



# CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

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## **Redeeming Failure**

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We are going to continue to worship our God, only this time, instead of us doing all the talking and singing, God is going to do all the talking. We're going to worship under the covering, authority, and power of God's very Word that he has spoken, so I'm going to ask you to get your Bibles open to Mark, chapter 14.

While you're doing that, I want you to imagine for a moment that all of your most humiliating failures, all of your poor choices and your sins were actually recorded in a book and published every year. Not only are your most epic fails in your faith and life published in a book every year, but that book is the number-one-selling book in all the world every year. Imagine that. That's a horrifying thought, isn't it?

One of the things I admire and appreciate about the Bible is its transparency. The Bible never attempts to cover up the failures of God's people. We see in our Bibles some of their highest achievements of faith along with some of their greatest struggles and moral failures.

We remember Abraham and Sarah's doubt. We know of Moses' insecurity and Jacob's deception. We know of David's adultery and Solomon's insatiable lust. We know of James' and John's selfish ambition. We know of Elisha's debilitating anxiety. We know of Jonah's disobedience, and that is just to name a few.

Today, we're going to look together at the beloved apostle Peter. Like an open book, we're acquainted with this fisherman-turned-apostle and pillar of the first-century church. We know of the apostle Peter, but as most of us know, Peter had no shortage of humiliating low points for us to learn from. Do you remember in the garden? We just read this a few weeks ago. They came in to ambush Jesus and Peter whips out a sword and just chops off a guy's ear right in front of Jesus.

Do you remember when Peter confronted Jesus? Jesus tells them he's going to die and Peter says, "Oh, no, you're not. Not while you're on my watch." Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan." Do you remember after the resurrection and the birth of the first-century church? Peter is found playing favorites with the Jewish converts and Paul the apostle has to publicly rebuke him.

Maybe up on the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain and there are Moses and Elijah, appeared in front of them, alive. Peter goes, "Hey, Jesus! Do you want me to set some tents up for Moses and Elijah and you?" like he's going to somehow protect the spirit bodies of Moses and Elijah.

I'm sure I'm overlooking a few more of Peter's failures we have in our Bibles, but the one we're looking at today stands above all of these. It all started right after the apostles were unknowingly eating their Last Supper with Jesus. Jesus warns them one last time how his final hours on earth were about to unfold, to which Peter really steps in it this time. I mean, this is the epic fail all of us are familiar with and, I believe, all of us can still learn from. So, with your Bibles open to Mark 14, let's stand now for the reading of God's Word. Let's pick it up in verse 26.

**"And when they had sung a hymn..."** This is right after they shared the Last Supper together. **"...they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away, for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'"** Jesus is quoting the prophet Zechariah, chapter 13, right there, prophesying about what's about to happen to him. Verse 28:

**"But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.' Peter said to him, 'Even though they all fall away, I will not.' And Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.' But he said emphatically, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And they all said the same."**

Now, I want you to scoot down to verse 53. Jesus has been arrested by the mob. He has been captured and taken to the Jewish leaders. We talked about that last week. In verses 53 and 54, we saw, **"And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire."** Now, scoot down to verse 66. This is a few hours after what we just read. Jesus is being mugged and beaten by this mob of Jewish leaders.

**"And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you mean.' And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them.' But again he denied it."**

**And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, 'Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.' But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know this man of whom you speak.' And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.' And he broke down and wept."**

Father, it is with great expectation that we come to your Word now and pray that you will speak to our hearts what we need to learn from Peter. God, I pray for those who are amongst us right now who are somehow stuck in their past. There are failures in their lives, God, that they cannot seem to break free from. I pray that today, God, they will find new grace.

God, I pray for those who are standing in our midst who are living a lifestyle of denial. God, they're following at a distance. I pray that today you would draw them near through repentance and forgiveness. God, I pray for those who are fearful, who are afraid to declare their allegiance for whatever reason. God, may today be the day they find courage. Lord, I pray you would have your way in all of our hearts. In Christ's name, amen.

