

Peter, Grace, and You  
By Don Green

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**Truth Community Church**  
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

Ordinarily David would say, "Please be seated." I don't know if that was necessary. I'm guessing that many of you at home were already seated as we finished that hymn. Whatever the case may be, I'm so delighted to be able to come back and join you again here from the Truth Community pulpit.

It's an unnatural time, really, for us. It's unnatural to preach to a camera instead of to an audience that I'm looking at and seeing faces and interacting with faces, but we trust that somehow this is all in the hand of God coming to us in his wisdom and coming to us from his goodness, and one of the things that I want to kind of start from here this evening is to just give us a fresh reminder and a brief reminder, I suppose, that even in times that seem unnatural to us, we should always be mindful of the fact that we are in a position of privilege as the people of God, as the church of Jesus Christ, as individual Christians. We are in a position of great privilege no matter what is happening around us. We were chosen before the foundation of the world to be in Christ. We were redeemed by the blood of Christ 2,000 years ago. Christ had us in mind by name when he died for us, he thought of us in the sense that he was bearing our sins on the cross. At some point in the past, for those of us that are Christians, the Holy Spirit worked directly and personally in our hearts to impart new life to us, to lead us to faith and repentance, and that new creation that he makes when someone becomes a Christian, and now the Spirit is at work continuing his work, sanctifying us and conforming us increasingly to the image of Jesus Christ so that one day in a great climax of God's eternal purpose for us, either at the moment of death when we are translated into glory or when Christ returns for us visibly and we see him coming for his people, we are of all people greatly greatly blessed and it is just so vital for us to remember that, to keep that in mind and to live a life that is constantly in response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to realize that our lives are defined by our union with Jesus Christ, our lives are defined by this work of God that he has done in us, this purpose of God that he is working out, and that has a transcendent preeminence over anything that's going on in the world around us or in our personal lives. It is those truths that enable us to face death with courage whether it's our own or a loved one that passes away. It is those truths that give us the courage to respond when the world mocks us and to respond with a patient serenity as we trust in Christ as he leads us through those times that he himself went through. Beloved, let's just remember the privilege that's ours, the position of grace that we are in. Christ has loved us and Christ has made us children of God. 1 John 3:2 says, "Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. Behold, what manner of love the Father has given to us." All

speaking to the unreachable depths of the privilege that is ours in Christ and the one who saved us will keep us and afterward receive us into glory. All of those things are true and wonderful and have a sanctifying impact on our lives, and they shape our affections, they wean us from a love of the world over time until we are loving Christ more and more and he ever becomes increasingly the preeminent affection of our hearts.

Now you would think from that position of privilege that we would then just live at a level of life and in an almost perfection of character and love for him and obedience to his word, and in joyful attitudes all of the time. You'd think that that is what would flow out of that privilege of position, but sad experience teaches us that that's not the case, isn't it? You and I both know that we don't live up to the lofty position that we have been given. Despite our privilege, we often fail, don't we? Even if it's not an outward failure that's visible to all, we know how cold and indifferent our hearts sometimes are and the longer I go in the Christian life, the more that I lament that, the more I lament the fact that my heart seems lukewarm and cold evening in prayer and as I'm praying to God, sometimes it seems like I'm just going through motions that are not worthy of the high position that is given to every believer in Jesus Christ. We spend time in spiritual indifference. We sin with our thoughts, with our words, with our deeds, again, whether it's observed by men or not, and we fall into this spiritual quicksand that makes it kind of hard for us to kind of sort things out, and you know, and our life doesn't always correspond to our position in Christ, and it's at those times when we're feeling the weight of the way that we still fall short of the glory of God, it's at those times where it is so easy to lose sight of how the Lord still deals with us in those times. He still deals with us in grace. He still deals with us as one who is lovingly carrying out his purposes and one who has said that he will never leave us nor forsake us, and that he will never allow anyone or anything to snatch us out of his hand, John 10, the end of Romans 8.

