

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

January 7, 2018

Peter Sifted...Slipping...Saved

John 18:1-26

Prayer: *...that we can spend some time coming near the cross as it were, especially on a day where we are focusing on you and what you have done for us at the cross. I pray this morning, Lord, that you would accompany us, that your Holy Spirit would give us the ability to dive deeper into your word, that we would be able to discover new and deeper parts of the love that you have for us in your word. Grant us by the power of your Holy Spirit to not just see these things and understand them but to incorporate them and make them permanent, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as you know it's the first Sunday of the month, and that's the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus, on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and there for the very last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them, and Matthew 26 describes it. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and give gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."* And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying,

"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and of his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat this sacrifice on a regular basis and this is what we call the Lord's table and we celebrate it once a month and we do this by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to point out those areas in our lives where he's convicting us of sins, by confessing those sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Now we've been working our way through the Gospel of John. We worked our way up to the 18th chapter. Jesus is under arrest, having been betrayed by a kiss. And if you remember the last time out, we looked at sheep among wolves and we saw that the primary wolf that Jesus so lovingly dealt with was Judas. This morning we're going to be looking at another disciple who was there that

night and that is Peter, and we'll see that in spite of this horrific attack that Jesus was undergoing that he was still on top of virtually everything and that he was using his unfolding arrest also as a means of shaping and molding his highly volatile disciple. See the events of this night did not happen in a vacuum and far more is going on behind the scenes in another realm altogether. Essentially spiritual warfare is breaking out. I say it over and over again that we are in the middle of this proxy war between two great kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and I often refer to this as occurring on the macro level. What we're going to look at this morning, what's going to be taking place in the next few hours is the unfolding of the battle on a micro level. It's not kingdom versus kingdom. It's Satan versus Peter and the focus is on Peter. And Jesus even warned Peter ahead of time that something more than meets the eye would be taking place in the near future. This is what he said in *Luke 22*. Jesus says: *"Simon, Simon, 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."*

See, Jesus is confronting his arrest and his beating and this kangaroo court that's going to eventually convict and execute him and simultaneously he's doing a very powerful work in Peter's life. So just to paint the scene, let's go back to the garden, that's where we were last month and just re-create the scene that we're looking at. It says this in *John 18:1*, it says: *When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one."*

So we have Jesus as the good shepherd, he's confronting a cohort of soldiers probably numbering up to a hundred or so led by Judas

whose greed has made him now drop every single pretense of being one of Jesus' sheep. So Judas leads the soldiers to the man he intends to betray with a kiss. And Jesus responds by isolating himself as the one being sought after so as to protect and make sure that the disciples don't get swept up in his arrest.

Repeatedly we see Jesus insisting that he alone was the one being sought after so that his disciples can remain free. And before we get to Peter's denial which is what we're going to focus on this morning, I want to point out something that took place. We see Peter, ever the rash one, do something extremely out of character not just for Peter but for all of the disciples. It says in verse 10: *Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"*

And we need to step back a little bit and just a little perspective here. Peter has launched an attack that borders on the absurd. You have to picture, Peter's got this little tiny sword, he's facing a hundred or so Roman soldiers, and for some reason Peter succeeds in cutting off only the ear of Malchus, the slave of the high priest. I want you to understand the very last thing that Jesus needed at this point was military help. Understand this Jesus, he is the ruling king of the universe. This is the one who spoke the sun, the moon and the stars into being by the power of

his word. I mean John's gospel tells us of Jesus, he says: *All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* John tells us that Jesus is the very author of life itself and that he is the one who at the very moment was sustaining the very processes of life that allowed these soldiers' hearts to keep on beating and their lungs to keep on breathing. We do Jesus a grave disservice by thinking of him somehow as a victim of Rome caught up in circumstances beyond his control. In fact Jesus was orchestrating virtually everything that took place. And the very last thing that Jesus needed is Peter trying to split open the head of the high priest's slave. But understand, not even that action took Jesus by surprise. Matthew's gospel gives us even more details of just how "in control" Jesus actually was. This is *Matthew 26:51*, it says: *And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew a sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"*

