

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

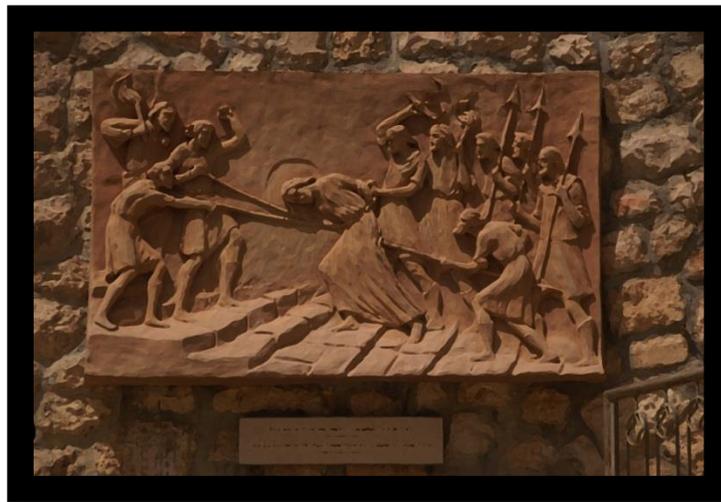
Failures And The Faith

Matthew 26:69-75

Written By

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Years ago, a fine, upstanding, well-respected leader of a successful Christian organization called and said he just had to talk to me ... right now. I moved some things in my calendar around and invited him to come for a visit.

Walking into my office, he was white as a sheet and looked quite troubled. I had known him for probably sixteen years at the time, so I knew from his demeanor things weren't right in his life. Thoughts jumped into my mind as he walked toward me and sat down across from my desk. Had his wife of over fifty years had a medical issue, or had something had happened to one of his children? Within a few minutes I heard about the source of his personal dilemma.

For many years he said his wife had been cold and distant to him. Really, according to his testimony, at this point in their relationship they were just two people living under the same roof, but that was about it. So, feeling rejected, isolated, and alone, he decided to drive down a street in town no man should ever drive down by himself. Seeing a lone, nice-looking lady standing alongside the road, he decided to pull his car over and just talk to her. A few minutes later, he shocked himself when he negotiated a price with her. Shock became fear and embarrassment as she quickly produced a police badge and called for other officers to surround his car. Within a few minutes he was handcuffed, placed inside a squad car, and transported for booking at the police station. Sitting there thoughts raced through his head like, "What was I thinking?" "What was I doing?"

After they booked him at the station, officers allowed him to make the one proverbial phone call ... to his wife.

As you might suspect, she was absolutely and categorically devastated. Her once faithful Christian husband hadn't just gone off the rails. No, he'd crashed and burned in a spectacular, shocking, jaw-dropping fashion. What now? What of their marriage? What would happen to his job as the well-respected leader of a Christian organization?

Fortunately, by God's good grace, they rebuilt their marriage to His glory. I spent some time counseling him in the pit of his perversion, and eventually, his wife forgave him, he forgave himself, and they went on to repair marital dysfunctions ... but it took years.

I shall never forget this story. It is instructive from so many perspectives, as a Christian. Some of the questions it brings to the forefront, and rightly so, is obvious: "What happens when there is a monumental moral lapse in the life of a saint?" "Is their marriage over, if they are married?" "Is God finished with them?" "Will the heinous nature of their sin put them in a position where the Lord will never do great things in and through their life?" And here's a tough one: "How should we, as believers, respond to those believers who make the most jaw-dropping, spiritually clueless, and publically known sinful choices?" Yes, "How should we respond when, not if, saints in our lives, saints we trust, look up to, and respect do a willful nosedive into the hard soil of sin?"

Peter's three denials of Christ while the Sanhedrin tried Him in the home of the High Priest, Caiaphas, answer our pragmatic questions, and then some. Peter, like my friend, enjoyed a great relationship with Jesus, he used his spiritual gifts to cut deep into Satan's kingdom, and he had impacted countless lives for eternity with his teaching and mentoring ability. Yet, in one evening, when he least expected it, when he thought he could stand the sifting of Satan, he fell in the faith in the most sobering, mind-numbing fashion. All the gospels recount his fall (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-27). Why? To cause us to realize we should all take heed lest we fall, to cause us to see the need to always be in prayer for ourselves and the temptations the Adversary will bring our way, and, ultimately, to teach us this life-restoring wisdom premise:

The Depths Of Sin Can Lead To The Heights Of Holiness (Matthew 26:69-75)

I say "can," not will, because when you crash and burn morally it is not a given you will come clean from your sin. Some saints, for a variety of narcissistic, irrational reasons, cling to their sin, resulting in a sub-par spiritual life with Christ, destroyed and decimated personal relationships, a tarnished witness to friends and family, and the loss of true, lasting, inner joy. Should this be your lot in life right now, I offer you this counsel from the author of Hebrews:

"Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7)

To harden your heart is to bring the discipline of your holy Lord upon you (Hebrews 6:1-8; 12:4-12). He will call you to task because you're His child, because He loves you, and because He wants you to move from the depths of sin to the heights of holiness. Peter's life, in this respect, is most instructive.

