

Sermon Title: Peter Plummets
Scripture Text: Mark 14:66-72

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-19-20

Come back with me to Mark Chapter 14. If it seems like we've been saying that for a long time, it's because: we've been saying that for a long time; this is a very long chapter, and it was interrupted by Christmas and New Year, to boot.

This is a passage that is set early in the morning of the day that Jesus went to the Cross. It's a little bit of a sidebar from the events in the life of Jesus, but this is when Peter is in the spotlight. If we're going to take from this passage what we need to take from it—and that's my goal for this morning—then you need to understand that, if you're a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, you live in constant danger (1 Pet. 5:8). It's easy to forget that, and when you forget the threat, you are more susceptible than ever (see Eph. 5:15, 16).

The danger is connected to the fact that, even though "in Christ" you are "blessed" with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted), even though you have a secure "inheritance" for which you are "protected by the power of God" (1 Pet. 1:4-5), even though "no one is able to snatch" you out of the hands of the Father and the Son (Jn. 10:28-29), you are still in danger.

Oh, you're not in danger of losing your salvation (1 Cor. 3:15), but you *are* in danger of falling into great grief and a guilty conscience (1 Sam. 24:5; 2 Sam. 24:10)—maybe even missing out on heavenly rewards that you might otherwise have received (2 Jn. 8). You are in danger of grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30), and bringing shame on the name of Christ (Rom. 2:24). Why? Because you're not a finished work, just yet (Phil. 3:12-14).

Romans Chapter 8, Verses 22 and 23, puts it this way: "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." Why? Because of Genesis Chapter 3; it is a cursed earth, it is a cursed world, and we are a fallen race (Rom. 5:12). It continues: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." Now, you're already a child of God (1 Jn. 3:2)—but you are still incarcerated in a physical body; it is not yet glorified, and that last step of your salvation package is yet to come (Rom. 13:11).

The groaning is because, while we wait for that final stage—while we still live in this earthly body—we are *easily* tempted (Heb. 12:1); and through this body, we maintain contact with all of the evils in this fallen world (1 Jn. 2:16). Don't forget: what we just read in Romans Chapter 8 is in the chapter that begins with these famous words: Romans 8:1—"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." If you are "in Christ Jesus," you will never be condemned (Jn. 5:24), because Jesus took upon Himself *all* your sin and *all* the penalty for your sin (Heb. 10:14; 1 Jn. 2:2). He absorbed *all* the wrath of God that you deserve. You *cannot* be condemned—but you sure do groan, when you know what *could* be and what *will* be, and you compare that with what is.

Now look what that same guy wrote *just before* he wrote Romans 8; not surprisingly, it's in Romans 7; let's back up to Romans Chapter 7, Verses 14 and 15—"For we know that the Law is spiritual"—everything that God says about right and wrong, about holiness and truth and

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unrighteousness and lies...all of that is true and good—"but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate." Now, if an Apostle could say that, I have a feeling you've had that same thought (1 Kings 8:38). "I do the things I *hate* to do sometimes!" Go to Romans 7:17 and 18—"So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." And then, Verse 21—"I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good."

Now, he does a very important and subtle thing there; he says: "I do these things I don't want to do—well, it's not me doing it! Because 'me'—'I'—*he knows*"—by the way, he also wrote Second Corinthians—"he knows he's 'a new creation' (Gal. 6:15; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10)—he's a whole new thing—but, there's still this 'thing' that anchors him to his own temptability; there's still the flesh" (see Gal. 5:17; cf. Matt. 26:41). Go on down a little bit further, where he says in Verses 24 and 25—"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from"—and here's where the problem comes from—"the body of this death?" Oh, I'm glad he answered the question! "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

Paul understood salvation. He wrote more on the Doctrine of Soteriology than anybody else, of all the human authors of Scripture, and he understands: your salvation includes the whole package that's mentioned at the end of Romans Chapter 8. In Verses 29 and 30, he says God "foreknew" you—He determined your relationship with Him in advance, "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; cf. Ac. 2:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). He "predestined" you "to become conformed to the image of His Son"—that means He guarantees the destination of your holiness in His presence (Eph. 1:4-5; cf. Ezek. 36:25), and He's working daily to help you grow in holiness (Phil. 2:13; cf. Ezek. 36:27; Heb. 13:21).

