

1. Failed Faith Fears Identifying With a Loser Christ
 - a. Peter is identified with Jesus by a servant girl
 - i. The accusation is one of identification with Jesus, "This man was with him!"
 1. The thing that Peter denies are not direct assaults upon Jesus, but rather direct assaults that he is identified *with* Jesus
 2. There is not even any indication that the servants in the courtyard see this identification as demonstrably bad, but merely that there is an identification with Jesus of any kind
 3. In fact, John signifies that this servant girl may have been the gatekeeper to the courtyard, and Peter had to be allowed in by her at the request of another disciple (most likely John) who knew the High Priest's family.
 - a. This recognition of the other disciple, and the consequent allowance of them into the courtyard indicates a predilection of respect
 - ii. The language also implies that she was staring at him, as if she was studying him, intently checking his features
 1. The drama is amped up a bit as Peter is trying not to be recognized as connected to Jesus, but he must stay warm, the firelight illuminates his face in flickering tones and this young girl is trying to make him out as an unusual guest in the courtyard fire of the High Priest
 2. Are there times in your life when you have tried to hide your identification with Jesus? With His teachings? With His claims?
 - iii. Luke is clearly connecting this denial statement of Peter with Jesus' earlier prophecy that Peter would deny him (v34) by using the word, "He denied it..."
 - b. Peter is identified with Jesus' people (second time)
 - i. The accuser (a man this time) makes a similar statement, "You, too, are one of them."
 1. "one of them"
 - ii. The accusation, which Peter denies, is not only that of being identified with Jesus, but also being identified with Jesus' disciples, i.e. the Church
 1. Thus, we see, that it is not only anger at Jesus but clearly fear of being known and recognized as among the group which follows Jesus because of the desperate moment at hand.
 - iii. Peter flatly denies being associated with the 12, most likely trying to distance himself from being on the Mount of Olives when Jesus was arrested, knowing that it was he who attacked with a weapon and could be justly and righteously brought inside for justice
 1. Are there times where we have been ashamed to be connected with the people of Jesus?
 2. There is an ease, in our day, to identify as "spiritual but not religious", when what we really mean is that we don't identify with the group of Christians
 - a. If you love Jesus, you will love His church, for it is His Bride.
 - b. It doesn't mean that you don't call one another to account when we may walk out of line with the gospel, but we hold *family* to account, and bear the name, "one of them with Him", with honor
 - c. Peter is identified as being constantly with Jesus (third time)
 - i. One gets the image of a progressive growth of murmuring around the fire and the courtyard - a discussion amongst the High Priest's household and servants of who this man is and a growing apprehension that he is, indeed, a follower of the criminal being deposed by the High Priest

- ii. This accuser spoke with the most certainty, "*Truly* this one *was being* with him"
 - 1. "was being" indicates a constancy, an ongoing relationship over time which Peter had with Jesus
 - 2. This accusation is that Peter was with Jesus for a long time and continued to follow Jesus even now
- iii. This accuser brought the most evidence: "for he is a Galilean"
 - 1. Peter's accent revealed his origin, and was a clear indicator that he didn't belong in the Courtyard, but was a friend of the Galilean Jesus.
- iv. Peter responds by claiming with the greatest strength yet, "I have not known whom you say!"
 - 1. The verb, "to know", here is in the perfect tense, indicating that Peter is not merely claiming that he does not currently know this Jesus, but that he has NEVER known this Jesus of whom they speak!
 - a. The pronoun translated "what" in the English can also be translated "whom" and is the direct object (accusative) of the verb "have not known" (perfect).
 - b. Trans: "Man, I have not known whom you say [I have known]."
 - 2. This is the end of Peter's denial: He claims to have never identified with Jesus, never to know Him, and not currently to have any relationship with Him at all

2. Faithlessness is a Slow Leak Towards Self-Reliance

a. Peter followed "at a distance."

- i. He followed. – this is important to note. He is one of only two mentioned in the gospels who followed.
- ii. Peter's failure wasn't sudden, but a slow slide of believing that his ascertaining of truth and virtue superseded Jesus' words of truth and virtue
 - 1. He was certain of his own conviction more than he was certain of Jesus' words
 - a. "You will deny Me...No, I won't"
 - 2. He was certain of his own plans
 - a. Swinging the sword at Jesus' arrest rather than awaiting Jesus' words
 - 3. He was certain that victory meant a powerful overtaking of the authorities
 - a. When Jesus has *said* that He must be handed over and killed in order to rise again.
- iii. What words of Jesus do we struggle to accept as true when compared to our own ascertaining of wisdom or experience?
 - 1. Sexuality?
 - 2. Social justice?
 - 3. Forgiveness and love for enemies?
- iv. How many of our plans seem good to us, capable of saving us, like better options than the difficult path to a wicked place (even though Jesus has spoken)?

b. But why did Peter's faith fail?