Now I pointed out before that a legion pretty much consists of

about 5,000 individuals. Twelve legions would mean that there was approximately 60,000 angels poised and just waiting for a sign from Jesus to go on the attack. Understand also that these are alien creatures who are of such power that we have one report of one angel who was sent to deal with King Sennacherib's army after he mocked God and said that God had no power to save Israel. We find in *2 Kings 19:35* a description of what that one angel did. It says: *And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.* So one angel in one night kills 185,000 soldiers. Just try to imagine what 60,000 of these enraged creatures would do, descending on humans who would dare, who would dare to touch their sacred King Jesus. But Jesus will not call for those angels. Jesus has given himself over to this process voluntarily and Peter, he doesn't get it at all. Before this night is over, he's going to have his understanding stretched in ways that he could never have imagined. I mentioned last time how the text points out that when Jesus identified himself also the I am, the entire crowd, it says, they fell backwards. It says: *When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.* And so Peter perhaps emboldened by that display of power decides that now is the proper time to split Malchus's head in two, and so he takes out a sword and he goes to do that very thing and Malchus ducks and next thing you

know he's got his ear cut off.

Luke's gospel adds yet another fact of what took place. This is Luke 22, it says: *And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him.* Now it's only Luke's account that tells us this miracle that Jesus did right after the -- right after Peter's attack. But there's another piece of information that we get from John, I've already mentioned it once. John's account of the incident doesn't mention the healing but it does something intriguing. It gives us a name. *John 18:10* again says: *Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus).* And that name gives us a hint that while the healing may not have had any affect whatsoever on the crowd, it may have had a very profound affect on Malchus. You see, John's account, that is John's gospel was written almost fifty years after Jesus had gone to the cross and it's incredibly interesting that John knew the name of this slave. Ordinarily nobody would have ever given an account of a slave. Why would he even know his name? It's powerful evidence that Malchus just might be a believer because why else would John after fifty years even remember his name? So Jesus responds to Peter's outburst with a healing outburst of his own which seems to go completely unnoticed

by the rest of the crowd. They were so intent on arresting him that they were apparently able to ignore a man gushing blood holding on to his severed ear now completely healed, now completely restored. You see, their passion for getting Jesus outstripped the evidence that stood right in front of their eyes that Jesus was no ordinary man. And so they begin the process of arresting him.

God knows how easily it is to get blinded to the truth of the gospel. Every single one of those soldiers that came out to arrest Jesus were witnesses to this miracle that took place of the healing of Malchus' ear and yet it meant nothing. I mean to acknowledge that miracle would necessitate acknowledging that there was something extraordinary about this Jesus that they were arresting. But the plan had already been set and Judas had already sprung the trap. Jesus was to be arrested no matter what and so we go back to *John 18*. This is verse 12. It says: *So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.* Now how much of the gospel is missed because it conflicts with our plans,

it conflicts with our desires, with our wills, what we want to do. Do not make the mistake of thinking of Jesus as a victim here. Jesus knows precisely what is going to take place, and John's gospel proves it by pointing out Caiaphas' statement. I mean God gives us in that statement perhaps the best example of willful blindness that also doubles as a stunningly accurate prophesy, proving that God still sovereignly guides even the sinful utterances of his enemies. You know, Caiaphas did indeed make that prediction. Caiaphas did say *it is expedient that one man should die for the nation*. He not only made this unwitting prophesy, he was critical in seeing that it came to pass. If you remember when he made that prophesy, it was only a few weeks prior to that, he was trying to calm down his fellow Pharisees who had just witnessed Jesus' most spectacular miracle. He had just raised Lazarus from the dead. And the Pharisees knew that Lazarus had been in that tomb long enough to not just be dead but to be in an advanced state of decay. Some of them believed that if a man died, the spirit would linger for up to three days and so the fact that Jesus waited even beyond that time made it virtually impossible that Lazarus was perhaps not dead and maybe just in a coma. I mean add to that Lazarus' own sister, what she said when Jesus told them to remove the stone, it says in *John 11:39*: *Jesus said, "Take away the stone."* *Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."*

I think the King James says *he stinketh*. Well we all know the rest of the story. Jesus commands Lazarus to come forth, and this body that's already in an advanced state of decay begins to reassemble its component parts. It begins to pink up with freshly healed internal organs that are now functioning, blood begins to flow again to all of the different organs, the heart starts to beat and he raises himself up by the power of Christ's word and he walks out of the tomb. And what follows next is really the best proof you could ever give to someone who thinks that miracles are going to get people saved, it's the best proof that miracles alone will never bring a person to Christ and that barring an intervention of God's grace, even a miracle such as this is going to produce nothing but further condemnation in those who have no desire to acknowledge Christ as Lord, because Jesus heals a man in an advanced state of decay and the response to it is mixed. The response is divided. Some of the witnesses say, "Surely this was a work of God;" others say, "We've got to kill this guy." Why? Why would somebody respond that way? Well, Jesus was going to ruin everything that they had built. I mean their careers as religious leaders were going to come to an end and it was that commitment to a different reality that made them unable to see what was staring them right in the face. The chief priests and the Pharisees who formed that council had seen the evidence and had made up their mind that they were not going to believe what their eyes and ears

