Wasn't that the point of all his temptations? And when Peter said, "You'll never go to the cross," what did Jesus call him? Satan. In Gethsemane, Satan did everything he could to so weaken and demoralize Jesus that he wouldn't drink the cup. But it didn't work. Jesus submits to arrest, and now he's on trial.

So Satan throws everything at Jesus—injustice ... Jesus stands firm. False accusations ... Jesus doesn't say a word. Unfair condemnation ... Jesus is as strong as ever and boldly proclaims the truth.

This isn't looking good. And it seems like at this point Satan panics. He throws the whole Sanhedrin into a frenzy. They start spitting on Jesus and punching him and beating him like a bunch of crazed gangsters. And the whole time Satan is watching saying, "*Come on Jesus—bail. Call those 12 legions of angels.*" But Jesus stands strong.

And when it looks like he's going to go ahead and drink that cup, I don't think Satan was celebrating. I think he's shouting, "No, no no!!! This can't be happening!"

So now what? What happens next in Revelation 12 when he fails to destroy the Messiah? He goes after the Church. That effort begins in verse 66. Satan sees the disaster unfolding in Jesus' trial, the cross is going to happen, so he turns his attention to the courtyard. "There's Peter ... by himself. If I can't destroy Christ, what if I could destroy the Church before it even starts? Jesus said whoever wants to save his life will lose his soul (Mark 8:34-36). Jesus clearly isn't willing to save his own life, but what about Peter?"

## Following at a Distance

**Mark 14:54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with<sup>1</sup> the guards and warmed himself at the fire.**

Following Jesus is it can be dangerous. So Peter comes up with this new form of discipleship—"I'll still follow him, but at a safe distance so I don't get caught up in what they do to Jesus." Best of both worlds, right? You get to be a follower of Jesus, but without the danger. You can be a Christian, but without the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> In 14:33, Jesus took Peter, James, and John "with" him. Here Peter is "with" the guards (same word). If we don't keep watch with Jesus we will end up sitting with his enemies.

### *Examples of Distance*

This is something we're all tempted with when following Jesus gets embarrassing or too costly. If you follow at a distance, you can identify with Christianity in socially acceptable ways (talk about your church, or that you're spiritual or that your faith is really important to you)... —but steer clear of actually mentioning Jesus by name and running the risk of sounding a little kooky.

Sometimes following too close to Jesus, obeying his words, can cost you money—or your job or popularity. It might mean you'll have to give up some forms of entertainment. Or maybe a relationship or a hobby or drinking practices. Following Jesus at a distance lets you still be a Christian without letting go of those things.

## **Following at a Distance Saps Your Strength**

### **A Tiny Test**

Well let's see how this works out for Peter. Last time we watched Jesus face down the Israeli Supreme Court. Now Peter's test.

**66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, (okay, here it comes) one of the slave girls of the high priest came by.**

Not exactly Darth Vader stepping onto the scene. It's hard to think of a less powerful, less intimidating figure in that culture. A slave ... girl. The strongest of the Apostles verses the weakest and lowliest person around.

**67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.**

She notices him, steps closer, checks him out.

67 ... "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. That's not a compliment. Remember Nathaniel's question, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

There's no threat of bodily harm at this point. What's at stake here is embarrassment. A bunch of military grunts around the fire find out you hang out with a Nazarene... , the kinds of jokes that start flying aren't going to be much fun.

### **Opportunity for Witness**

On the other hand, this is quite the opportunity. Jesus said his job as a disciple was to be a witness before governors and kings. This isn't exactly a king, just a slave girl, so it's like discipleship training wheels. But it's a chance to proclaim his allegiance to Jesus... — maybe even preach about repentance like he did back in ch.6.

He could have said, "Yes, I was with him. And let me tell you something about 'that Nazarene.' There as a girl up north, about your age, who got really sick and died. That Nazarene went to her house, took her cold, dead hand, and said, 'Time to get up, sweetie' and she came back to life. He did that to prove he can give eternal life. And he'll give it to you if you follow him."

## Big Man vs. Little Girl

Is that what Peter does?

**67 ... "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. 68 But he denied it. "I don't know, I don't understand what you're talking about," he said.**

That sentence is just as awkward in the Greek as is it in English.<sup>2</sup> He already sounds like the lady in Hamlet who “doth protest too much.” The girl’s probably thinking, “Whoa, I guess I hit a nerve.”