I want to take a quick chronological run-through of what we just read, and then I want to share some points of application I think will be very helpful for us. Like I said, Jesus has been betrayed by Judas. He has been ambushed by this mob in the garden. We pick it up in verse 54. Peter is following Jesus, who has been dragged along by this mob. He's following Jesus, it says in verse 54, at a distance. This is the very one who said, in verse 29, "Even if all my fellow disciples fall away, I will not."

Now, we find him, virtually minutes later, afraid and unsure, and he lags way behind. You see, in the safety of the upper room or the company of Jesus and his fellow disciples, Peter is confident to say what he said. "I won't do that, Jesus." Yet out in the world, where he's amongst the haters of Jesus, his fragile faith is exposed.

As I'm studying this week, I just thought, as a side note for all of us who love Jesus, let's be sure to admit our spirituality and faithfulness cannot be measured or judged in this room in this place today alone. I think it's important for us who love Jesus to confess today that this is not where our faithfulness is measured, okay? Let's make sure we don't make that mistake.

In verse 55, Peter sits down amongst part of this mob that just stormed the garden. They've dragged Jesus into a mugging. We find Peter just trying to blend in with the enemies of Jesus, but the enemy isn't going to let him.

I think, at this point, as Peter is sitting around this fire, he's struggling. He loved Jesus. Jesus was the most amazing person he ever met. Jesus literally transformed and changed his life. Yet Peter is sitting there, I'm sure, thinking, whether Jesus lives or dies, Peter still has to live with these people. So, he's trying to blend in with the haters of Jesus.

Once again, as I'm thinking through this passage, Psalm 1 comes exploding into my mind. Do you remember when David wrote, "**Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers...**"? There was Peter, amongst the scoffers, the wicked, the sinners. Before he could realize what he had gotten himself into, the light from the fire shines on his weathered fisherman's face, and they begin to question his loyalty to Jesus.

We read, in verses 66-70, three different times, these people say, "You are one of his followers!" and three times, he denies. Each time, his denial gets a little easier. Each time, if you notice, by the end, it gets more aggressive. When the heat really got turned up, Peter panicked. Then, we read in verse 68 and 72, the rooster crows two different times, just like Jesus said it would in verse 30.

That rooster must have sounded like a loud siren. It must have felt like bright lights were going off. I'm wondering if that rooster crow must have been deafening in Peter's ears. Did you notice in verse 72 that Peter breaks down and weeps? That word there, for *wept*, is an agonizing, sorrowful cry, the kind of cry when you realize how bad you've hurt someone and you just can't take it back.

Now, to make matters even worse, when you read the gospel of Luke, in Luke's recording of this scene, Luke records that when the rooster crowed the second time, Peter looked up and saw Jesus across the courtyard, staring right at him. Can you imagine that moment? I don't see Jesus with his arms crossed, shaking his head, thinking, "Ugh. I had so much hope for this guy. Gosh. He has let me down so many times." I don't see that version of Jesus anywhere in Scripture, but especially in this moment.

No, I imagine our Savior filled with compassion, and without words, Jesus saying, "Peter, I know you're embarrassed right now. I know you feel like a failure. I know if you could take it back, you would, but you can't. It's too late." I believe when Peter looked up and saw Jesus staring at him right after that rooster crowed the second time, Jesus sensed his regret. I think Jesus knows the remorse and humiliation of that great fisherman.

If Jesus were able to go over to comfort him, he would have, but that would have just been a temporary comfort. You see, what Jesus is about to go through for Peter and for all of us will be the source of our comfort through many more of our failures and struggles forever and ever. The love of Jesus is our source of strength in the face of failure. So, what can we learn? What's the redeeming value of an epic failure of faith in our lives? I want to begin with the most obvious application. You probably already see it for yourself.

1. *We need to avoid spiritual pride.* We need to make sure we don't overestimate our ability to resist temptation. In verse 30, you remember, Peter tells Jesus, "If I must die with you, I won't deny you. I won't fall away like all the rest of these guys." I believe Peter was sincere. I think he believed he was strong enough to resist denying Jesus, even if it meant his own death.