Not only did He foreknow you, not only did He predestine you, He "called" you to faith by His Holy Spirit—"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him," says Jesus in John 6:44 (see also vs. 65; cf. Deut. 29:4; Matt. 13:11; Jn. 3:3, 5; 8:43, 47; 10:26; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25), and God effectually drew you to Himself (Jn. 6:45; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 24:7; Matt. 16:17; Ac. 13:48; 16:14; 1 Cor. 1:30).

And then it says He "justified" you—declared you righteous on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 8:33-34; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 10:14). And He will glorify you—at that moment that you are "absent" from "the body of this death" and you are "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8; cf. Phil. 1:21, 23), you'll be "glorified"! That's a certainty because it is guaranteed by the promise of God—so much so that, that which hasn't happened yet is stated in the past tense (Jn. 6:39; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; Jude 24). If you have all the other parts of that package, you have the whole package, and you will be glorified!

But right now, you and I live in between the moment of being justified in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11; cf. Jn. 13:10; Rom. 8:10), and the moment of being glorified in His presence (Heb. 9:28; 12:23b). In the meantime, you're still incarcerated in "the body of his death" (cf. Matt. 26:41; Rom. 8:23).

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Before you came to Christ, you were completely a slave to sin (Prov. 5:22; Jer. 13:23; Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:17; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3). But He redeemed you—He set you free from that bondage, so now you're free to follow Him, and you are free to pursue ever-greater holiness, and to continually grow in your practice of righteousness (Rom. 6:18-19; cf. Prov. 4:18; 2 Cor. 3:18).

But that constant danger that you face is forgetting that in your "flesh" dwells "no good thing" (Rom. 7:18, KJV), and that you are always temptable. When you come to a point in your walk with the Lord that you start thinking, "I'm getting the hang of this! I can do this! I can please Christ!"—and you forget that you need His grace and His strength desperately, every moment (Jn. 15:5)—well, that's the time that you are about to fall (Prov. 18:12). That's what happened to Peter. He loved Jesus. He wanted to be with Him; he was *zealous* about that! I remember one day when he jumped out of a boat and ran across the water to be with Jesus; he did great, until he started looking around, and then he sank (Matt. 14:30). But as much as he loved Jesus, Peter didn't yet grasp all that was in play.

We have before us a pretty straightforward passage; but to have its intended impact, you need to know the background, because this passage is not just the story of Peter. It's here in Scripture for our "teaching," for our "correction," for our "training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). There are some things that we need to be reproved by from this text, as in all of Scripture. And this is a great warning against self-confidence.

Now, let me remind you of a string of events leading up to our passage: It all started...well, I guess, when Peter was born; but when we got to know him—and he's a disciple of Jesus—remember, Jesus took the guys up to Caesarea Philippi, as far from the crowds as He could get, and He was starting to train His disciples; and that's where He asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mk. 8:27), and they told Him all the answers, and He said, "But who do you say that I am?" (vs. 29), and Peter—always the one to speak first—said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

And then at Matthew Chapter 16, Verse 21, we pick it up with this: "From that time"—about a year before the Cross—"Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him"—that's a *really* bad idea, Peter! Jesus is God! Okay...that's Peter! He "began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' "

What just happened? He had been on the *pinnacle* of speaking the truth—"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"—and about two minutes later: "He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.' "—"I know you want to be with Me. I know you don't want Me to go, but there's something much bigger in play here!" Peter—and the others—didn't get it yet.

Later, we come to John Chapter 6, Verses 66 through 68. It says there: "As a result of this"—the "this" is some things that Jesus was teaching that were a little bit hard—"As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the

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twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?' Simon Peter"—always the spokesman—"answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.'" He was bold about his commitment to being with Jesus.