So while Jesus is facing down the Sanhedrin, Peter faces a tiny test and collapses like a shack in a hurricane. That’s what happens when you think you can follow Jesus at a distance. You lose your strength.

This is the man who climbed out of a boat in a deadly storm to see if he could walk on water. He drew on a whole crowd of armed guards and attacked them with a knife. His courage in the book of Acts is legendary. He feared nothing—never backed down no matter what they did to him. But here a slave girl threatens to embarrass him, and he denies the most important thing in his whole life. You can have almost superhuman ability, but the moment you get out of step with Jesus, you’re like Sampson with a haircut.

## Following at a Distance Increases Fear of Man

### Not Prepared for an Easy Test

So following Jesus at a “safe” distance is the opposite of safe because you’re distancing yourself from your source of strength. And Satan will exploit your weaknesses.

For Peter, I don’t know if he was intimidated by the opposite sex. Or if he just wasn’t prepared for this kind of test. He imagined himself standing against the Sanhedrin or an angry mob, and he was ready for that, but not a random slave girl coming out of nowhere. By the time he even realized what was going on, he was already neck deep into his denial. Life comes at you fast, and Satan usually starts small.

### Vulnerability

And he hits you where you’re vulnerable. Peter craved human honor. He argued with the others about who was greatest. Satan can easily manipulate someone like that just by the threat of losing human approval—even the approval of a total stranger.

### Seeking Human Approval

Judas betrayed Jesus for love of money; Peter betrayed him for love of human honor—he didn’t want to be embarrassed. It’s called fear of man, and it’s very powerful. It can drive a person’s life.

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<sup>2</sup> The punctuation and translation of this reply are awkward. Some say it is in the form of a formal legal denial. [e.g. M. Shebuoth VIII. 3: “ ‘Where is my ox?’ He said to him, ‘I do not know what you are saying’ ”]. [The form is repeated in M. Shebuoth VIII. 6, and is reflected in the Testament of Joseph 13:1 f.: “ ‘What is this that I hear concerning you, that you steal persons ... and sell them for slaves?’ But the merchant fell at his feet, and pleaded with him, saying, ‘I beseech you, my Lord, I do not know what you are saying.’ ”]

And it's so irrational. Just ask yourself—who are these people whose approval or disapproval affects my emotions more than what God thinks of me? Are they brilliant people whose opinions and judgments are super accurate?

In this case, Peter cared about the opinions of men who were about to spit in Jesus' face. Why do we care about the judgments of people who are blind and ignorant? Fear of man is one of the most irrational sins there is. But that's what happens when you follow Jesus at a "safe" distance." People become really big and Jesus becomes small and fear of man takes over.

People are to be loved, not feared. And it's only when you're walking close enough to Jesus so that his approval is all you need that you'll be free to love people instead of fearing them or using them to boost your self-worth.

## Following at a Distance Clouds Your Understanding

So this girl confronts him, and Peter pulls a Sargent Schultz: "I know nothing!"

### 68 ... "I don't know, I don't understand"

This is more irony. All through the book the problem is always failure to understand who Jesus is.<sup>3</sup> And now Peter says, "I swear to you—I'm totally ignorant about Jesus."<sup>4</sup> He thinks he's lying, but his words are truer than he realizes. He really didn't understand Jesus, otherwise he wouldn't be denying him. It's impossible to truly understand the glory of Christ and be ashamed to be associated with it.

Following at a distance saps your strength, makes you fear man, and clouds your understanding of Christ. Now look at v.68.

## Following at a Distance Dulls Your Conscience

### First Rooster Crow

The first crowing of the rooster was typically just after midnight and the second was about an hour later—around 1:30. That first crowing rang out like an alarm clock to wake Peter up before he went ahead with the denials.<sup>5</sup>

But it didn't. Somewhere in the back of Peter's mind it registered, because when the second one happened, he knew it was the second. So he heard it, but it didn't make him stop

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<sup>3</sup> In chapter 9 Jesus told them he was going to die and rise again.

**Mark 9:32** But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.)

In ch.4 when Jesus told the parable of the soils, the disciples didn't understand it.

**Mark 4:12** Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"

When Jesus warned them about the yeast of the Pharisees, they didn't understand. They thought he was talking about literal bread.