So what I want to do tonight is to give us a real life illustration in that kind of grace that will give us insight. Sometimes it's easier to kind of appropriate the truth that we're getting from Scripture if we see it in a biblical illustration and it's not so direct to us and confronting us in our failures, we see how the Lord worked in someone else's life, and then we start, it's easier for us to appropriate the way that therefore he is working in ours, and to do that I want to consider the life of the Apostle Peter in a brief survey from some passages in the book of Matthew to give us an insight into grace. We'll see Peter, we'll see the grace that the Lord showed to Peter and then we'll see how that grace applies to you and me, and I'm looking forward to being able to share these things with you here this evening.

You know the story of Peter. I hardly need to summarize it but I will just because that's what I do, I guess. Peter was a fisherman who became a leading apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote two letters that are found in our Bibles today and so we have an ongoing legacy from the Apostle Peter 2,000 years ago that's different from the one that Catholics pretend to have. They think that Peter was the first pope. That's not the legacy that we have from Peter. The legacy that we have is what Scripture says about him and then in the two letters that the Spirit of God inspired through his words, Peter's words. So we think about Peter and we think about Peter and we kind of summarize his life in this way:

he was a man who was impulsive in word and in action. He trusted Christ enough that one day he walked on water contrary to nature. Peter walked on water and yet he was a man who was weak enough that he had to lie to a servant girl so that she would not be able to associate him as one who had been with Jesus. Such magnificent faith and accomplishment on one hand, such weak and stunning failure on the other. His contradictions are vast and it's just one end of the spectrum compared to another end of the spectrum, and it gives us a sense of, these contradictions give us a way to see the grace of God operative in Peter's life in multicolored splendor, and as I said, we're going to look at some passages of Matthew for a quick survey that I trust are going to be an encouragement to your heart.

Now first of all, I want to look at the advantages that were given to Peter. If you're taking notes, that's the first point for this evening, the advantages that were given to Peter, and we're going to see four of them here. Peter was a man who was privileged to have unparalleled access to Christ. He had unparalleled communion with the Lord Jesus during Jesus' earthly life.

First of all, we're going to see that he had an advantage of position. He had an advantage of position. If you look at Matthew 10 in the first two verses, we see that Peter was the leader of the 12 disciples. In Matthew 10:1 it says, "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother," then the other eight are listed. Peter listed there first as preeminent among equals, preeminent among the apostles. Every time the 12 apostles are listed, Peter is listed first, an indication that he had a role of leadership even among that select group of men who were specially the apostles and the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as an apostle, he was given the power to do wonders in order to vindicate his claim to be a spokesman of the Lord. You see there in verse 1, he had authority with the other apostles over unclean spirits to cast them out, to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. It would be nice to have an apostle these days, wouldn't it, to kind of put an end to all of the things? Charismatics look pretty silly these days, don't they, with their claims to have healing power? They can't do anything. That's why this virus is going on and spreading, it's because there's no man with the power of an apostle to put an end to it. So Peter here was in a position where he had leadership, he had a privilege of the position that the Lord gave him and that he exercised there among the other apostles.

Now we're not going to spend much time on any of these but not only did Peter have the privilege of position, as I said earlier, Peter walked on water. Peter walked on water. If you look at Matthew 14 and we'll look at an extended passage here. Matthew 14, beginning in verse 25, or actually we'll just go to verse 24. The disciples were in a boat and "it was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night," somewhere in the late night, early morning, 3-6 AM, somewhere in that time, "in the fourth watch of the night Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus

spoke to them, saying, 'Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.' And Peter said to Him, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' And Jesus said, 'Come!' And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus." Let's stop there for just a moment. You know how the story progresses and I'll read it again in a moment anyway, Peter eventually sinks and has to cry out and Jesus asks him about his lack of faith at that point when he started to sink but, friends, what I want you to see is that for a moment of time, for a brief moment of time Peter had such strong faith in Christ that he stepped out of a boat onto water and stepped on water in a way that was utterly contrary to nature. What an experience to have. What a privilege was given to Peter not only to be a leader among the apostles but to be a man who actually physically walked on water.