We've already seen just earlier—it's past midnight now, but earlier the same night—when Jesus was with His men at the Passover meal, He said, "You will all fall away" and be "scattered" (Mk. 14:27). "But Peter said to Him, 'Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.' And Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times.' But Peter kept saying insistently, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And they all were saying the same thing also" (vss. 29-31). So, yeah—Peter gets the ink, but he wasn't alone.

An even *deeper* bit of background not recorded by Mark, but in Luke's record of that night—Luke Chapter 22—Jesus said this, apparently privately, to Peter: "Simon, Simon"—if He says your name twice, it's like your mom using your middle name; you *know* you're going to hear something you don't want to hear! "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat" (vs. 31), just like Job Chapter 1 and Chapter 2; Satan can't do anything that God the Father does not *allow* him to do. Satan wanted to go after Peter. How did Jesus know that? I don't have the answer—I just know He did. "Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (vss. 31-32). And Peter said, "Oh, wow, Lord! I didn't realize how serious this was!" No, he didn't. "But he said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!' And He said, 'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me' " (vss. 33-34).

Then we know what happened after that. Jesus took them to the Garden of Gethsemane and He told them, "You stay here and watch and pray," and He took Peter, James and John with Him, went a little bit farther, and said, "You guys stay here and watch and pray," and Jesus went off and prayed and He came back, and they were doing what? Sleeping. And He woke them up, told them, "Watch and pray," and He went away and prayed and came back—they were asleep. And it happened a third time. Then Judas showed up; he betrayed Jesus, and we read in Mark 14:46 and 47—"They laid hands on Him and seized Him. But one of those who stood by"—guess who? You already know—"drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear." Now, that's Peter.

Prior to the resurrection of Jesus, and the day when Jesus, after that, spoke to him to, as He said, turn him back and have him strengthen his brethren—before Jesus restored him and recommissioned him, Peter was a study in two things that you always see side-by-side: *great desire* to be with Jesus—*nobody* was more zealous than Peter in that department—but side-by-side with it, you see this totally misplaced self-confidence. He was *absolutely determined* he was *not* going to deny Jesus; he was *not* going to walk away from Him; he was *not* going to let anything bad happen to Jesus. It would have been a good idea, if only Peter had read First Corinthians before the night that Jesus was arrested. Well, it wasn't going to be written for about another 30 years or so, but First Corinthians 10:12 says: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands"—and that was Peter!—"take heed that he does not fall."

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Now, I strongly encourage you, if you want to do something profitable on Sunday afternoon, go look and see why First Corinthians 10:12 begins with the word "therefore." Big hint: read Verses 1 through 11, and you'll see the lessons that you are meant to learn from Israel in the wilderness.

Now, if you're a fan of seeing prophecy fulfilled, and you don't like having to wait centuries or millennia to see it happen, you should love our text for today. What Jesus prophesied the night before, comes true before dawn! Peter did exactly what Jesus said. On the night of Jesus's trial, that was when Peter—I use the word "plummeted"—to the bottom of the pit of despair. Three times, he denied that he knew Jesus. And just like Peter hadn't read First Corinthians, I don't think Peter would have grasped the source of the way that I chose to outline this passage, but I think you can put it this way: Strike One, Strike Two, Strike Three. If you said that to Peter, he'd say, "Well, I already struck high priest's servant's ear, and Jesus healed it." No. He would get it if he were here today.

Now, a little more background for you. Last week, remember, I introduced you to the fact that Jesus's trial had a Jewish phase, composed of three parts, and a Roman phase, also composed of three parts (see chart at end of this transcript). We saw the record in Mark's Gospel of the Jewish parts of it last time. They all took place between midnight and just after dawn of the morning of the Crucifixion. We have a tremendous amount of material detailing this night and the day of the of the Crucifixion, so it takes a lot of work to harmonize Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John about the events of this night. We're going to stick to Mark's record. All you need to know for sure is that Peter's denials all took place in the span of two hours or less—roughly between 1:00 AM and 3:00 AM—and it all went down during the three parts of the Jewish phase of the trial, and they all happened in the same place. Remember, the former high priest, Annas, and the current high priest, his son-in-law Caiaphas—and probably all the generations in between—lived in this gigantic complex: a big open courtyard in the middle, residences around the sides, and a gated entryway into a little porch leading into that courtyard.