The good news is that Peter eventually got there. Tradition tells us he died as a martyr and when they were about to kill him, he asked to be crucified upside down because he believed he was unworthy to die the same way his Lord and Savior died.

For us, the application is clear in Romans, chapter 12, verse 3. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." Don't think too highly of yourself. Proverbs 18:12 says, **"Before his downfall a man's heart is proud..."**

So, the question is...*How can we know spiritual pride is beginning to creep into our hearts?* What are the signs? How does it show up in our lives when we start to maybe get a little too much confidence that we are ready to take on the world of Jesus-haters? I think these are some things we need to be aware of.

A. *We spend less and less time in personal devotion and prayer.* It's the first sign something isn't right with our relationship with Jesus. Like Peter, we find ourselves trying to follow Jesus at a distance. The way we know that's starting to happen is our Bible is starting to collect some dust. Our prayers are starting to sound pretty shallow and hollow.

There's a distance between us and Jesus and there's a lack of closeness and intimacy. That's the sign that maybe there's a little bit of pride creeping into our heart. Jesus encourages us though, in John 15. He says, "**I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**"

Again, I was studying this week, and this event in my life popped into my head. I hadn't thought about this for 10 years, because I think it was that long ago when it happened. I don't know if any of you have been snowmobiling, and if you have, I don't know how many of you have been snowmobiling and have ever been caught in a whiteout.

It was getting late and getting dark and it was a complete whiteout. The clouds, fog, and mist had come into the mountain trails we were on and it was getting pretty frightening. In those moments, you are completely dependent on the taillights of the sled in front of you. You have to stay close to each other.

You have to go slow, because in a whiteout, there's no depth perception. It's like being in a complete pitch-black dark situation, only it's white. You can't see anything, only it's white. Somehow, some way, I lost track of the taillight in front of me and I was stuck. I had no idea. If you don't follow the person in front of you, it's the only way that keeps you from driving your sled right over a cliff, into the side of a mountain, or into real danger.

I don't know what happened. I don't know if I was going too slow. I don't know. They made a turn. I lost them and I had to stop dead in my tracks. I literally had to just pray that they would realize it. I was the last one in the line and I had to pray they would realize I wasn't back there. They did eventually turn around and they came and found me. Those few minutes felt like hours. I was dead in the snow.

I was thinking this week, Jesus said, "I have come into the world as the light. Follow me. Follow me close." One of the ways we could look in the mirror to see if there's some spiritual pride is to evaluate how close we are trying to follow Jesus at the moment.

B. *We spend less and less time with God's people.* It comes out in ways like this. "I can do this Christian life just fine. I don't really need the encouragement, wise counsel, accountability, or love of my fellow believers." So we start finding that time at church, going to church, or in a

small group or Life Group gets less and less consistent. All of a sudden we're just perfectly fine thinking, "You know what? I don't need any of you. I can do this. It's me and God. We're like *this*." That's a sure bet that you are starting to get way too proud.

C. *We gradually spend more and more time hanging out with unbelievers.* I'm not just talking about unbelievers in general, because we are supposed to hang out with people who don't know Jesus. That's our mission. That's our love for the world. I get that. I'm not talking about in general. I'm talking about hanging out more and more with unbelievers, knowing they have questionable character and motives, and we're willing to ignore the fact that they are beginning to influence us away from the things of God.

Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." I think the point to remember is that we are much more dependent on the Holy Spirit than we think we are. Remember, we couldn't save ourselves from the penalty of sin. Jesus had to save us from the wrath, judgment, and condemnation of God.

He had to save us by dying in our place, paying the penalty, taking the punishment our sin deserves. Just as much as we could not save ourselves from the penalty of sin, we also cannot save ourselves from the power of sin in this world. We need to depend on the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that lives in us. Many failures in the Christian life can be traced back to spiritual pride and laziness.