Now you look at verse 30 and he saw "the wind and he became frightened and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Christ, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" What a privilege, what an advantage was given to Peter to have an experience like that, a leader of the apostles stepped out in response to the command of Christ and walked on water, and even though his faith lapsed, so to speak, his faith wavered at that time and he started to sink, even at that, he was on the receiving end of the Lord stretching out his hand to save him and to keep him from sinking. So he did something miraculous as he walked on water by the strength of the presence of Christ, and then he was on the receiving end of a gracious rescue from Christ that brought him into the boat, and then after they were in the boat, the waves stopped. So what a magnificent experience that none of us can relate to on a human level, to have an experience like that. What an advantage that was given to Peter.

Now you go on in Matthew and you realize that there were spiritual advantages that were given to him as well. It wasn't just the position of leadership or the physical advantage of walking on water, Peter received revelation about Christ before the other apostles did. He was preeminent in reception about revelation of who Christ himself was. Look at Matthew 16:13. Matthew 16:13 says this, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' But Jesus said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" He recognized that Christ was the Messiah sent from God, that Christ was God's anointed one who would bring deliverance to his people and Peter made that confession in the midst of great confusion among his contemporaries about who Christ was, some thinking he's John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and other prophets, and yet Peter was given the advantage, the privilege of speaking out and declaring who Christ was and getting the answer right in the midst of all of that spiritual confusion.

Look at what Jesus says in response to him in verse 17. "Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" Peter received from God the Father revelation that enabled him to

speak rightly about who Christ was. What a privilege. In this time before the exaltation of Christ when Christ was just before them in human flesh, in human appearance, Peter having walked with Christ, Peter having received some manner of inward revelation from God that illuminated his mind to know who Christ was, spoke this out in the presence of the other disciples in a way that is still recorded and that we're still talking about 2,000 years later. What privilege given to this man, a leader of the apostles. He walked on water. He received direct revelation from God during the earthly ministry of Christ and correctly identified him in front of men and confessed him truly before men. These are great advantages that were not given indiscriminately to everyone who lived in that time, these were advantages that were given to one man, to Peter, and they were his to appropriate, they were his as a gift from God to him, and he had advantages that even some of the other disciples did not share in. What a position of privilege he was in.

Finally, we can see one other one, we've seen three, we'll see one more here. Fourthly, Peter saw the Transfiguration. He saw the Transfiguration. Look just a few verses down to Matthew 17 beginning in verse 1. "Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him." This miraculous unveiling, the veil was pulled back for a moment in time and the glory of God shone through and Christ was transfigured into a brilliance that no human could ever attain to, and Peter was there to be an eyewitness to that with a couple of the other apostles, and along with that, of lesser significance, he saw Moses and he saw Elijah and recognized them and they were interacting with him. It just becomes incalculable the grace that was given to Peter, for him to experience and to know these things and to see them with his own eyes, and to stand on water with his own feet is just an advantage that was given to him and uniquely to him.

So he was in this position of great advantage that was not given to others and, beloved, I just want to remind you, we're making a little parallel here between Peter and us, we're not apostles, we haven't walked on water, we didn't see Christ transfigured, God hasn't given new revelation to any of us, and yet we have privileges of our own that we were speaking about at the start: chosen, redeemed, adopted into the family of God, sealed by the Spirit, on our way to heaven. Not everybody receives that gift. Not everyone is going to heaven. Not everyone is a Christian. You and I as Christians have a blessing that has been given to us that is of transcendent quality, of infinite duration, and we have advantages of our own even if they're not exactly like the advantages that were given to Peter.