told them. And all they really needed was some type of reason to refuse to believe, and that's exactly what Caiaphas gave them. Caiaphas, mind you, is the highest religious leader of his day and he was happy to give them an excuse. This was his response to Jesus raising Lazarus. This is *John 11*. It says: *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."*

You know, there's something absolutely stunning about Caiaphas' wickedness being transformed into a perfectly accurate prophetic utterance about what Jesus was about to do. And once again, God is letting us know in no uncertain terms that the events that took place were 100 percent under his sovereign control. So too the events that were taking place in how Christ was dealing through all of this with Peter. See, God is guiding and shaping all of the consequences that are unfolding in this evening. And here with

Peter we see Christ ordaining an intended consequence, an unintended consequence and a superintended consequence.

Jesus has just been taken captive, as you recall, and this captivity is not like -- it's not like it's not genteel, he's going to be subject to beatings, he's going to be slapped around, he's going to be mishandled and mistreated. *Luke 22* describes it. It says: *Then they seized him and led him away, 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, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man was also with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. Now Peter's intended consequence was to get close enough to Jesus without really exposing himself as one of his followers. His unintended consequence was being identified by a servant girl and then by a fellow onlooker as a follower of Jesus. You see, he wanted to be close enough to Jesus to know what was*

taking place but when that put him in a position of being identified as one of his followers, his fear, it just overwhelmed him. And just as Jesus predicted, Peter denied him three times.

I want to talk about how it is that Jesus superintended Peter's decision. We know that Peter was always known as an impulsive person. Many times he said things that he didn't really think through and one of the worst instances of bad thinking leading to bad statements occurred shortly before Jesus' passion began. We'll pick that up right after the bread. So if the elders would begin distributing the bread. I'd like us to take a moment to just focus in on this picture that we've painted so far. Jesus is now under arrest, he's been in the garden, he's been taken away, Peter is in this incredibly difficult circumstance, he's trying to sneak his way into the courtyard. Three different times now he has disavowed Christ and Christ, I'm trying to maintain here, is still in absolute and total control. So I would like us first to take into account the control that Jesus had. Do not see Jesus as a victim. He was not. Consider the power that Jesus refused to appropriate by putting himself in that position and then consider the love that drove him to do that.

I want us also to consider the warning that God gives us about communion itself. This is contained in *1 Corinthians 11* where God

says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* And again as I say every month, communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster. What I say is if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or your sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, take care of that first, just pass the elements on. As I say no one is going to think of you lousy or poorly or think that there's something wrong with you. In fact, it may be the wisest thing that you could do. But on the other hand, we also make the mistake of thinking that unless we are absolutely pure and spotless and perfect we're not worthy to receive communion, and that too is -- the enemy loves that same extreme on the other side. Because being a child of the King doesn't mean that you are flawless, that you don't ever sin and that you never fail. It means that you recognize that your salvation is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by being good. And this quote, I still continue to repeat it every month,

I'd love everybody here to have this in your memory. It says, "In the kingdom of God the one thing that qualifies you is knowing you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking you do." That means that when we do fail, because we are believers, when we do understand that we have sinned, it's because we have God's Spirit that is now inside us. And it's God's Spirit that convicts us and so we grieve and we grieve that we know that we have a Father in heaven who longs to forgive and cleanse us. And God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you are spotless and sinless. It means that you understand that when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father and an advocate is someone who speaks on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And that's where we park. That's what we understand. You see, we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own. We own this alien righteousness that belonged to Jesus and is given to us by faith, so we are free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. As it said, he lived the life we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So as you are

going through this process of confessing your sins, of understanding the Holy Spirit's moving in your life, I want us to just think and increase the depth of your understanding of just what it is that Christ did for you in the garden, while he was under arrest and all the different parts of his passion. Think on that for a moment.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 23rd verse says: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* So take, and eat.