2. *Listen to God's warnings.* Don't ignore them. God's Word is filled with his promises and we love the promises of God, but let's not forget that some of God's promises are actual warnings as well. In verse 30, Jesus warned Peter, "You're going to do this." Peter ignored the warning. God warns us that when we do certain things or don't do certain things, there will be consequences.

For instance, God's Word warns us, "Warning: Keep bad company. Promise: It will corrupt your good morals. Warning: Love money too much. Promise: You're going to experience grief of all kinds. Warning: Gossip about people. Promise: You will lose your reputation and possibly your friends forever.

Warning: Spare the rod of discipline. Promise: Your kids will bring shame to you. Warning: Hold a grudge, refuse to forgive. Promise: Become bitter and ruin your spiritual life. Warning: Reject Jesus. Promise: Face the judgment and wrath of God without hope." Psalm 19, verses 8 and 11, says, "**...the precepts of the Lord are right...by them is your servant warned...**"

I guess I would have to ask right now... I wonder if there are any of you who are ignoring God's warnings right now. You're treacherously close to feeling the pain of his promised consequences. Oh, how I hope you will let Peter's story draw you back to the safety of God's precepts, commands, warnings, and promises. Listen to God's warnings.

3. *Declare your allegiance.* I honestly believe... I'm going to ask Peter this. I have a whole list of questions to ask him. When I see Peter in heaven, I'm going to ask him, "If you had a do-over, if you could go back and re-do that scene right there, what would you do?" I think Peter would say,

"I would say yes to the first girl who asked me if I was a follower of Jesus." I think he would just, right up front, identify himself with an honest, "Yes."

The lesson I think Peter would say to us today is to not hide your Christian identity, because the longer you wait the easier it gets to say nothing and the easier it gets to even deny Jesus. So, cutting the cord with our past is easiest right up front. The problem, I think, in the church is that there are too many Christians today who are members of the WPP, the Witness Protection Program. You see, while our salvation is really personal, it was never, ever intended to be private.

Jesus said, "...let your light shine bright before men..." Romans 10 says those who trust in him will never be put to shame. I believe, biblically speaking, the Christian coming-out party is our baptism. See, at our baptism is when we become totally known as followers of Jesus. I know some of you sitting here right now love Jesus but you've never been baptized. You've never obeyed the very first command of being a disciple of Jesus. I would encourage you that you use this opportunity today to get that right.

Others have been undercover Christians for too long, and I want to encourage you to fearlessly start letting people know who you are. I don't mean acting obnoxious, silly, and ridiculous, but taking the opportunities as they arise to be able to say, "I don't think like that anymore. That's not my priority in life. I love someone more than I even love that," whatever *that* is.

4. *Understand the heart of our Savior.* This is where I think the deepest part of this failure of Peter affects our lives. Just like he did to Peter, I believe Jesus looks right at us as his followers when we fail in our sin. I don't think Jesus looks at us with condemnation, but with love and compassion. I think this is hard for some of you to convince yourself of.

I don't think Jesus looks at us when we sin with his arms crossed, just saying, "Ugh. I had so much hope for her. Man..." As silly as I might be appearing to you right now, I know many of you subconsciously think that's what Jesus does every time you sin. I don't believe that's a biblical view of Jesus.

Jesus says to all of us, "I understand." Jesus knows how many temptations we face every day. He has known since before time began. Jesus has seen it all, and he has felt the crushing weight of the world's rebellion and wickedness against him and his Father. Jesus would say to you and me, "I'm on your side. I'm not the enemy." What is the heart of Jesus when we sin?

A. *Jesus is not surprised when we sin.* He knows our sanctification is a progressive process. He knows we are being made new and being transformed, slowly and surely, into the image of himself. He promises that when we're truthful about our sin and we repent of it and confess it, we can find forgiveness.

That's the great promise in 1 John 1. "**If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**" Let that promise soak into your soul! This shows us

that being dishonest, prideful, or in denial about our sin or blaming others for our sin never brings us the freedom from our guilt and shame that we long for. Shame will always drive us to hide. It convinces us that we can't truly be forgiven or made clean.