From an analysis of the historical narrative of Peter's spiritual lapse in the home of Caiaphas in Matthew 26, coupled with data we can pull from the parallel gospel accounts, the Spirit of God shows us three supportive concepts we should understand and apply when Satan seeks to sift us so he can bring our plane down.

You Will Encounter A Sinful Slide (Matthew 26:69-70)

Peter's spiritual crash didn't occur all at once. No, it came in increments, as it usually does. His bold, courageous demeanor made him the logical choice as the leader among the disciples; however, it also became his point of weakness as it mixed with his own selfish desires.

- When Christ predicted His death, Peter rebuked Him to His face (Matthew 16:22).
- Peter dropped his guard one day when he wanted to know what Jesus would give them for leaving everything to follow Him (Matthew 19:27).
- When Jesus prophesied that one of the disciples would betray Him, Peter definitively and impulsively contradicted Christ's word by saying he would never think of becoming a turncoat to Christ (Matthew 26:35).
- When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples in the Upper Room before His arrest, Peter's knee-jerk reaction was to prohibit Christ from touching his feet (John 13:8).
- When Jesus prophesied that Peter would also betray Him, the lead disciple would have none of this notion (Matthew 26:33-35).
- When Jesus told Peter to stay on guard and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to His arrest, Peter slept ... along with the other disciples (Matthew 26:47-56).
- When they came to arrest Jesus, Peter attempted to stop the event, which had to occur to fulfill prophecy, by striking the High Priest's servant with a sharp sword (Matthew 26:51).

Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus that fateful evening didn't come out of thin air. No. It represented the culmination of a slow, selfish unchecked slide into sin. His massive self-confidence left him thinking he was invincible. His Rock of Gibraltar self-confidence caused him to also think that he didn't need to pray when Jesus said he should. His insubordination to the true words of Jesus in private left him open for very verbal and very public acts of insubordination in the home of Caiaphas. His impulsive ways brought him into a courtyard where he should have never been, surrounded by godless, anti-Christ people who would push him spiritually to the proverbial breaking point. Arrogantly, however, I'm sure he thought that he, if anybody, could handle whatever became of the situation. He thought wrong and it he'd live to see the fragility of his faith.

Peter's slow slide into a sin of all sins is recorded for all of us to see and learn from in verse 69 of Matthew 26:

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."

Don't miss the import of this instructive verse.

According to John's account, Peter was walking with an unnamed disciple who personally knew the High Priest, Caiaphas. Once they arrived at the High Priest's home, that disciple went in and later came back and made sure Peter gained entrance to the massive inner rectangular (John 18:15-17). The servant girl was probably the gatekeeper, and she recognized Peter. According to John's account, it appears that Peter had walked over to a nice fire to warm up, and it is at that juncture she walked over to him and made her statement. At that point she innocently asked, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." The present tense nature of the participle "and said" (λέγουσα) suggests she probably made the statement more than one time, and the presence of the following coordination conjunction "and" (λέγουσα Καὶ σὺ ἦσθα μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου) before the personal pronoun "you" demonstrates her statement was definitive, not questioning, in nature.

Big, bold, powerful Peter replied in a way I'm sure took his breath away:

⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."

He, who said he'd never desert Christ; he, who brought a sword to take on as many armed soldiers as he could in the Garden of Gethsemane; he, who said he'd never deny his Lord;¹ he,

¹ Lexical meanings for the word "deny" according to Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature: aor. inf. ἀρνηθῆναι (Just., D. 69, 4) (Hom.+).

① **to refuse consent to someth., refuse, disdain** (Hes., Works 408; Appian, Syr. 5 §19; Artem. 1, 78 p. 72, 26; 5, 9; Diog. L. 2, 115; 6, 36; Jos., Ant. 4, 86; 5, 236, Vi. 222) w. inf. foll. (Hdt. 6, 13, 2; Wsd 12:27; 17:9) ἠρνήσατο λέγεσθαι υἱός *he refused to be known as the son* **Hb 11:24** (JFeather, ET 43, '32, 423–25).