- i. He wasn't following bravely, as if he was standing with Jesus "to prison or to death" as it were. Thus, though he had promised never to disown Jesus, he is faltering here, being afraid of standing with Jesus, but still clinging to some affection for Jesus.
 - 1. This type of behavior, waiting at the door to be let in by the gatekeeper, indicates that Peter didn't lack courage, he was daring to take a risk to be

noticed, recognized, and apprehended as a follower of the arrested Jesus and as the one who took off Malchus' ear

2. Thus, Peter is vacillating between courage and fear, anger and sorrow, confusion and discovery.
- ii. Peter may have been less fearful than angry at Jesus. Jesus seemed set on getting arrested and killed. Peter had tried to stop him by word and by deed (sword), yet Jesus reprimanded him. Thus, he may be angry that Jesus was being foolish.
 1. Is this what he meant by, "I don't know the man!" - he thought he had known Jesus, but these recent behaviors by Jesus were inexplicable, and it was as if he didn't even know Jesus in his angry confusion?
 2. Have you ever thought that Jesus' words were too "old-fashioned" or "don't work today"?
 3. Have you ever tried to justify an alternate interpretation of the Scriptures because you felt that it just simply couldn't apply to you?
 - a. The justification of sin because the Scriptures slay my very soul, showing me that I am broken at the very core of my being, is the first step in the slow slide to failing faith
 - b. It is a rejection of Jesus' words and an affirmation of my own which leads one to eventually declare, "I don't even know *that* man!"
- iii. Peter still cares for Jesus greatly, thus wants to see what happens, but he is also vacillating because Jesus is not the man that he wanted him to be and is not saying and doing the things that he wants him to do. He is caught in a tortuous position of confusion and failing faith..
- iv. He loves Jesus, remembering all of Jesus' actions and words that were shown towards him over the past three years. Yet, whom did he love more?
 1. He was the bravest of all the disciples, the most loving of all the disciples, but his love for Jesus was yet subsistent to his love for his own life.
 2. All the earlier words, spoken with rash bravado but a few hours before, have been swallowed up by the reality of the cost of trusting Jesus.
- c. Faith fails because we have slowly ceased to trust completely in Jesus' words and have begun to trust our own hearts and our own wisdom, judging His words with our own desires.

3. Love is the Root of Faith and the Root of Faithlessness

- a. Peter's faith failed because he loved...himself more than Jesus.
- b. When Jesus told him that this propensity, actually the surety of this, was in his heart, Peter refused to believe it
 - i. Luke 22:31-34
 - ii. Note the relationship Jesus makes
 1. "I have prayed that your faith would not fail"
 2. and "you will deny me three times"
 3. and "when you return"
 - iii. Jesus is telling Peter that his faith would fail (*when you return*), and that this failure of faith would be a repeated denial of knowing Jesus at all. Thus, the denial of Jesus by Peter was a failure of faith, i.e. faithlessness
 - iv. Now, we must be careful here that we do not equate a failure of faith in Jesus, a denial of Him, with abject condemnation, or eternal faithlessness.
 1. Jesus gives eternal life and loses none of his sheep (John 10:28)

- c. Peter's faith failed, but he was not lost, for Jesus told him, "When you return" indicating that Peter would return to trusting in Jesus, to a lifestyle of not denying that He knows and follows and worships Jesus. Though he failed, he was not lost, because he returned.
 - i. In the same manner, our faithless moments, when we love ourselves more than Christ, are not absolute indicators of the *condition* of being lost. However, if we don't return, it surely is. Yet, the question is one of love, of being identified with Jesus even when the chips are down: do I love my own life more than Him?
 - 1. Do I love my reputation more than him? My money more than him? My comforts more than him? My sexual life more than him? My pleasure more than him? My family's appreciation more than him?
 - 2. If you have fallen away in these areas, return! Return to Him! Repent through bitter tears if necessary, but return to him! Jump out of the boat of your normal life, your typical career, your usual things, and swim to him in joy.
- d. Seeing Jesus Reveals Our Weakness and His Strength
 - i. Peter was still pursuing Jesus (something Judas didn't do)!
 - 1. Though it was "at a distance" he was still pursuing Jesus
 - 2. Yet, he faltered and failed to love Jesus more than himself, and his wickedness was revealed when his eyes met the eyes of the mocked and beaten Christ.
 - ii. When he saw Jesus, really saw Him, it brought back to his soul that Jesus knows him and loved him, and this truth crumpled his soul
 - 1. Sometimes mercy is more embarrassing than justice because it strips you of any honor or power or self-delusion of grandeur and strength
 - 2. The hardened heart denies, in the face of kindness, but the softened and humbled heart crumbles in the face of kindness
 - iii. Though Peter ran away, weeping bitterly over his hardened heart, he found room for repentance when Jesus rose again – he *raced* John to the tomb

Conclusion:

In John 20 we are shown that Jesus restores Peter with three questions and three commands: "Do you love Me more than anything else?" "Feed my sheep." To all who have strayed from trusting in Jesus in some manner, loving your comforts, your pleasures, your respect/honor, more than you have entrusted yourself to His words, let the gaze of Christ Jesus reveal the depth of your wickedness and denial. The one who gave Himself for you, to be beaten and mocked and spit upon, to be shamed and stripped naked and unjustly executed, hanging for hours from nails through his ankles and wrists in plain sight for all to see and shake their heads. That one we have denied. The one who was robed in the stars and enthroned on constellations, who stretched out the heavens like a blanket and shook out the planets like dust, who commanded millions upon millions of heavenly servants, stooped infinitely low from such an infinitely glorious throne to hang upon that tree...that you might be rescued from your foolish treachery...and we denied knowing him out of fear of being identified with him. They mocked us, they threatened us, and we failed. Bitter weeping is appropriate...but not the end of the story.

To those who will close to Him again, risen from the dead, made alive by God's sovereign power and having fixed our eyes upon Him hear His voice, "When you return..." be assured that all who return to Christ Jesus with faith, though it be as feeble and delicate as a mustard seed, if it would grasp upon Jesus and entrust itself to His word will find a Savior with restorative graces. "Do you love me more than honor? Do you love me more than gold? Do you love me more than comforts? Do you love me more than these things?" Then compassionate and committed Jesus will lift your head and give you honor more than these, grant you an inheritance among His people, comfort your sorrowed heart with His love, and give to you the honor of being an entrusted emissary for His great name. Return to Him with all your heart for He is gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in covenanting love.