You know, Jesus knew exactly what he was getting into. There was no surprises as this unfolded. He knew that he had come to this planet to die for his sheep, but when he began to explain it to his disciples, he ran into a buzz saw or a brick wall. They were absolutely clueless. And Peter, Peter went one better or you could say one worse. As Jesus is explaining to the disciples what he has to do, he begins to upbraid Jesus for even thinking these thoughts. Jesus was not impressed. This is *Matthew 16*. It says: *From that time 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 on the third day be raised. And Peter*

took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." See, after three years of living with Jesus, Peter still did not grasp at all what his mission actually was. He didn't understand that Jesus didn't come to earth to be a teacher or a philosopher or some type of political leader, that he came to earth to be a sacrifice.

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I want us to consider for a moment just some of the particulars of why Jesus came in the flesh. Jesus came to exchange his righteousness for our sin so that by faith in his sacrifice we could stand before a holy God. We could stand before that God clothed not in our filth but in his righteousness; and without that righteousness, all of us are doomed. And over and over again, Jesus sought to explain this, to explain that you cannot get to heaven by your own goodness, that you cannot get to heaven by your own righteousness. And he once told a story and it was about somebody who trusted in their good deeds. And in the story he describes heaven as a great feast and all those are welcomed who are clothed in his righteousness. But in the middle of his feast they find somebody who's not appropriately dressed, so to speak. This is *Matthew 22*. It says

"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." For many are called, but few are chosen." What Jesus was using this story to tell is that a holy, perfect God has got to demand of us that we be perfect as well. He is perfect; we must be perfect. Jesus himself literally said so in *Matthew 5:48*, he said: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." And what this is saying is without Christ's perfection you are that stunned wedding guest. I don't care how righteous you think you might be, you will never begin to approach the righteousness of perfection, the righteousness that Jesus alone possessed. And by faith alone, we appropriate his righteousness as our own. So by faith we can stand before a holy God made perfect by his Son's sacrifice. Jesus came to earth to give us his righteousness through the cross. But you know that was the last thing that Peter wanted to hear. Peter couldn't believe his ears when he heard Jesus speak of his upcoming suffering and death and he wouldn't hear of it. Jesus not only puts Peter in his place, he also gives him an advanced warning of the very events that were going to take place during his suffering. He tells them as I've already mentioned in *Luke 22*, he says again:

*"Simon, Simon, 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 we've already seen that's exactly what happened, but I want to focus on one little detail that occurred during Peter's denial. Jesus was so much in control of things that as Steve Estes points out in *When God Weeps*, what he's saying is that while Jesus was being interrogated and beaten, he was also simultaneously controlling the weather that night. Now we know that Jesus can control the weather because we know that he spoke a cyclone into submission. I mean if you remember the story, he was asleep in the bottom of a boat, he's on the Sea of Galilee and a huge storm arises and his disciples are all terrified, they all are convinced they're going to drown and Jesus gets awakened by his panicked disciples and his response to the storm is simple. *Matthew 8* says: *And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?"* Well, in fact this was the man who while appearing to be the victim of Rome*

and the religious leaders was actually so much in charge that while he is being beaten, he's also orchestrating a high pressure system over Jerusalem that night and he's orchestrating in such a way to make it cold enough to force Peter to seek warmth. Jesus wanted Peter to be in a particular spot at a particular time for a very particular reason. And here's how it all unfolded in our text this morning. This is *John 18:15*. It says: *Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." That was Peter's first denial. Verse 18 says: Now the servants and the officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold. Why was it cold? Because Jesus had ordered up a high pressure system at that very moment. And they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. See, it was the cold weather that put Peter standing right where he was. John 18:25 says: So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." That was Peter's second denial. Verse 26 says: One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off,*

asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Peter again denied it, and at once the a rooster crowed.

Now John's gospel leaves some of the details out and it's Luke's gospel that fills in a very important detail of why Jesus had Peter standing by that charcoal fire warming himself. And we pick up on Peter's actual denial in Luke 22. It says: *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." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.* And here's the critical point, verse 61: *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." And he went out and wept bitterly.* The scripture also says that Peter's third denial was violent, it was vehement, it was accompanied by cursing, and Jesus at this time is bruised and he's beaten, he's just begun his passion, and at the very height of Peter's denial, his eyes and Jesus' eyes meet. You see, Peter intended to stay close enough to find out what was going to happen to his master but not so close to be implicated as one of his followers. Jesus superintended the exact time and the circumstances so that as he was being abused by his captors and being denied by Peter, he has the presence of mind to make a

rooster crow. As verse 61 says: *And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.* So Peter the bold one, Peter the stubborn one, the one who had bragged about his loyalty now finds himself staring into the very eyes of the one he is denying and he's absolutely crushed. It says *and he went out and wept.*

