

“Jesus Goes Before Us to Galilee” | Mark 14:26-31, 66-72 (Lent 2024: Palm Sunday)

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(Small Group Discussion Questions on Page 5)

Introduction (Galilee)

When telling our own stories, it's often tempting to redact the account, to curate a version of ourselves that presents us in the best possible light. The classic example is the inevitable question that always comes up in a job interview, 'what would you consider to be your greatest weakness?'

Most people say, you take that question, and you flip it by turning it into a strength. 'Well, I guess my greatest weakness is that I just care too so much. Sometimes its overwhelming how utterly caring I can be. But, that's my weakness, what can you do?'

As an interviewer, I once asked a candidate this question, to which they replied 'I just love being on committees way too much? Are there committees here, I'd love to be on five or six of them. I just love to serve, that's my weakness.' After the interview was over I said 'there's something deeply wrong with this man. Nobody likes committees that much. Cast away his resume into the outer darkness.'

One CEO said the best way to answer this question is, "please hire me and within a month you will find out all my weaknesses.

Today's passage from Mark's Gospel focuses on Peter, and it doesn't cast him in the greatest light. And yet, here's the curious thing: most scholars agree that the eyewitness source of Mark's Gospel was Peter himself. Peter provided the story, he didn't hide it. Why?

Perhaps it's because Peter understood that his experience between when he first met Jesus in Galilee to when he reconnected with Jesus in Galilee after the resurrection is not just descriptive of Peter's greatest weakness but our greatest weakness. We'll explore today's passage in two parts.

First, we'll look at Peter's confidence on the mountain, where he swears to follow Jesus, even to the point of death (Mk. 14:26-31). Then, we'll learn from Peter's crisis at the gateway, where he denies Jesus three times, and where he realizes the limits of his own confidence and power. Ultimately what we'll find is sobering news, but good news. That as those who follow in the fallibility and the inevitable infidelity of Peter, our story doesn't end alone, ashamed at the gateway, it ends redeemed, restored, and resurrected with the risen Lord in Galilee. Let's journey *there* with Peter today through this text.

I. Confidence on the Mountaintop (Mk. 14:26-31)

Verses 26-31 takes place at the Mount of Olives. And if we look at Peter's response here, it looks like he is at an all-time spiritual high. He is literally having a mountaintop experience.

This despite Jesus' sobering pronouncement in verse 27,

"You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

Before turning to Peter's cocky response, we should ask: what is Jesus quoting here and why?

Jesus is quoting a prophecy from chapters 12 and 13 of the Old Testament book of Zechariah—a book written roughly 500 years before Jesus was even born. The prophecy talks about a shepherd who the Jews believed to be the Messiah, the chosen one to save the world through Israel.

The prophet Zechariah describes this figure as an 'only son' and 'a firstborn' who will be pierced for his people's sins. This pierced shepherd Messiah will open up "a fountain" for the house of David to cleanse "the inhabitants of Jerusalem from sin and uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1)

All the skeptics in the room who even know the slightest bit about Jesus story are at least thinking, 'Ok, well that's a really bizarre coincidence.' Those who know Jesus as Lord are saying, it's not a coincidence at all, it's the faithful God following through on what he always promised to do. To atone for our sin, to save us from sin, and death—indeed, as we'll see in this text, even to save us from ourselves.

In the face of this stunning prophetic claim, Peter seems unphased, charged up, confident. In verse 29, he responds to Jesus with an arrogant level of certitude, casting himself in a superior light to the rest of the group. Peter says

"Even if they all fall away, I will not."

The original language is emphatic here. There is not even a verb in the Greek. It simply says "even if they all fall away, **yet not I.**"

Jesus is trying to draw Peter to focus on Jesus' forthcoming crucifixion. He's also **hinting at hope** through a promise resurrection when he says "but I will go before you to Galilee." All that Peter can do is redirect the focus on himself, and how much more reliable he reckons himself to be in comparison to the others. 'These other clowns might let you down but not me. I'm good value.'

Then, after Jesus predicts that Peter will deny him three times that very night, Peter responds again with even greater boldness

"[Peter] said emphatically, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And they all said the same."

Peter is doubly emphatic here. It could be translated: “he said emphatically, I will **certainly not** deny you.”