**Mark 8:17** Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"

<sup>4</sup> We saw Mark using irony all through Jesus' trial, and we see it again here. This is a form of irony where the reader can see a greater meaning in the words than the character who is speaking them. It was a common literary technique in Greek writing, and Mark is using it here.

<sup>5</sup> Some reliable manuscripts have it at the end of v.68, right after the first denial. There are strong arguments for that being in the original. We don't know for sure, but we do know the first crowing had to happen at some point prior to Peter's third denial.

and remember Jesus' words like the second one did. Sleepy Peter slept right through his alarm. His subconscious hit snooze.

The rooster functions in this incident like an audible, external, conscience. And this is what happens when you try to follow Jesus at a distance. You become deaf to the early pangs of conscience. Your conscience is a gift from God like a guard rail to keep you from driving off into the ditch. But when we're lag behind Jesus, we lose the guardrails and fly off the road full speed. Following Jesus at a safe distance is the opposite of safe. It strips away your strength, increases your fear of man, clouds your understanding, and dulls your conscience.

## Following at a Distance Isolates You from the Body

### Second Denial: "One of Them"

So Peter tries to escape this scary little girl by leaving the scene.

**68 ... "I don't know, I don't understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.**

But the girl catches up to him there an hour<sup>6</sup> later.

**69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them."**

Who is "them"? She's talking about Jesus' followers—like that weirdo young guy who ran away naked in the garden and the rest of the ragtag bunch. The first test was whether Peter would associate himself with Jesus. This one is whether he'll associate with Jesus' followers.

**70 Again he denied it.**

"No, I'm not one of *them*."

### Denying the Church

And Mark is clear—this counts as one of his three denials of Christ. Which means disassociating yourself from the Church is a denial of Christ. Sometimes we're embarrassed by certain Christians and we're tempted to disavow our connection with the Church as a whole. "I'm not one of *them*." That's a denial of Christ. We are Christians vertically and horizontally, connected to both the head and the body.

### Safe Distance from the Church

And sometimes when people shy away from the church it's not about shame but self-protection. They've been hurt, and so now they're gun shy. They say, "Oh, I would never try to follow Jesus at a distance." But they do attend church at a safe distance. They'll keep all their relationships at the surface level so there's no risk of being hurt again. Or maybe they give up on church altogether.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 22:59.

But you can't do that and be a Christian. Forsake his body and you forsake him.

### *Lone Rangers Are Dead Rangers*

And when you do that, you're easy pickings for the enemy, because lone rangers are dead rangers. Peter had faced hostile crowds before when they went out two by two and handled it fine. If one of the other disciples had been with him now, this probably wouldn't have happened. But he went alone, and he fell.

Following Jesus at a safe distance weakens you, increases your fear, clouds your understanding, dulls your conscience, and isolates you from the brothers.

## Following at a Distance Creates Even More Distance

**70 ... After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."<sup>7</sup>**

Now more people are getting involved. It's like a pack of wolves that smell blood in the snow and they're gathering and circling around Peter.

### Snowballing Sin

At this point Peter goes off.

**71 He began to call down curses, and to swear, "I don't know this man you're talking about."**

The NIV assumes Peter was calling curses on himself ("May God damn me to hell if I know that man"). That's a possibility, but it's more likely he was cursing Christ.<sup>8</sup> "I don't

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<sup>7</sup> According to Matt. 26:73, it is Peter's accent that gives him away. Galileans had a very thick accent (see Matthew 26:73; Acts 4:13). They weren't that great at speaking Hebrew or Aramaic. They couldn't distinguish between some of the guttural sounds that are important in semitic languages. According to the Talmud (cf. b. Ber. 32a; b. Meg. 24b), Galileans are said to pronounce 'aleph as ayin and ayin as 'aleph (i.e., too much guttural for the 'aleph, too little for the ayin). One text pokes fun at Galilean pronunciation: "A certain Galilean went around saying to people, 'Who has amar? Who has amar?' They said to him, 'You Galilean fool, do you mean an ass (hāmār) for riding, or wine (hāmar) for drinking, wool (.āmar) for clothing, or a lamb ('immar) for slaughtering?"

Their accent was considered so ugly that they weren't allowed to pronounce the benediction in the synagogues. That's amazing to think about when you consider Jesus most likely had a Galilean accent.