Flash forward until after Jesus rises from the dead. Picture the scene. We have the risen King of the universe cooking breakfast for his disciples. Just ponder that for a minute. Afterwards he has a conversation with Peter that focuses in on his healing and his restoration. This is *John 21*. It says: *When they had finished breakfast, 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 a 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; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." See Peter's three denials of the Lord is met with three affirmations of his restoration. "Feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," "feed my sheep." You know it's hard for me to get my head around the victorious risen King of the universe serving breakfast*

to the very one who denied him knowing that he is fully restoring him. For the rest of Peter's life, for the rest of his life and ministry he would remember that night and those eyes, and he would know from personal experience that our God is a God of mercy and grace and that he chooses broken vessels like Peter to minister his grace to a fallen world. See, the sins that Jesus had gone to the cross to pay for included Peter's cursing and vehement denial. Jesus had paid that price already and because he had paid that price, he explained to Peter he was now free. And Peter intended only to get a safe enough distance to find out what was happening to Jesus. Jesus superintended Peter's cowardice with just one look and it forever broke his arrogance and his confidence in his own strength in a way that it would affect his ministry for the rest of his life. This is a Jesus who is in complete control. This is a Jesus who was being brutalized, he's being beaten. This is a Jesus who was still saying I am going to disciple my disciple Peter. This is the God that we worship. Just think on that for a moment.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, 25th verse says: *In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* So take, and drink.

This is the part that we call heart, hands and feet, where we try

to practically draw out of what God has revealed to us this morning something for our own lives, and so I want to start off by asking this question: Have you ever done, have you ever done what Peter did? Have you ever denied that Jesus Christ is Lord? Have you ever denied that you know him? I mean it may not be as blatant as what Peter did, but every time that you're in a situation where somebody's taking your Lord's name in vain, do you just sit there and say, this is a little too creepy for me to speak up. Or you've had those kind of situations where you know God is prompting you to at least admit who you are and admit who he is and your relationship with him, if you've ever not gone there, you have a sense of what Peter experienced. If you've ever thought that you're beyond forgiveness, consider this one fact that when Jesus went to the cross to pay for your sins, your sins were 2,000 years in the future and yet he paid for them that day on the cross. So there's no question that Jesus has already seen your very worst and that nothing you will ever do or ever could do is going to ever catch Jesus by surprise. That's why God says his love is a gift. That's why he says in *Romans 5:8*: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* And he demonstrates that. I mean he certainly loved Peter while he was obviously still a sinner. And he took what was arguably the very worst thing that Peter had ever done and he used it for good. He used it to build compassion and a heart for those who fail that

guided all of Peter's life and his work. And it was Peter himself who said this of Christ in *1 Peter 2:24*, he said: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* That's Peter tending his sheep just like Jesus had asked him.

And here's the good news for us in particular, the good news is this: What Jesus did for Peter, he's doing right now for us. I mean God says for we know that those who love God, all things work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose. We've said that verse so many times. *All things work together for good.* Would you ever stop and think what "all things" means? "All things" means good things, neutral things, bad things, sinful things, awfully sinful things like denying your Lord with cursing more or less to his face. God used even that wickedness for good. I mean Peter was a betrayer, he was a denier, Paul was a murderer and a persecutor. God used their wickedness to shape and to mold them into the task of building his church.

Here's the good news for all of us in the first month of the year 2018. That's what God did for Peter, what God did for Paul, he wants to do for us. God says all things work together for good. I

mean do you really believe that? That God can take the very worst thing that you've ever done and somehow or other by his overweening power work that for good. And if you don't believe that, I'd love to have the opportunity to introduce you to two fellows, Peter and Paul. They can explain to you how this works. You see, the God who put their lives back together can make all things work together for good in your life as well. So let's praise him and thank him.

Father God, we just, we sit amazed at what you've done. It boggles my mind that you are being beaten and mistreated and yet your eye is looking for Peter. You've arranged it such that he's there right at the point where you can make eye contact with him as that rooster crows. What a crushing blow that was for Peter; what an incredibly important building block that was in his spiritual life. And Father, all of us have crushing blows, all of us have times where we have messed up and we think, oh, God, how could you ever forgive that, and I just pray for each of us that we might get the sense that what God has done in the life of Peter he is doing in our lives. "All things" means all things, and I praise you, Lord, that it means just that, and I praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.