Now you would think, you might think that Peter given all of that favor would be a man who was perpetually strong and carried out obedience and glorifying Christ with all that he had. I mean, how could you go wrong, how could you slip and fall with such advantages given to you? Well, Peter did. He failed many times and not only did he fail many times, he failed in spectacular ways. He failed at points of great opportunity and did not carry through the advantages that were given to him before the resurrection during the time of Christ's earthly life. And I want to show you just in our second point

here for this evening, the advantages that were wasted by Peter. The advantages that Peter wasted to drop the passive voice. The advantages that Peter wasted and Peter wasted a lot and he failed a lot.

First of all, we're going to see that he failed in impulsive words, in sudden words he failed. Peter was one who could not control his tongue. Look back at Matthew 16:21 for a moment. Just after he had said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Christ had pronounced a blessing upon him for that revelation that was given to him, just after that we read what happens in Matthew 16:21, "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 be raised up on the third day." Here's Peter now in verse 22, "took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But Jesus 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.'" God the Father had sent Christ in order to accomplish redemption for his people at the cross of Calvary and Jesus was explaining this in advance to his disciples to help prepare them for that time that would soon enough come to them, and what did Peter do instead of receptively receiving what Christ had said, instead of adopting the posture of a disciple and a learner at the feet of his Master? He took it upon himself to correct Christ. He took it upon himself to tell Jesus, "No, You've got it all wrong. This will never happen to You. God forbid that what You just said should come to pass, Lord!" It's hard to know what was going through his mind at this time but there was obviously pride in his heart to think that he was speaking to Christ not simply as an equal but someone who was in a position, Peter thought he was in a position to correct Christ, to be an instructor of the Son of God, so much so and so bad was it that Christ says, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Peter at that moment had become a mouthpiece for the devil himself because anything that would have worked to frustrate or hinder or discourage Christ's redemptive work on the cross could only have come from Satan who would seek to hinder that great accomplishment of the Lord Jesus. So God sent Christ to die for sinners, anything to hinder that work was from Satan himself, and so here is Peter despite all of the advantages that were given to him, his mouth got him into trouble as he speaks and Christ has to correct him immediately after he had pronounced blessing on him. His mouth got him into trouble and he wasted the advantage of his position.

Now not only were the sudden words of Peter a problem, Peter also wasted his advantages in his self-sufficient pride. His self-sufficient pride. Peter in that foolish self-confidence, contradicted the Lord and yet you go on and you see in Matthew 26 that it happens again. Matthew 26, beginning in verse 31. Jesus is telling his disciples what is just about to take place in their lives in a matter of just a few hours and he is preparing them for his crucifixion. The Lord's Supper is now over. They've had the Passover. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and now after that moment of intimate communion with Christ, Jesus says to them in verse 31 this, he says, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." But here's Peter again correcting his Lord. You know, you just want to insert yourself into the narrative and run up to Peter and put your hand over his mouth and say, "Peter, stop

talking, please stop talking. You're making things so much worse!" But we don't have that opportunity. Peter said to him in verse 33, "even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And Peter said to him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." And all the disciples said the same thing." It wasn't just Peter, it was all the disciples saying this but in his foolish self-confidence, Peter contradicted the Lord. You can see the pride that was animating his heart as he had such a certainty about himself and his own strength that he says, "Lord, I'll never die to You. I will never deny You. If it comes down to death, I'll choose death before I would deny You." Peter's saying this about himself in advance but we'll see soon enough what happens but Christ telling Peter, "Peter, you'll deny Me," Peter in self-sufficient pride says, "No, I won't."

Now you can start to see the downgrade taking place ever so rapidly as we look at the third way that Peter squandered his advantages. We've mentioned his sudden words, his self-sufficient pride, and now we see him in spiritual indifference in Matthew 36 as we continue reading in this text. Matthew 26:36, "Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.' And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.'" Here is Christ in the depth of agony describing it as a deep grief that was like unto death in his soul, and he's pleading with God as he contemplates the horrors of Calvary that were just ahead, and yet even as he knew the horror that was about to come upon him, he submits to God in a remarkable moment of self-renunciation saying, "Father, not My will but Thine be done. Father, if it's Your will for this to be carried out upon Me, if it's Your will for Me to bear the eternal torment of sin on behalf of My people, I accept that." So Christ is in the middle of a crucible in his soul as he is on the verge of this crucifixion, and he asks Peter and two others to stand beside him in prayer to be with him and to support him in prayer.