<sup>8</sup> Swearing that he didn't know Jesus was a kind of curse on himself. It would be a little odd for Mark to say that Peter cursed himself twice in a row. And cursing Christ became a common way for people to prove they weren't Christians. The younger Pliny reported to the emperor Trajan as special commissioner to Pontus-Bithynia (ca. 110) that when he interrogated suspected Christians, he asked the prisoner three times, "Are you a Christian?" with threats of punishment. The accused proved his or her innocence by cursing Jesus—something, Pliny insists, "those who are really Christians cannot be made to do" (Epistles 10.96.3, 10.96.5). This curse was proof enough to the authorities that the person was not a Christian. In the Martyrdom of Polycarp 9:3, the proconsul tells the bishop, "Swear and I will release you." Polycarp replies, "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he had done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?" According to Justin Martyr, the Jewish rebel leader Bar Kochba (132–135) gave Christians the choice between death and cursing Christ (1 Apol. 31.6). Cursing Christ therefore was proof that one was not a Christian. In my opinion, Mark implies that Peter commits this blasphemy. This would make Peter's fall all the more dreadful and his restoration all the more remarkable.

Mark is certainly capable of using two roughly synonymous expressions to emphasise a point, but it is questionable whether that is what he is doing here, since ἀναθεματίζω standing alone does not mean to swear in the sense of 'to invoke a curse on oneself'. It is a transitive verb, essentially meaning to dedicate something to God (LXX Nu. 18:14), but almost always used in the LXX in the negative sense of 'devote to destruction', hence 'curse'. This usage lies behind the Pauline use of ἀνάθεμα as a curse formula (1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22; Gal. 1:8, 9). In the only other NT uses of the verb in Acts 23:12, 14,

know that blankety blank son of a blankety blank.” He’s goes to the farthest extreme he can think of to deny Christ.

And when you put distance between you and Jesus, the result is always more distance. Sin always spirals into worse sin—never the other direction, because all sin is relational. And the more damage you do to your relationship with God, the farther you drift from him, the less access to grace you have, and you drift even farther.

## Following at a Distance Ends in Disaster

### Losing What You’re Trying to Save

A “safe” distance from Jesus is a complete oxymoron. Trying to keep yourself safe will always backfire. That’s what Jesus meant when he said whoever tries to save his life will lose it.

The aspect of life that Peter is trying to save here is his dignity. He doesn’t want to be embarrassed. And he ends up utterly humiliated. Save your life and you’ll lose it. Try to save your dignity; you’ll lose it.

You can fill that blank in with anything. Hold on to your money; you’ll lose it. Your time, energy, job, family—anything you try to protect from the “dangers” of following Jesus, you’ll ultimately lose. But if you lay them on the line to follow Jesus, you’ll gain life.

Our final point about following Jesus at a safe distance is it always ends in disaster. Look how it ended for Peter. Here comes the pain.

### The Rooster

**72 Immediately the rooster<sup>9</sup> crowed the second time.<sup>10</sup> Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three<sup>11</sup> times." And he broke down and wept.**

What’s more painful in life than the agony of regret? This isn’t just mild regret from some common stumble; this is a, “I just ruined my life” moment. Like that line in the song, “He’s Alive,” “When it finally came to choices, I denied I knew his name. Even if he was alive, it wouldn’t be the same.”

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21 the reflexive sense is achieved by adding *ἑαυτοῦς*; without that addition its meaning is to curse someone or something other than oneself. (Matthew here uses the rare *καταθεματίζω*, which is not discernibly different in meaning.) In this context the natural object to be understood is Jesus, so that Mark portrays Peter as voluntarily doing what Pliny was later informed that ‘real Christians’ could not be compelled to do.

<sup>9</sup> This is why roosters are on top of weathervanes. Weathervanes were the original weather app. They would put them on the highest point in the town and everyone could see which way the wind was blowing. And back then, the highest place in most towns was the church steeple. And it was the churches that put the rooster on there because of this this event. The idea was that wherever you were in town, you had line of sight to that rooster to be reminded of the danger of following Christ at a distance.

<sup>10</sup> NICNT: “Observation over a period of twelve years in Jerusalem has confirmed that the cock crows at three distinct times, first about a half hour after midnight, a second time about an hour later, and a third time an hour after the second. Each crowing lasts from 3-5 minutes, after which all is quiet again.”