Illustration [‘Dungarees and Heresies at Sears’]

This week, as I studied this passage, I kept feeling like ‘I understand the meaning, but it’s not really hitting me personally.’ And so, I went for a walk because that usually helps me gain clarity for whatever reason. As I was walking and thinking through Peter’s confidence in light of Jesus’ predictions, I eventually said aloud to myself, ‘**Lord, what does this have to do with me?**’

Instantly I felt my heart unravel and open itself to the text, and I literally sighed. It wasn’t a sigh of revelation received, the light bulb turning going on, an aha movement. It wasn’t that. It was more like a sigh of sobering self-awareness. Peter’s self-confidence had not initially stood out to me, not because it was so foreign, but because it was so familiar. Whenever I’m under pressure, I feel a troubling kindship with confident Peter more than a default commitment to Jesus Christ.

I’ll give you one example, maybe you can relate. I’m in the stage of life and parenthood when you’re more likely to be considered **embarrassing than endearing** to your kids—even when you’re on your best behavior! And when I am called out for being the embarrassing parent I never respond virtuously. I always vigorously stand my ground — I’m confident dad, not corny dad.

We’ve all been there or are there. The last time I was on the other side of this, as the embarrassed kid rather than the embarrassing parent, was in 1992. Back then I was eleven years old. Back to School shopping at Sears in the Square One Mall in Saugus, Massachusetts with my Mom and Nana.

“Johnny, look at how sharp you look in those nice new dungarees. Nana come over here look at Johnny. Later, walking about a mile ahead, my Mom’s shouting ‘Johnny, Johnny, why are walking so far ahead, Nana can’t walk that fast. The whole experience made the car ride home listening to my mom’s John Denver cassettes seem like sweet freedom.

Recently, the dungaree torch has been past. I’m the one on the sidelines, being too noisy at a sports game. Wearing a cheesy dad hat that says ‘Scotland on it.’ I sighed when I thought about Peter’s self-confidence because whenever I’ve unknowingly been the embarrassing parent, I have routinely responded not with **the humility of Jesus** but with **the heretical self-confidence of Peter**.

I say stuff like: ‘You might be tempted to be embarrassed of me. Just remember: I’ve done stuff. I’ve published like 10 books. Most people don’t do that. I’m no embarrassment! You can be proud of me; just look at my dad hat and New Balance 990s. Now come on, kid, let’s go buy you some nice new dungarees.’

Transition: The mountain top. That’s where Peter feels confident. And we follow right along in his fallible footsteps whenever we stand our ground on our own self-righteousness rather than

on Christ. But the episode doesn't end with Peter's confidence on the mountaintop; it carries on to Peter's crisis at the gateway.

II. Crisis at the Gateway (Mk. 14:66-72)

After the account of Peter's confidence on the mountain, many things happen.

Within hours the disciples will:

- **fall asleep on Jesus** [three times btw] in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42)
- **flee** from Jesus at his arrest (Mk. 14:43-50)

Then, like a flashback in a movie, we return to Peter who **denies** Jesus under the pressure of the crowds in Mk. 14:66-72. In this scene, Peter fulfills the prediction that he will deny Jesus three times.

In verse 66, Peter starts out in courtyard, overlooking the area where Jesus was being questioned. A servant girl "looks intently/directly at Peter" in verse 67, and identifies him, perhaps from the light of the fire, saying, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."

Peter denies the claim, in verse 68, using what Rabbinic scholars have noted is a legal phrase to declare innocence from a charge: "I neither know nor understand what you mean." The rooster crows for the first time as he makes his way from the courtyard to the gateway.

As Peter gets further away from the perceived danger, he doesn't, however get any safer. In fact, his situation worsens significantly. The servant girl addresses the bystanders in verse 69 ("This man is one of them"), drawing in a larger crowd against Peter which leads him to his second denial of Jesus in verse 70.

In verse 71, the bystanders now collectively come at Peter: "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." We know from ancient historical Jewish documents like the Talmud that Galileans were well known because of their dialect. This would be like if someone said to Ben Affleck, 'I know you're from Boston, I'd know that accent anywhere.' And Affleck responding 'No, clearly I'm from Kentucky.'

The bystanders call Affleck's bluff: 'Ok, so where do you park your car?'