② **to state that someth. is not true, deny** (Hippol., Ref. 6, 42, 1; opp. ὁμολογεῖν=admit, say 'yes', as Diog. L. 6, 40; Jos., Ant. 6, 151; Did., Gen. 176, 14) w. ὅτι foll.: ἄ. ὅτι Ἰησ. οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός **1J 2:22** (the neg. is redundant as Demosth. 9, 54 ἄ. ὡς οὐκ εἰσι τοιοῦτοι; Alciphron 4, 17, 4 v.1.). W. acc. τὶ *someth.* (Jos., Ant. 6, 151 τ. ἀμαρτίαν, Vi. 255) IMg 9:1. W. acc. and inf. foll. PtK 2 p. 14, 22. W. inf. foll. (Epict. 3, 24, 81; Wsd 16:16) ἠρνησάμην δεδωκέναι *I said that I had not given (it)* Hv 2, 4, 2. Abs. (SIG 780, 25; Gen 18:15) **Lk 8:45; J 1:20; Ac 4:16.**

③ **to disclaim association with a pers. or event, deny, repudiate, disown** (verbally or nonverbally) w. acc. *someone* (Appian, Bell. Civ. 2, 39 §154 ἀρνούμενοι τὸν Δύρραχον) or *someth.*, or abs., with obj. supplied fr. the context; usu. of backsliders.

ⓐ of repudiating Moses **Ac 7:35**

ⓑ of repudiating Christ ἄ. με ἔμπροσθεν τ. ἀνθρώπων **Mt 10:33a; Lk 12:9**; ἄ. (αὐτὸν) κατὰ πρόσωπον Πιλάτου **Ac 3:13**; cp. vs. **14**; ἄ. τὸν κύριον Hv 2, 2, 8; Hs 9, 26, 6; 9, 28, 8; Dg 7:7. τὸν Ἰησοῦν 2 Cl 17:7; cp. 3:1. Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν **Jd 4**. τὸν υἱόν **1J 2:23**. τὸν δεσπότην (s. below c) **2 Pt 2:1**; cp. ISm 5:1. Of Peter's denial (MGoguel, Did Peter Deny His Lord? HTR 25, '32, 1–27) **Mt 26:70, 72; Mk 14:68, 70; Lk 22:57; J 13:38; 18:25, 27**. ἄ. τὴν ζωὴν = τὸν Χριστόν Hv 2, 2, 7. Without obj. **2 Ti 2:12a**; Hv 2, 3, 4; Hs 9, 26, 5; 9, 28, 4 and 7; MPol 9:2.

ⓒ of repudiating God (Aesop, Fab. 323 P.=Babrius 152 Crus. τὸν πρότερόν σου δεσπότην [Apollo] ἠρνήσω) ἄ. θεὸν τοῖς ἔργοις *disown God by deeds* **Tit 1:16**. ἄ. τὸν πατέρα καὶ τ. υἱόν **1J 2:22**. μὴ θέλειν ἄ. θεόν Dg 10:7.

ⓓ of Christ's repudiation of pers. (cp. the Egypt. ins HTR 33, '40, 318 τοῦτον ἀπρηήσαντο θεοί) **Mt 10:33b; 2 Ti 2:12b. p 133**

ⓔ w. impers. obj. *refuse, reject, decline* someth. (Lycophron v. 348 γάμους=marriage; Himerius, Or. 18 [Ecl. 19], 2 the χάρις of a god, the gracious gift offered by the deity; 4 Macc 8:7; 10:15; Nägeli 23) ἄ. τὴν πίστιν *repudiate the (Christian) faith* **1 Ti 5:8; Rv 2:13**. τὸ ὄνομά μου **3:8**. τὸν νόμον Hs 8, 3, 7.

ⓕ of behavior that in effect repudiates one's standards for self-identity ἄ. ἐαυτὸν *be untrue to oneself* **2 Ti 2:13**.

ⓖ gener. ἄ. ποικίλαις ἀρνήσει *deny in many different ways* Hs 8, 8, 4.

who was known as “The Rock,” was brought down by a servant girl. His evasive denial matched her statement with an in-your-face emphasis in the Greek: Οὐκ οἶδα τί λέγεις. By placing the negative first in the clause, Peter underscored the “fact” he had absolutely no clue regarding what she just said. His slide into sin had started some time ago, and now as it heads to a culmination crash-point it, too, starts out slowly. Such is the nature of a moral failure. It creeps up on you slowly and then broadsides you in the most unassuming, unanticipated fashion.