To grasp Peter's state of mind, I also want you to see how he got there—how he got in with that crowd at the Jewish phase of Jesus's trial—because it helps to paint the picture. We've only got six verses to deal with, and it's pretty straightforward. John 18, Verses 15 and 16—this is right after He's been arrested: "Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple." John never calls himself by name in his Gospel, except when he lists the Twelve disciples who became Apostles; so this is Peter and John. "Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter was standing at the door outside"—he didn't have a reserve ticket! "So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in."

Now, that tells you something that we haven't seen in Mark. We know that all the disciples were eventually scattered, but not all of them disappeared immediately; both Peter and John—that "other disciple"—followed, at a safe distance, to where they took Jesus. John, because they knew him, was let in, and he went out and got Peter in.

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We don't know anymore about what John did; we don't know how long he stayed, we don't know whether or not he witnessed Peter's denials, we don't know what else John did that night. We *can* see that Peter was still highly motivated to keep his word: "I'm not going to leave You! I'll follow You to prison, even to death!" He was going to fulfill all those proud promises he made, not to desert Jesus that night. *But*, he got caught off-guard. Strike One—I think he was caught looking. I don't think he knew this one was coming.

Here we go into our text: Mark 14:66 through 68—"As Peter was below in the courtyard"—"below" because the trial probably took place on the second floor and overlooking there, maybe just so everybody could hear. "As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.' And he went out onto the porch."

Now, again, when you put all the Gospels together, Luke 22 specifies that Peter was not just warming himself by the fire, he had mingled with the soldiers and whoever else was there. It was a cool evening; early spring in Israel could be cool at night, so he was "warming himself" around a fire. There was probably kind of a bonfire, like when people light a fire in a trashcan to contain it, so people can warm themselves. That's what he was doing.

In that moment, Peter's brashness and his lack of prayer collided head-on. He was thinking of all the things he had said about how brave he would be. Well, his commitment got the worst of the collision; and caught by surprise, he panicked—at least, I think he panicked—and he denied Jesus. I don't think he had a prepared speech. He certainly didn't come there *for the purpose* of denying Jesus, because he had already denied that he was going to deny Jesus.

He did it though; and then it says: "he went out onto the porch." That means, he left wherever the fire was; he probably wanted to get away by himself, collect himself, and he probably went to the corridor that comes from the gate that leads below the second floor and opens out into the courtyard there. Maybe he was a little shaken by how quickly those words had just flown out of his mouth. You know, from your own experience, that sometimes your first answer isn't your best one. Maybe Peter was thinking, "I've got to shake this off! I just *heard* that fastball go by; I didn't see that one, let alone get a swing at it." Strike One, Peter.

Here comes Strike Two. The sad thing is that, Peter's next answer also wasn't good. I think maybe we can chalk up the first denial, at least in part, to the fact that he was ambushed. He was probably expecting to be called in front of a tribunal, and he would *stand* with Jesus! He wasn't expecting a servant girl to ambush him in the crowd.

But he walked away, had time to think about it; and before long, he was tested again. Strike Two is in Verse 69 and the beginning of Verse 70—"The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, 'This is one of them!' " So she had said to him, "You were one of them!" Now, she's saying, "Wait a minute! Look at this guy! He's one of them!" And she's calling attention to him

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Now, we aren't told if there was a specific threat against the followers of Jesus, like there was against Jesus. The fact was, Jesus specifically made sure that His men didn't get arrested. Remember, when they came to Him, He "said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' He said to them, 'I am He' " (Jn. 18:4-5)—and knocked them all on their backsides, which I just *love*. But He said, "If you seek Me, let these go" (vs. 8)—referring to the disciples. That implies: they *did* have good reason to believe that, anybody with Him might also be killed, or at least severely punished.