He comes back and what does he find? You know the story, don't you? Verse 40, "He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" So Peter had failed. He was asleep while Christ was in his hour of anguish. Christ comes, wakes them up, warns them to continue in prayer and what happens? Verse 42, "He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.' And He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more." You know, you see a pattern here. Three times Christ said, "Peter, you'll deny Me." Three times he comes to them and they're sleeping. This wasn't a momentary failure. Peter was guilty of repeated failures throughout this night that came in bundles of three. So verse 44, "He left them again, went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting?"

Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" Peter failed to watch him pray. He was in the midst of his lowest hour of squandering the advantages that were given to him. The opportunity was there for him to stand beside the Lord, so to speak, metaphorically speaking, to be with Christ and to support him in prayer and to seek his own need for strength in his own hour of temptation but he slept it away. He slept it away, beloved. Here he was as Christ is pleading with him to be his friend and to be strong beside him, and Peter puts his head down and goes to sleep.

His sudden words wasted his advantages. His self-sufficient pride wasted his advantages as he boasted in the presence of Christ about what he would do, and then that self-sufficient pride starts to manifest itself in physical sleep as he drifts off and it culminates in finally, fourthly, in sinful denial. In sinful denial. Peter could not withstand the test of the adverse circumstances that came upon him. Look at chapter 26, verse 57 as we see the word of the Lord being fulfilled exactly as he said it would be. In verse 57, "Those who had seized Jesus lead Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome." Skip ahead to verse 69, "and now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him and said, 'You too were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.' When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant girl saw him and said to those who were there, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' And again he denied it with an oath saying, 'I do not know the man.'" He swore that he didn't know Christ and in verse 73, "A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.' Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!' And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, 'Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and he wept bitterly."

Friends, this is sad on so many levels. It's sad to see him fail. It's sad to see the anguish in his heart but we need to take just a moment to recognize what had happened to Peter. His denials of Christ were simply an outworking of his own proud and impulsive heart. Christ warned him to pray and to seek to be delivered from the temptation and he failed to do it. He had already said he would never deny Christ, what was the purpose of prayer then? Christ had warned him about what was to come and Peter said, "No, that will never happen to me." So his pride and his arrogance and his self-sufficiency set him up for a colossal failure. The great advantages that were given him make the failures of his life at that time all the more compelling by contrast. And here's Peter's problem, to put it in more modern colloquial language, I guess: Peter thought too highly of himself and he thought too lightly of the possibility of sin in his own life. Peter's enthusiasm as he spoke so grandly about his own courage and what he would do in the future, his courage and his enthusiasm were entirely superficial. They were not grounded in truth and they were not grounded in a reality of character. The external advantages that he had enjoyed had not yet transformed him into that man of character that the Spirit would one day make him and that we'll talk about in just a moment.



But here you are, you have a man with great privilege who has now failed greatly and it is that black backdrop, my friends, that enables us to get a window of insight into the nature of divine grace, and as we pivot here to our third point, our third point being the advantages that were restored to Peter, the advantages restored to Peter, here's what I want you to see and to remember: Peter in his position of privilege failed the Lord in his life. You and I in our position of privilege also fail the Lord in our lives. So we are on common ground with Peter even though our failures might not seem to be so spectacular as his, they certainly, they aren't as prominent and they're certainly not recorded in Scripture as Peter's are, and yet here we are, people of a different kind of privilege and spiritual advantage failing in our own spiritual lives. So we can identify with Peter here and what I want us to see is how it was that the Lord dealt with Peter after his failures to give us a window of insight into the nature of grace that he shows to us as well.