I want you to hear the epic application of 1 John 1, which is that the way back to Jesus is not more effort to cover up my shame or guilt, or to make more effort to make myself worthy of his acceptance again. The epic promise in this passage is that the gospel of grace is about trusting what *he* has done to make us worthy of his acceptance. It's not about what we can do over and over to keep trying to make ourselves worthy. He's not surprised when we sin.

B. *Our failure does not have to be final.* Peter's story isn't over in Mark, chapter 14. What happens to Peter after the crucifixion and after the resurrection confirms how much Peter loves him. I want you to turn to John, chapter 21. This is after the resurrection. We know Jesus appeared to the disciples. We can see here that when he did, he took a little walk with Peter. He pulls him aside. I picture Jesus with his arm around his shoulder, talking to him. Pick it up in verse 15 of John, chapter 21.

**"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him 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 everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me.'"**

What a dramatic and glorious picture of the gospel! It doesn't end with a weeping fisherman in his shame, the shame that relentlessly whispers to all of us that no matter what we do, we'll never find forgiveness. Shame always tries to convince us that we will be defined by what we did or what someone did to us. Shame wants us desperately performing for acceptance that we really don't believe we deserve, but the grace of Jesus says, "There's nothing you can do to make me love you less and there's nothing you can do to make me love you more."

Three times, Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Do you think that was an accident? No way. Three times, Jesus reminded Peter of his purpose. It's like Jesus was saying to Peter, "My purpose for you in your life is not changed one iota by your sin or by those who have sinned against you. My purpose for your life stands because my grace in your life cleanses you, changes you, and makes you acceptable to me. Follow me."

Some of you may be, right now, unnecessarily stuck in your shame and guilt from the past. You have been stuck with your past defining you, either because of your epic failure of faith and sin



or because of someone else's sin against you. You're sitting here right now, and it has been years, and you're still feeling that definition of your life being declared back then. You need a fresh, biblical view of the heart of your Savior, Jesus.

I think you need to hear Jesus asking you, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" If you answer that question by saying, "Yes," I want you to hear Jesus saying to you, "Then let me love you! Let me love you! You're not defined by that. Your purpose is not limited by that. You are covered in my grace."

Others of you need to repent. You're a little too proud. You're following Jesus at a distance. There's less and less time with God and his people. You're pretending like you're just fine and you know you're not close to the Lord at all. I'm not saying you hate him. I'm not saying you're an atheist or you're denying him in every step of your day. I'm just saying some of you know you have drifted away from the Lord.

You're here today, praise God. This may be why he wants you here. He's saying to you, "Listen. You're too far away. You need to come closer." Today is the day for you to say, "Okay. I'm done pretending like Jesus and I are like *this* when he knows I'm not and I know I'm not and probably everyone around me knows I'm not."

I think, finally, there are some of you who just need to declare your allegiance. Some of you need to get baptized. Stop putting that off. Delayed obedience is disobedient. Some of you just need to look for opportunities to be honest and declare who it is you follow most. For some reason, God loves to give us opportunities to do that, doesn't he? To be able to say, "You know what? That part of my life is in the past. I don't do that anymore. Why? Well, because Jesus is my Lord and Savior." I'm going to ask you to bow your heads for a minute.

Father in heaven, I began this message by asking you, God, to accomplish what you needed to accomplish in our hearts. I end this message by thanking you for allowing the failures of Peter, your precious servant, to be recorded in your Word. I pray, God, that none of us will leave here unchanged today and I pray that all of us would leave here with a greater view of your love and your grace that takes away our shame and our guilt, restores our purpose, and continues to call us close. We love you so much. In the name of Jesus, amen.

These people are standing up here right now for those of you who honestly and sincerely want to say, "Okay, hey, I need to get baptized. What do I do next?" They're also up here for some of you who want to say, "God has been way too far back in my rearview mirror. There's too much distance. I want to repent of that. I want to change that. Pray with me." I hope you'll allow them to do that. That would be our joy. God bless you. I look forward to being with you next week. Bring your Bibles with you.