Now, let me give you a little hermeneutical tidbit. "Hermeneutics" is the art and science of interpreting of the Bible; and in this case, in this part of Scripture, we get to work a lot at what we call "harmonizing," where we have several different records—in this case, four different records—of the same events. And when you carefully compare Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you find that the statement that's made by the servant girl is one of them; it's worded or recorded differently in the different accounts. Likewise, you find Peter's response recorded differently in the different accounts. That leads some people to say that there were more than three denials—maybe as many as four or five or even six. By looking at some old things that I have done, I'm pretty sure you could find a recording, somewhere on the planet, of a sermon in which I said he may have denied Jesus as many as six times. But if we're going to stay with a sports analogy: After further review, the play, as called in Mark, stands.

The verbs that are used for these things, and the fact that there is a two-hour window during which this happened, allows for plenty of room for the likelihood that, that girl—and there might even have been two different servant girls—may have said it several times in several ways, and Peter likely answered different challenges with different words. In one case, he says, "I am not"—well, that sounds like, "You were one of His followers." But when she says, "You were with Him," he maybe denies it in a different way. So probably, there was Strike One and he answered; Strike Two may have involved more of an interchange of several things, and Peter wound up denying Him. Maybe different people challenged him. Likewise, with questions worded differently and answers worded differently—that explains the subtle differences in the Gospels. The best evidence points to there being three times that Peter was challenged, and three times that he denied knowing Jesus—all within about two hours—but it *was* three times.

He goes from, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Mk. 14:31) to a bold-faced lie three times in the space of two hours. How sad. But that's what fleshly pride does to you; it sets you up for terrible failure (see Dan. 5:20; Ezek. 28:17-18).

As you know, Strike Three is even worse. In Mark Chapter 14, Verse 38, Jesus is talking to the men when they had fallen asleep; He says: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Remember what we saw in Romans 7:15, and then Verses 18 and 19—"For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate...For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."

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Peter didn't yet understand that; he didn't yet understand the depths of his own depravity, even as much as he loved Jesus; he didn't yet understand the battle between the flesh and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:16-17). Now, I grant you, there is also a New Covenant era of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that Peter didn't yet have (Jn. 14:17), but he was still confident in his own ability and his own resolve to come through under pressure, but he *didn't* come through.

The mighty Peter has struck out! Mark 14, from the middle of Verse 70 and on: "And after a little while"—so, right after he came in, probably right near the end of the trial—"the bystanders were again saying to Peter..." So, who did the girl say it to before? She told "the bystanders" (vs. 69). Now the people who heard from the girl are saying, "Well, wait a minute! You're one of them!" "The bystanders were again saying to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too.' " How did they know he was a Galilean? Probably by an accent, maybe clothing—I don't know, but they perceived that he was a Galilean. "But he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this man you are talking about!' Immediately a rooster crowed a second time." We aren't told in Mark about the first crowing; you can go study Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John together—it happened twice. The "rooster-crow" is one of the watches of the night (see Mk. 13:35); it ends at about 3:00 A.M., as the Jews counted it.

"A rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, 'Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.' And he began to weep." It was probably about 3:00 A.M. when this happened, and Peter is now broken; he's at the bottom. The stage was set for Jesus to put him back together and to shape him into the Apostle Peter (see Hos. 6:1).

Now look at what Luke tells us happened. At that same moment that the rooster crowed, which we saw in Mark 14:71—this most likely happened as they were leading Jesus away at the end of the trial, to take Him to the Romans—Luke 22:61 and 62 says: "The Lord turned and looked at Peter...And he went out and wept bitterly." Can you *imagine* making eye contact with Jesus when you have just *curse*d like a fisherman, and sworn by whatever he swore by, and denied Him?

I'm sure you know the rest of the story with Peter, when Jesus dealt with him in John 21; maybe we'll be able to touch on that as we finish up in Mark. We know that, on that same night, Judas also felt terrible remorse; *he* went out and hanged himself (see 2 Cor. 7:10). He was a phony from the beginning (see Jn. 6:64, 70-71). Peter felt horrible remorse; he "wept bitterly," but his faith didn't crumble. Jesus had prayed for him. He went on to be the most influential apostle in the early years of the New Covenant era.