Right now you might be very uncomfortable concerning what we are talking about. You either are now starting to connect the dots of your slow slide into an even greater sin, or you’ve just been broadsided by a “servant girl.” You’re stunned, you’re shocked, and you’re uneasy because you, as a believer, are, perhaps for the first time in a long time, hearing God speak to your cluttered conscience. This is good. Why? According to the Puritan Richard Sibbes, your conscience is ...

“... the accuser that lodges a complaint against us when we are guilty, and a defender to side with us in our innocence (Rom. 2:15). It acts as a witness, giving testimony for or against us (2 Cor. 1:12). It is the judge, condemning or vindicating us (1 Jn. 3:20-21). And it is the executioner smiting us with grief when our guilt is discovered (1 Sam. 24:5).²

God is speaking to you loud and clear through your conscience. Will you listen to Him? Those who listen pull out of the dangerous dive through confession (1 John 1:9). Those who don’t, crash and burn. Peter was of the latter group. He failed to listen to his conscience and to pay attention to all the warning signs he was heading from a slow slide from smaller sins into the pit of a greater sin.

For those who don’t listen and respond to the Spirit of God, the digression into deeper, darker sin is a given. We learn this much from studying Peter’s next verbal moves at the home of Caiaphas while they interrogated and tortured Christ.

You Will Encounter Your Sinful Self (Matthew 26:71-74)

Put differently, if you don’t respond to the promptings of the Spirit, if you don’t gain a true appraisal of your spiritual and/or personal weaknesses, you will participate in shocking sin and you will see just what you are carnally capable of. Consider what happened to Peter.

⁷¹ 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.”

④ **to refuse to pay any attention to, disregard, renounce** ἄ. ἐαυτόν *deny, disregard oneself* =act in a wholly selfless way **Lk 9:23** (s. ἀπαρνέομαι). ἄ. τὴν δύναμιν εὐσεβείας *deny the function of piety* (by contradictory conduct) **3:5**. τὴν ἀσεβειαν ἄ. *renounce impiety* **Tit 2:12**.—HRiesenfeld, The Mng. of the Verb ἀρνέσθαι: ConNeot 11, ’47, 207–19; CMasson, Le reniement de Pierre: RHPR 37, ’57, 24–35; MWilcox, NTS 17, ’70/71, 426–36; s. lit. s.v. ἀπαρνέομαι.—B. 1269; 1273. DELG. EDNT. M-M. TW. Spicq. Sv.¹

² Richard Sibbes, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in Alexander B. Grosarts, ed., *Works of Richard Sibbes*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981): 3:208.

Don't miss the import of the first clause, please. Peter left the bright, flickering light of the fire and retreated to the darker area of the covered gateway leading to the outside doorway.³ Instructive, isn't it? When we sin in the light, we typically and naturally pull away into the darkness to find cover for our sin. Can you relate?

Once again, a servant girl became his greatest spiritual threat with her definitive statement: "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth," (Οὗτος ἦν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου ... the singular demonstrative opening pronoun of her clause is placed in the emphatic position grammatically). Test number two. How would Peter, the self-acclaimed heroic disciple, fare? Read on and see:

⁷² And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."

He moved spiritually downward from saying, "I don't know what you are talking about," which was an outright lie, to perjuring himself by emphatically stating by an oath designed to bring divine judgment down upon himself: "I do not know the man."

Once again, he couldn't have spoken more definitively. The negative at the head of the sentence proves this grammatical observation, viz., Οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον. Further, Robertson's *Greek Word Pictures of the New Testament* argues, and probably rightly so, that the articular "the man" is a derogatory statement. Sad. Very sad. He who had been called personally by Jesus to be a fisher of men, he who had walked on the water with Jesus in a storm on the Sea of Galilee, he who had seen the glory of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, he who was the first disciple to openly confess Jesus as the long-awaited Christ, he who had been called the Rock by Christ all of a sudden had a complete memory loss. Why? Well, to side with Jesus might have cost him his life, or least a severe beating. For Peter it was far more logical to preserve his life and save his skin by denying any cognition of Jesus. What happened to the man who said he'd never desert his Lord, who promised to stay by His side unto death? He couldn't even stand up to two muscularly inferior servant girls. Tragic ... and his slide into deeper, darker sin was not over either. No, yet another step remained before he hit bottom.