<sup>11</sup> It’s no coincidence that Peter fell asleep three times in Gethsemane and then failed three times when the test came. Sins of omission lead to sins of commission. Fail to do what you should do, and soon you’ll be doing what you shouldn’t do because distance from Christ results in more distance from Christ.



## He Wept

Luke tells us this was the moment Jesus looks eyes with him. On his way out, Jesus looks through swollen eyes and dripping blood right into Peter's soul, and suddenly Peter remembers everything.

**72 ... And he broke down<sup>12</sup> and wept.**

Matthew says, “**he went outside and wept bitterly.**” He hears the rooster, sees Jesus, remembers everything, and he's crushed to powder. Each crowing of the rooster goes on for 3 to 5 minutes. That rooster just keeps crowing and crowing and crowing, driving that guilt like a spike deeper and deeper into Peter's soul. This had to be the worst pain Peter ever suffered his whole life. That's where following Jesus at a safe distance will take you.

### *Going After the One Lost Sheep*

This is the good shepherd leaving the 99 and rescuing a lost sheep. You've probably seen paintings of that, Jesus climbing up out of some dangerous, rugged ravine carrying a happy little lamb in his arms. Touching, but in real life the way Jesus rescues the wandering sheep isn't usually that gentle.

Jesus calls us back, but he doesn't just pick us up and carry us back. Going back to him doesn't mean anything if it's not an act of our own will. When you're moving away from him, the only way back is to do a 180. And 180's of the will are painful.

In Peter's case, Jesus rescued him with a look—a look that destroyed him. I have no doubt that if you asked Peter as an old man what the worst moment of his life was, he'd point to this moment.

This is yet another one of those reasons why it's so foolish to say, “I'll just sin now and ask forgiveness later.” The only path back is one of repentance, which is agonizing. And the longer you wander, the more agonizing it is to turn around.

You say, “What if I get to that point and I don't feel the sorrow or remorse?” Well then you're really in trouble. That's why this isn't something to mess around with.

## Repentance

This is the last we'll hear of Peter in the book of Mark except for one quick reference in ch.16.<sup>13</sup> Why doesn't Mark tell us the rest of Peter's story? It's not necessary because the original readers already knew it. The original readers of Mark have known Peter to be the greatest spiritual leader in the entire worldwide church for as long as they could remember. He was a hero. His courage was legendary. His preaching converted thousands. He was the greatest example of courage and faithfulness to the Lord that anyone knew.

They knew the end of Peter's story. Mark is showing them the beginning, which had to have been almost impossible to believe. It's shocking because everything Jesus says is a

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<sup>12</sup> Literally, “he threw on.” This seems to be an idiom, but scholars are unsure as to the meaning.

<sup>13</sup> The reference in 16:7 is not insignificant. **Mark 16:7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you.**” If he just would have said, “tell his disciples” that obviously would have included Peter, but he says Peter's name specifically to let us know Peter is still in the group.

mark of people who are going to hell, Peter does. Jesus said if anyone is ashamed of him, Jesus would deny that person before the Father. Peter was ashamed of Jesus.

**1 John 2:23 No one who denies the Son has the Father.**

**2 Timothy 2:12 ... If we deny him, he also will deny us.**

Peter denied Jesus.

Jesus said whoever tries to save his life will lose his soul. Peter tried to save his life.

Revelation 12:11 says believers are those who “**did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.**”

**But here Peter loved his life so much that he wouldn't even suffer embarrassment for Christ.**

**James 5:12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear ... or you will be condemned.**

Peter swears he doesn't know Jesus.

All this language describing people who will go to hell is used of Peter. Why? The readers know Peter wasn't going to hell. He was a model disciple. So when describing his failures, why not use different words—words that are associated with stumbling and failing instead of the language used of people going to hell?

## **Restoration**

It's to teach us a very important truth about repentance. When he says Peter broke down and wept, that's shorthand for all the rest of his repentance and his restoration. The point is this—all those descriptions you read in the Bible about people who are going to hell, they all apply *only to the unrepentant*. When Revelation says all liars are thrown into the lake of fire, it's all *unrepentant* liars. When 1 John says if you hate your brother you're condemned, that's *unrepentant* hatred. You are not defined by your sin unless it is unrepentant sin.