The Book of Acts has its own inspired outline: Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8. Jesus says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"—from Jewish-central, to half-breed territory, to the Gentiles. Peter spanned all of that; he was the main spokesman in Jerusalem, in Judea; he was the main one when Samaritans came to faith; it was to Peter that Jesus gave the vision about the lifting of the Old Covenant dietary laws; it was Peter that He sent to preach to that first group of the of Gentiles; it was Peter who paved

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the way for the Apostle Paul (Acts 15:6)—and by the way, they overlapped each other by about 14 years. And you see in Acts, how it's Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter, Paul gets saved, a little bit of Peter, and then it's all about Paul and the ministry to the Gentiles as God fulfills His plan.

It's imperative, though, before we leave here: We need to let the Holy Spirit teach us and convict us from this passage. Peter has stuck out. Peter didn't just fail in those moments in that courtyard. A bridge doesn't crumble because a train ran over it; it crumbles under the weight because it was broken. A bridge doesn't hold the train up because the train runs over it; it has to be *built* that way. The seeds of his failure were sown much earlier. We need to learn from Peter: how did he get to that point?

Well, several things that we can say: Peter boasted too much. Jesus told him he would fall; he should have wept bitterly *then!* He told him Satan was after him; he should have said, "Oh, Lord, help me!" But what did Peter say? "Well, Jesus, I know 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16:16); I know 'You have the words of eternal life' (Jn. 6:68, NKJV); but when it comes to *me*, You're wrong." That's what he did. Never forget what we read earlier, that poor Peter hadn't had a chance to see: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Cor. 10:12; cf. Prov. 16:18). So, Peter boasted too much, but also: Peter listened poorly. How many times had Jesus said what was going to happen, and he—and the others, too—didn't get it? His pride kept him from *really hearing* what Jesus said, so he ignored clear warnings.

We know for sure, because it is recorded several times, that Peter prayed too little. He would have done better to pray fervently in the garden, rather than sleeping. The failure wasn't for lack of information, it wasn't for lack of urging from the Lord, but it sure *was* from a lack of him calling on the Lord. We also know Peter—and I can relate to this one—he acted too fast. Remember the ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant? Our ministry is not about doing armed conflict (Eph. 6:12); it's a *spiritual* battle for souls, and it's done by the power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Now, here's a big one: Peter followed too far. Luke 22:54 specifies that, at that trial, "Peter was following at a distance." My friends: if you're going to follow Jesus, *tailgate* Him! Do not keep a "safe distance"! Anchor yourself to Him! Peter was at a "safe distance" where he got caught between faith and fear; he let fear win. He got caught between loyalty and terror of punishment; he let terror win. He got caught between courage and cowardice; he let cowardice win. He wanted to follow Jesus, but at the trial, what did he do? He kept a "safe distance"; he tried to blend in with the world. It was the soldiers who were warming themselves around that fire. He tried to remain incognito, and it led to his undoing.

Now, when you leave here, eventually you're going to be at your job or at your school or with your family—some of whom might not share your faith. You might be in your neighborhood. You might interact with people online these days. Are you going to try to remain incognito, or are you going to stand in God's grace, and speak "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) to a dying world? We need to learn from Peter.

Sermon Title: Peter Plummets
Scripture Text: Mark 14:66-72

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-19-20

Do you have any friends who don't know the Lord, and you haven't told them the gospel? If that's the case, you are a *terrible* friend! If you knew that your friend had been infected by the Smallpox virus, would you say, "Have a nice day!"—or would you *tell* them? Don't follow too far. Incognito is *not* a spiritual gift! That's not how we live for Christ.

Now, you're not being tested on whether you would stand up at Jesus's trial before the Jews or before the Romans, but you *are* being tested on whether you are living as an ambassador in this world (see 2 Cor. 5:20). You *are* being tested! He *does* see you! (see Prov. 5:21; 15:3) His eye *is* on you, and He's watching how you identify with Him in the world, and how you fulfill your purpose as part of "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12; cf. Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). Jesus taught that, how you treat other people shows what you think of Him (Matt. 25:40, 45; cf. Prov. 14:31; 17:5).