Matthew tells us what happened next:

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."

According to Luke's account, this encounter occurred about an hour later (Luke 22:59). Galilean dialect was different insofar as they had problem pronouncing some of the Hebrew (or Aramaic) gutturals.

r	Resh is pronounced at the back of your throat in a high point.
u	Ayin is pronounced at the back of your throat ... as if you were clearing it. It occurs at a lower point.

³ Lenski, R. C. H., *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961): 1069-1070 states, "Peter waited long enough to have attention safely withdrawn from him and then quietly approached the πύλων, the long entryway that led out from the courtyard to the street through the front side of the building. Mark calls it the προαύλιον, "the vestibule" (M.-M. 537); it was not another courtyard in front of the palace. It is his evident intention to get away unobserved.

j	Chet sounds like the “ch” in Bach.
h	Hey sounds like a “hah” when you quickly exhale.
a	Aleph is pronounced like the first letter of “o” in “o-clock.”

Now you can see what people from Galilee had trouble with these letters. They are not easy to articulate, and if one couldn't properly pronounce them, as in Peter's case, it would be easy to identify this person as being from out of town.

The pressure finally built of so much in Peter's heart and mind, he finally just exploded all over these questioners:

⁷⁴ Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” And immediately a rooster crowed.

Guess he figured if he added some swear words ... a little profanity ... this would serve to make his lie that much more believable. No sooner did the perjurious words, coupled with profanity clear his lips, than a rooster crowed a second time, just as Jesus had prophesied (Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30, 72; Luke 22:61; John 13:38; 18:27). You know, if you have to resort the filthy language to buttress your point, your point is probably not worth buttressing.

Isn't this all so tragic? Out of the mouth of the lead disciple came not only denial of any knowledge of Jesus, but also profane, abusive, gutter words. Jesus was so right when He castigated the wicked Pharisees with this statement:

“You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speak out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34).

The godless garbage which filled Peter's mouth merely showed him the sin which lurked deep in his heart. Put him in this right scenario, the right kind of life test, and you'd see the things hidden in the darkness.

Who among us cannot relate? Who hasn't watched as your sin drug you to deeper levels of darkness, resulting in the vilest words coming from your mouth? Perhaps the vile verbiage came forth when you were confronted by your mother and father for a sin you were engaged in. Perhaps it happened when a godly person called you out regarding a sin you are flirting with. You know what I'm talking about. Given the right complex set of circumstances, the correct amount of adversity, the perfect dose of peer pressure and the next thing you know you aren't just denying Christ and your Christian walk, but you are substantiating your newfound premise with vulgarity. I've even seen the vulgarity on *Connection Cards* at church. Instead of reacting positively to the teaching of the Word, some anonymously write the most detestable things. How sad.

Peter no sooner uttered these wicked words than a lone rooster crowed in the distance, thereby substantiating the fact that Jesus knew Peter would crash and burn. I'm sure he never heard a rooster crow after this night than he couldn't help but think about his temporary denial of his Lord and Savior. There in that moment Peter was hit head-on with the fact that he, of all people, he the boaster, he the hero had just committed the most unspeakable sin of denying Jesus not once but three times in a row without even batting an eye.

Can you relate to Peter? Have you spiritually denied your Lord? Yes, you.

- You didn't defend Him when others put Him down in class.
- You chose not to say anything about him in a paper where you could have easily referred to Him and His teachings.
- You saw an open door with a friend in another faith, but you didn't chose to walk through it for fear of not knowing what to say.
- You didn't speak up at a family gathering when the non-Christian side of your lineage started in on the Christian side.
- You purposefully didn't correct an argumentative friend who mischaracterized Christ and the Bible. You chose to just let it go for the sake of peace.
- You didn't wear Christian emblems because you didn't want to offend anyone at the party.
- You've chosen a carnal lifestyle right now, one which runs counter to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.
- You didn't decide to go home after the first round of drinks while on a business trip with your team from work, and that second, third, and fourth round cost you dearly because you weren't thinking clearly.
- You've first flirted with an old flame through *Facebook*, then you got his cell phone number to see how he was doing, and now you're thinking about establishing a time to meet and catch up ... alone, and you're both married.
- You've gone from one affair to another and your Christian mate is none the wiser, at least that is what you think.
- You ... well, you can fill in the blank.