Affleck takes the bait, 'Obviously, Harvard Yard.'

The bystanders fire back 'and where do you get your coffee?'

Affleck says 'Where else, Dunkin's, dude.'

By the time the bystanders get to the Red Sox or Yankees question, Affleck knows his goose is cooked, and that the whole ordeal is the opposite of wicked awesome.

Peter, pushed out to the margins, far from Jesus, with the fury and weight of the crowd threatening to crush him, loses all of the confidence he had on the mountaintop. **His confidence collapses in a moment of crisis at the gateway.**

Then, in verse 71 Peter “invokes a curse on himself” and takes an oath “I do not know *this man* of whom you speak.” And so, Peter denies Jesus for the third time, and he does so without ever even formerly mentioning Jesus’ name.

Verse 72 brings us to the sad response. After hearing the rooster crow a second time, and remembering the words of Jesus, “he broke down and wept.”

Conclusion (Jesus Goes Before us to Galilee)

The gateway. It’s where Peter—***it’s where we all*** find ourselves eventually. In a crisis of faith. When we finally realize that all the confidence in the world won’t be enough to get us through.

At the gateway. Alone. In the dark. *There* comes the crisis. *There* we finally break down and weep with Peter, crying out

“I’m not who I wish I was.” “I’m not who people want me to be—who people need me to be. I’m not people to think I am.” I’ve **denied myself** (‘I’m not a Galilean’) and **I’ve sold out my Savior** (‘I do not know this man.’)

The self-righteousness that used to make me feel secure, now hems me in from every side. Where the confidence that used to hold me up, now, in the end, threatens to crush me.

Have you been to the gateway? Have you been far away from God, and yet deep down you hope, you sense—there has to be something more than this pain, than this loneliness.

There must be a **bright light** beyond the **present void of bitter darkness**.

At the gateway, not in the confidence; but in the crisis. *That’s* where the gospel becomes real. *That’s* when it makes a claim on your life—the first time and every time you find yourself there. The gateway. *That’s* where the gospel calls you to a decision. When you realize you can’t save yourself and you can’t save the ones you love, but that **Jesus promised to “go out to go out ahead of you to Galilee”** to do just that.

If today you find yourself in crisis at the gateway, shed your tears, dry your tears, pick up your palm, take up your cross and **carry on to Galilee**. The good news of the gospel is that you are not forever stuck at the gateway, broken, waving the palm of hypocrisy and defeat; your inheritance lies out ahead—not alone at the gateway, but with the risen Lord in Galilee.

Discussion Questions:

(1) In Mark 14:66-72, as Peter gets further away from Jesus, and continues to deny him, he expects his situation to ease up, to get less severe, but it gets worse. As he withdraws first fleeing the Garden, to the courtyard, and then from the courtyard to the gateway, the pressure

ramps up. In moments when you have been far from Jesus, whether by denying him, spiritually sleeping, or just lukewarm, how has it felt to handle the unexpected, often severe, and seemingly unfair and random obstacles of life without God? How does being close to God change your experience here and now?

(2) In Mark 14:29-31, Jesus speaks clear words to Peter, but turns the conversation in on his own strength “Even if they all fall away, I never will.” When Peter does this, he disregards not only what Jesus is speaking, but what the Scriptures spoke in Zechariah 13, from which Jesus quotes. How does Peter’s self-confidence apart from, and really, against the clear teaching of Scripture, set him up for failure? What are some ways that we can be too individualistic in our faith, only hearing what we feel we need, or want, and what is the effect of this on our own spiritual nourishment and life?

(3) Evangelical Christians, even if they do not have a particular time or moment, are often distinguished from non-evangelical believers by the focus on conversion and the need for all people to be born-again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The National Association of Evangelicals says it this way, “We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, **regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.**” Have you ever been to the gateway, to the edge of your own limits and self, and trusted in Jesus through a conversion in which Jesus vitally renews you? Briefly share some of your testimonies, and perhaps focus on how different the experiences are, and yet how central they are to our experience of the truth and staying power of the Gospel in our lives

(4) How can we have accurate confidence in the areas in which we are uniquely skilled, and yet not allow this to hijack the supremacy of Jesus as our life, our hope, and our Lord?