I want to get real practical; I'll pick something that is not the greatest sin world, so I'll use it as an example. Roughly every week—usually more than once—I often hear somebody say about our church that I love so much: "There are so many people I don't know!" I have an idea; it's a brilliant one! Introduce yourself! Try me on this, will you? Look around the room—is there somebody here whose name you don't know? Probably so! Is that their fault? No! It's *your* fault, because they don't know you, either. Start today! Introduce yourself to at least one person each week; and then, do it again next week, because—you'll forget. But don't worry—they did, too! And we have that whole wall out there with name tags on it. You are the person responsible for the friendliness and the ministry of Heritage Bible Church—you, you individually, you personally, are the *only one* you need worry about on that score!

You know the saying—I've shared it with you: The answer to the question, "Who is the biggest sinner in the room?" "Me." The answer to the question, "Who is the most important person in the room?" "Everybody else." (see Phil. 2:3). If you live by that, you're going to do really well at making connections!

I will say, you are following too far, if you can come to the place where the Body of Christ assembles and worships, and not extend yourself to make that gathering *better and better*. How much are you praying? How often, during this last week, did you do something to help or encourage a brother or sister in Christ? How much are you listening to your Lord?—In other words, how much are you reading and studying His Word?

We can only *imagine* how Peter felt—oh, the *daggers* that must have gone through his soul when Jesus looked at him, right after he had denied Him! Well, don't forget: His gaze is always on *you*. And His directions are pretty clear: Be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers" (Jas. 1:22; cf. Lk. 11:28); "Stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24). There's a Greek word—*allēlōn*—that is translated "one another"; it's a reflexive where we don't have the exact word in the English; that's why we need two words: "one another." If you want to find out what you're supposed to do, go find every "one another" in the New Testament, and start working on them—you'll be *real busy* for the rest of your life, and God *will* use you.

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And we need to be known for preaching the gospel. Yes it's important that we care for each other; Galatians 6:10 says, "Let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." So especially, we focus on each other; but we need to be known for taking the gospel into the world! The *bad news* is that people are alienated from God—they're heading for judgment! (Eph. 2:1-3) The gospel is the *good news* that answers the *bad news*! (Eph. 2:4-6) Through the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus, people can be saved (Rom. 4:25; 8:32-34)—*if they will* turn to Him (Is. 45:22; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17).

That same guy who wrote about groaning in Romans Chapter 8 (vs. 22), and wrote about "no condemnation" (vs. 1), and wrote about doing what he doesn't want to do (7:15-19)—he also wrote this, at the beginning of that great letter: Romans 1:15 and 16—"So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." You don't have to go to Rome to obey the principle of that. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is"—and by the way, "it" and *only* "it"—"is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (see Rom. 3:19-26; Heb. 10:10, 14)

Let's pray:

Our Father, how we thank You for Peter. Thank You for Your grace to him, and what You made of him in Your goodness. May we, likewise, stand in Your grace. In our every interaction that we have with the people around us, may we spread Your grace; may we demonstrate it. May we be, as You have told us in Ephesians Chapter 3, trophies of Your grace on display for the world to see. Thank You, Father, for hearing our cries. Thank You that You know our needs, even before we ask. You know the conditions of our hearts. Deal with anything that gets in the way of us following You—and not from afar. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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THE SIX PHASES OF THE TRIAL OF JESUS
Sourced from "A Harmony of the Gospels"
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Religious Trials

First Jewish Phase, before Annas	John 18:12-24
Second Jewish Phase, before Caiaphas	Matthew 26:57-68 Mark 14:53-65 Luke 22:54
Third Jewish Phase, before the Sanhedrin	Matthew 27:1-2 Mark 15:1 Luke 22:66-71

Civil Trials

First Roman Phase, before Pilate	Matthew 27:11-14 Mark 15:1-5 Luke 23:1-5 John 18:28-38
Second Roman Phase, before Herod	Luke 23:6-12
Third Roman Phase, before Pilate	Matthew 27:15-26 Mark 15:6-15 Luke 23:13-25 John 18:39 - 19:16