I'm sure some of you saints know exactly what I'm talking about. Some of you have crashed and burned like Peter did, and some of you realize now you are on the verge of a fiery flight. All of this spiritual teaching and truth logically leads to a final practical question: If I crash and burn like Peter, is God finished with me? Is my spiritual life over? Can I never move on and do greater things for God? Will He ever forgive me? Will others forgive me? The last verse answers these questions because it shows us that ...

You Will Encounter Your Steady Savior (Matthew 26:75)

You might need to read that point one more time. This time, let it sink deep into your scarred soul. It is built off the righteous rock of verse 75:

⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

At the precise moment of the cock crowing, Peter made the direct connection between the rooster and Christ's prophecy. It was one of those spiritual "a ha" moments, a time when God finally got his saint's direction attention, when the mind of the saint grasped the magnitude of what they just did, spiritually speaking.

In order to appreciate this part of the instructive narrative, we must read the parallel account in Luke:

⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22).

Follow the chronological order. Peter denied Christ for the third time. Immediately a rooster crowed for a second time. Peter recalled that Christ had prophesied this would happen after his third denial. Jesus, who was badly beaten at this point, looked directly at Peter. Peter, then, emotionally imploded, cried uncontrollably, and had no choice but to leave the area. Ever been that emotional over your sin?

What is most instructive here is the look of Jesus. Let us think deeply about this.

- This was the look of love from the God-man who should have been consumed with his current dangerous and deadly circumstance. Jesus, the True Shepherd, cared more about His chosen man than He did Himself at that precise moment. He cared enough to look at him, not to say, "I told you so," but to say, "I love you even though you just denied me three times." Listen carefully. Regardless of what you've done as a saint, Jesus still takes the time to look at you in love. He sees your sin, but He also sees your potential as His child. Peter knew the look he saw in that powerful moment. He'd seen it before as he sank in the water during the storm, as he boasted how many times he should forgive someone, as he had impulsively put his foot in his mouth on more than one occasion. Yes, ol' Peter knew that look. It was the look of love. Alfred Edersheim sums up this look most eloquently: "*His eyes spake His depths of Peters heart, and broke them open. They had pierced through all self-delusion, false shame, and fear: they had reached the man, the disciple, the lover of Jesus.*"⁴ The same Savior who looked at Peter is looking at you right now. It's the same loving eyes calling for you, the straying sheep, to come home, to come clean. Love truly is the jack-hammer capable of breaking through the most hardened carnal behavior in the life of a saint. Will you respond to the look of Christ?
- Peter was, in turn, looking for Christ. True, he denied Him three times, but the denials were of the mouth, not the heart. He followed Christ to the house of Annas and then to the house of Caiaphas because he loved Jesus. He stood around a hostile crowd warming themselves up around a fire in the hopes of getting a glance at the Savior. He, unlike Judas, wanted to see Jesus. Put differently, Peter placed himself in a strategic position where his eyes could connect with those of His Master. Yes, his denials were despicable; however, Peter was so near Christ that it was possible for Christ to look into his saint's

⁴ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1981): Book V, 564.

eyes to get at his heart. What does this tell you? It tells you that you must look to Jesus in your sinful situation. You must say, "Lord, I look into your eyes right now. I'm here in worship so that can happen. Thank you for looking lovingly at me, despite what I've done."

- When Jesus looks at you, his look is so powerful, so convicting, it results in a powerful, and frequently, emotional event in your life. Years of sin hardening the opening of the well of spiritual life in your life results, at the moment of confession, in a gushing forth of tears of bitterness mixed with great joy. Why? You weep because of the shame of your sin, but more importantly, *you weep because you are overcome with the fact that Jesus truly does desire to move you from the depths of sin to the heights of holiness.*

Take a look at Peter's life post-ascension of Jesus and post-Pentecost. Never again in his life did he deny His Lord. As a matter of fact, he went right back to the Temple mount in Jerusalem and boldly and courageously preached the gospel to those who had denied and crucified the Christ:

¹¹ While he [the healed lame man] was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. ¹² But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" ¹³ "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. ¹⁴ "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. ¹⁶ "And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. ¹⁷ "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. ¹⁸ "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. ²² "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED TO EVERYTHING He says to you. ²³ 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' ²⁴ "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. ²⁵ "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' ²⁶ "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3).

Sounds like a man who got right with God after a tremendous spiritual failure. Sounds like a man who learned that the Lord is full of grace and mercy toward His wayward sheep (James 5:11), and that when they do come home He can't wait to use them to accomplish much for Him.

And to think, some of Peter's greatest spiritual strides were made after one of his greatest spiritual falls. How did it all start? With one look of love.