If you tell a lie, you're not a liar unless it's an unrepentant lie. If you commit murder, you're not a murderer if you repent. When the Bible talks about adulterers, hypocrites or any other sin label, you can always pencil the word “unrepentant” in front of it, because if you repent, that label doesn't apply. In Peter's sermon in Acts 3, he said:

**Acts 3:14 “You denied the Holy and Righteous One.”**

Peter was famous for denying Jesus. Is that the pot calling the kettle black? No, because Peter had repented, and that's all he was asking those people to do.

Not only did Peter not go to hell; he wasn't even disqualified from leadership in ministry. Jesus restored him to pastoral leadership days later.

That's great news for us, isn't it? Because every one of us in this room has many times loved our own lives too much to do what we knew God wanted us to do. We've all followed Jesus at a distance. But there's hope as long as there's still something in you capable of hearing that second rooster and repenting. Peter was spiritually too sleepy to be awakened the first rooster crow, but he was at least alert enough to hear the second. If he had been completely asleep, like Judas, the second rooster crow wouldn't have had any effect either.

### *Remembering Christ's Words*

And how does that happen? What was it that turned Peter around even when he was so determined in his sin?

**72 ... Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him ... And he broke down and wept.**

It happens when we remember God's words. Not just in the sense of recalling the verbiage, but in the sense of letting the force of those words have their intended effect on your heart.

### *Looking Toward Jesus*

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus' look would have been wasted on Peter if Peter hadn't also been looking toward Jesus? He wouldn't have even seen it. As bad as his fall was, there was still something in Peter that could be awakened. Joel 2:12 says, "Rend your hearts, not your garments." The high priest tore his clothes; Peter tore his heart. And he was forgiven and restored.

## **Conclusion: Afraid of the Rock**

Why are we tempted to follow Jesus at a distance? It's because there are moments when following close to Christ seems to threaten our happiness. Obeying Jesus right now will be too hard, too painful, too costly—we're afraid ... of obedience.

Jesus talked about people who build their house on the rock and those who build on the sand. Whenever I ask people, "What do the rock and sand represent?" inevitably they say something like... , The rock is Christ and his word, and the sand is human wisdom or false religion." That's not true. Do you want to know what the sand is? It's God's Word.

**Matthew 7:26 Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.**

Building on the sand is not building on the foundation of falsehood. Building on the sand is hearing the truth of God's Word but not putting it into practice. Building on the rock is hearing and doing—obeying.

And that's what will keep you safe from the storms of life and the ultimate storm of Judgment Day. That rock (obedience to Christ) is the only thing that can save us from the storm.

So, when we're tempted to follow Jesus at a safe distance, what is it we're afraid of? The rock! We're afraid of obedience, and obedience is the very rock that will keep us safe. In the insanity of our skewed perspective, we're more afraid of the rock than we are of the storm that the rock will save us from. That's why those who try to save their lives will lose everything, because they shy away from the rock and build on sand. But if we repent of that and lay down every aspect of our lives to follow Christ, then we'll be safe and we'll receive life that's truly life.

# Harmony

<p>Matthew 26:69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. <sup>70</sup> But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. <sup>71</sup> Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." <sup>72</sup> He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" <sup>73</sup> After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." <sup>74</sup> Then he began to call down curses and to swear, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. <sup>75</sup> Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.</p>	<p>Mark 14:66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. <sup>67</sup> When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. <sup>68</sup> But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway. <sup>69</sup> When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." <sup>70</sup> Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." <sup>71</sup> He began to call down curses on himself, and to swear, "I don't know this man you're talking about." <sup>72</sup> Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.</p>	<p>Luke 22:56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." <sup>57</sup> But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. <sup>58</sup> A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. <sup>59</sup> About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." <sup>60</sup> Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." <sup>62</sup> And he went outside and wept bitterly. <sup>63</sup> The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. <sup>64</sup> They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" <sup>65</sup> And they said many other insulting things to him.</p>	<p>John 18:12-27 <sup>17</sup> "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." <sup>18</sup> It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. <sup>25</sup> As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." <sup>26</sup> One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" <sup>27</sup> Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.</p>
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## Summary

Peter tried a new form of discipleship—following Jesus at a safe distance. The goal is the best of both worlds—still follow Jesus, but without the cost. The result was weakened strength, fear of man, clouded understanding of Christ, dulled conscience, isolation, increasing distance, and the worst pain of his life. But even though he did all the things that are marks of those going to hell, he didn't go to hell because he repented and was restored. The good shepherd rescues the lost sheep through the excruciating process of repentance.