So let's look at that, shall we? Point 3, the advantages restored to Peter. Now on a purely human level, on a purely human level you could not have blamed the Lord if he had cast Peter aside. After all of those colossal failures, Peter did not support him in prayer, Peter denied him with curses like that, after all of that, who could have been surprised if the Lord had simply cast him away and started to work with someone new? But as you know, that's not what Christ did. Instead of that, we are given the opportunity to marvel at the grace that Jesus Christ showed to Peter.

Look at the Gospel of John 21. John 21. Christ restored his wayward disciple to a place of service even though he had failed in such tremendous ways. John 21:15, look at it with me. "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?'" And he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' Then Jesus said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.'" In verse 17, "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' And Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'" Three times Jesus asked him if he loved him.

Now there's a distinction in the Greek verbs that are there but that's not really the purpose of the passage to highlight the distinction between those two Greek verbs. I realize I differ with some on that point. But what Jesus here is doing is asking Peter three times to affirm his love for Christ and those three affirmations that he pulls forth from Peter correspond to the three denials that he had made of Christ, and more remotely, the three times that he failed to support him in prayer. You have Peter having failed in a threefold way, therefore Christ comes to him and draws out a threefold confession from him in order to restore him to that prior position of Peter's life. So Peter's answers are corresponding to his earlier denials and what Jesus is doing here, Jesus is showing mercy here. He is giving new opportunity to Peter in front of the other disciples who knew quite well how Peter had denied him. So this painful process that grieved Peter was a necessary corrective, a necessary tonic, as it were, to his soul. It was necessary for Peter to come

back to his confession of Christ and affirm his love for him before he could be returned to service. Peter had to repent of each time that he had denied Christ and these confessions of his love for Christ were that opportunity.

Don't miss the fact that what Christ did in response to each of those denials was he sent Peter, he told Peter, "You tend My sheep. Take care of My lambs." In other words, "You look out after My people, Peter. Now that you have confessed Me again, I am putting you into service so that you can serve Me and that you can have now a fruitful ministry in response." Peter here, this had to have been excruciatingly humbling for Peter and yet his soul needed that humbling, that public humbling because he had denied Christ in a public way, but the point is that as Peter humbled himself, the Lord showed grace to him, the Lord forgave him and the Lord placed him into service. Isn't that remarkable? Isn't it stunning to think what Christ had done there? Here Peter had failed him so publicly, so greatly, and yet the Lord forgives him, the Lord accepts, graciously accepts Peter's confessions of love for him, and goes further and puts Peter into service to care for the people of God after Christ would be ascended. So the Lord restored him to his position of advantage and service, and as you read the book of Acts, you see that Peter lived that out. After the Holy Spirit came and filled him and the other disciples, Peter was now a man of unconquerable courage. He courageously confessed Christ before men even in response to commands from the authorities, even in response to threats to his personal safety. Church tradition tells us that ultimately Peter was crucified upside down as a martyr for his faith in Christ. Church history tells us that Peter asked his executioners to crucify him upside down because he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.

So beloved, here you see the magnificent grace of Christ on display. After such a brutal denial by Peter, Christ still forgave him, not only forgave him but commissioned him to ministry and used him, as we said earlier, in the writing of two of the epistles, and in the first 11 chapters of the book of Acts you just see this magnificent history of the courage and ministry of Peter in such a great and wonderful way. All that grace upon a man who had denied Christ with curses, a man who had been a puppet of Satan for a moment during the earthly life of Christ. Can you imagine? What we're seeing here and the reason that we're talking about this, believe it or not, it's not about to talk about Peter. We're not talking about Peter here at all as much as we're talking in a more transcendent way what the Lord did to Peter and for Peter. This gives us a sense of how great the grace of Christ is. A man can deny him with curses and Christ will forgive him when the man comes to him humbly by faith. I'm a man just like that. I cursed Christ and I cursed with the name of Christ in my pre-conversion days. It sickens me to this day, it grieves me to this day to remember that, that such things came off of my tongue and out of my lips, and yet Christ forgave me like he did Peter. How wonderful, how extensive, how great and magnificent is this grace of Christ to forgive sinners like that, and what does it say to us about the abounding love of God to unworthy sinners like you and me, that he would forgive on such a magnitude of order like that?

You would think that, you know, that once you had cursed God, you had given up your hope of ever being forgiven. We see that's not the case in the life of Peter, that God forgives even those who blaspheme his name when they come humbly and repentantly to

the Lord Jesus Christ, and what I want you to see is that Christ received him freely. Christ did not commission him to do works of penance beforehand. Peter didn't have to lash himself with a whip and beat himself in order to earn forgiveness somehow. This was a free grace given to him by the Lord Jesus, free grace given to Peter by Jesus. Why? Because Jesus loved him. Because Jesus is a Christ of mercy. He's a Christ of grace. He's a Christ of patience. He's a Christ of goodness, and this is who Christ is, and when you see the magnitude of Peter's failures heightened by the advantages of position that are given to him, he was a colossal failure before Christ as Christ restored him there in John 21. No more pride, no more boast there, all he could do was appeal to the omniscience of Christ and say, "Lord, You know that I love You. Lord, You also know that there is nothing in my life right now that would give any outward evidence that what I'm telling You is true. So Lord, be gracious. Look on my heart and know that I love You and receive it based on Your knowledge, not on the proof that I can offer you with my hands." Peter had nothing that he could hand to Christ to show his love, there was simply a humble confession of faith that said, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You." And on that, Christ receives him and forgives him.

It's remarkable. It's what we all depend upon in order to go to heaven. Not a one of us has any merit. Not a one of us has any spiritual life in and of ourselves. We were all dead in trespasses and sins. We were all under the domination of the devil. We were all doomed to suffer the wrath of God and yet Christ came to us in mercy and brought the Gospel to us and the Spirit of God opened our hearts in order that we might believe in Christ and be saved. God graciously, Christ graciously, the Spirit of God graciously working in us despite all of the ways that we had sinned against him in order to bring us to salvation.

What a wonderful Lord and now here we are in our position of privilege as Christians, as those that have now been born again, and yet I ask you even as a Christian here today whether Peter sounds like someone you know? You know. You know who I'm talking about, I'm talking about you. Have you sinned with your thoughts, with your impulsive words, with deeds that you have done that just bring you shame, that just makes you want to hide your face from everyone over shame of what you have done or what you have said or what you have thought in your heart? Maybe, maybe you were given opportunity, there was a providential opportunity for you to speak up for Christ, to declare yourself a Christian and to say a word of defense of Christ and of the Bible, and yet you remained silent. Perhaps you joined in with the laughing mockers who were mocking Christ and you did not stand out apart, you were afraid of them like Peter was afraid of the servant girl and you put your spiritual tail between your legs and hid and ran from the opportunity to be a bold man for Christ. Well, you know, the sin of those things is very real and we need to confess them honestly to Christ, but what we need to see and what we want to see here this evening is the way that Christ deals so very graciously with his sinful disciples, and if you have struggled lately, I encourage you to look fresh to this grace of God. If Christ forgave Peter of his great sins, beloved, he'll forgive you of your sins as well. The Apostle Paul said that he was the chief of sinners and yet in that he found mercy in order that, and Paul is the foremost sinner and Christ forgave him that others could look and see an example that would encourage them to believe in Christ unto eternal life.

Christ is more than willing to forgive you. If you are a Christian, he has already paid for your sins and, my unbelieving friend, if you are not a Christian, I just want to tell you that your sins against Christ are enormous; that your guilt is very very great and that you can do nothing to deliver yourself from your own bondage to sin, and you need to come to grips with that and not diminish it in foolish self-confidence, foolish pride like Peter. Don't be like that. Look at the reality of your sinful life and humble yourself and let the conviction of Scripture and the Spirit of God come upon you because you are a sinner who is under the wrath of God. But once that conviction settles into your soul, in fact, don't wait any longer, recognize that Christ is gracious to sinners, he is the friend of sinners, he is willing to forgive the chief of sinners and that means that he is willing to forgive you too. He forgave Peter and, my friend, my unbelieving friend, I want to tell you that Christ will receive you in that same manner of love that he received Peter back. He will change you. He will turn you into his servant and place you into effective service to Christ. You can go from being a servant of Satan to a servant of Christ by receiving him right now. Why wouldn't you do that right away?

But for my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, I want to encourage you as well to realize that even in the sin that you are so ashamed of, that pains you so much, to not let your feelings of unworthiness hinder you from coming to Christ and confessing those freely and being restored to your joy. Scripture speaks about this willingness of God to forgive us repeatedly. You can see it in Psalm 32. You can see it in Psalm 51. But just a couple of brief verses to hang our thoughts on it. Proverbs 28:13 say that, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." If you go to Christ in repentant faith, repenting of your sins and coming to him and believing in him for his promise of forgiveness, it says he'll show you compassion. A like verse from the New Testament is 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As you hear that, remember Peter. Denied Christ with curses, Jesus forgave him and put him into service and Peter prospered greatly after he was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. My friend, don't you see that even the sins that seem so great in your mind are not greater than the grace of Christ? His grace is greater than all of your sin. His willingness to forgive far exceeds your willingness to confess those sins to him. His desire to restore joy to your soul is far greater than your desire to know that joy in yourself. You see, we just see and we come back to what we tried to say again and again and again year after year after year, God is more good, he is better, he is kinder, he is more merciful, he is more loving than anything that you could possibly believe about him.

So there is no reluctance on God's part, there is no reluctance on the part of Jesus Christ to forgive you if you will only come to him and confess these things to him. He is willing to take away that sense of guilt and restore the joy of your salvation to you, my Christian friend. If he did it with Peter, he will do it with you and the wonder of that, the beauty of that is this. I can't get over it as I think about what I'm about to say. I never quite get my mind around this. You do not have to work your way back into his favor. You don't have to cry a certain number of tears. You don't have to feel a certain amount of guilt. You

don't have to do anything with your hands. You certainly don't have to go to a Catholic priest and confess your sins before you can be forgiven. None of that. You just go straight to Christ. You pour out your heart to him. You confess what you have done and you ask him to show you the same mercy that he showed to Peter, and you know what he'll do? He'll do it, he'll show you exactly that same kind of mercy because that's who he is. He is a wonderful, merciful Savior for all of those who come to him in repentant faith.

You know, I've mentioned those letters by Peter and I just want to close our time here this evening looking at a couple of verses that Peter wrote. 1 Peter 2:24. Because Peter out of the depth of his own spiritual experience points us to the place where sin was paid for, where it was forgiven and ransomed. 1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself," meaning Jesus Christ, "bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Past tense reality. You were healed. Your sins were forgiven and so you can come to Christ and ask for a fresh cleansing from sin in light of whatever it is that's troubling your mind tonight. 1 Peter 3:18, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." The whole reason Christ died was to bring you, a sinful wretch, to God and to reconcile you to him. That's why he came. That's why we call him Savior and it's what he delights to do. He delights to forgive sinners just like you who come to him in repentant faith.

My friend, there is a fountain of grace for you at the cross of Jesus and on the authority of God's word, I tell you that you can come and drink freely from that fountain which Christ delights to give to the refreshment of your soul.

Let's pray together, shall we?

*Father, we thank You for the wonderful grace of Jesus, grace that is greater than all of our sin. We pray now, Father, for those that have been watching, those that are convicted of sin, Father, may Your Spirit draw them to Christ perhaps for salvation for the first time, perhaps for a Christian who simply needs to be renewed after a long struggle with sin. Father, may You show them the grace that You showed to Peter that Your word testifies to, and may we all join in singing Your praise as we close now. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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