



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“The Road to Gethsemane” Mark 14:32–42

This morning, I want you to take your copy of God’s Word and be turning with me once again to the Gospel of Mark, if you haven’t already, Mark chapter 14. That’s where we’ve been for the last several, several months, and this morning we come to verses 27 through 31. I’ve entitled this section of Scripture, a brief section of Scripture, and the title of this sermon simply this: “The Road to Gethsemane.” Please stand in honor of the reading of God’s Word, just a few verses, verse 27 through verse 31:

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.’ 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.

Thus ends the reading of God’s Holy Word. Please be seated, and let’s ask the Lord for His help as we look at this text together.

Our Father, as Your people, we gather in the name Christ so that through Christ we may worship You, our triune God. We ask that this morning we may hear the Shepherd’s voice and follow the Shepherd’s path and trust the Shepherd’s heart, for You are our God and we are Your people, the sheep of Your pasture. So, we ask Lord, that You would bless Your flock of worshipers this morning to understand Your Word, to guard our hearts from failure, from sin, temptation, Lord, that we might be sanctified, holy vessels that are useful for You, our Master. We pray these things in Jesus’ name, we ask it. Amen.

Well, in the verses that I read to you, verses 27 through 31, it comes on the heels of Jesus celebrating the Passover with the disciples in the upper room. And with the close of this Passover celebration, Jesus really begins walking the last stretch of road leading to the end of His earthly life, the road to Gethsemane. Jesus, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, who would undergo the severe anguish in the garden of Gethsemane, a garden of grief, as it were, at the prospect of being alienated by His Father and abandoned by the disciples. This spotless Lamb of God, as Peter would later call Him in His epistle, would be crushed under the divine wrath of God in order to bear the iniquities of His people, spilling His precious blood. Isaiah the prophet said in Isaiah chapter 53 that, “*Yet [this] was the will of the LORD to crush him...when his soul makes an offering for [sin].*” Jesus understood that. The one who just earlier refused to drink the fourth and final cup of the Passover, we saw that in verse 25: “*Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of*

the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” This Jesus, the one who refused to drink the fourth and final cup, would now willingly drink the cup of God’s judgment down to the last dregs. Earlier, Jesus had told James and John—remember when they asked Jesus through the efforts of their mother if they could have those seats of prominence in the kingdom? Jesus said, “*You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?*” A little further in the garden, if you look with me at verse 36, Jesus cried out “*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*” And then later in the garden, you remember that Jesus told Peter “*Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?*” Jesus drank the agony, the bitter agony of the reality of the Father’s wrath being poured out upon Him here in the garden of Gethsemane. But here they are on their way to the garden, a garden that is believed to have had an oil press operative in Jesus’ day. How fitting, because Jesus would experience the pressing, overwhelming, crushing weight of anxiety, the looming reality of the Father’s crushing judgment upon His head to secure salvation for sinners. That’s where we find ourselves in the steps of Jesus as He walks toward the cross.

Now, verse 26 told us that they had left the Passover after singing a hymn, and “*they went out to the Mount of Olives.*” They would have sung the traditional Hallel psalms, Psalm 116, 117, and 118, and Jesus would have left with the eleven, leaving now Jerusalem, crossing the Kidron Valley, heading to the Mount of Olives. They would have left through the eastern gate in Jerusalem, and on this night, they wouldn’t have gone all the way back to Bethany as in previous nights. They would camp out, as it were, in this garden. Jesus Himself would not do any sleeping, but He would be doing a lot of praying. Jesus is on His way there. The last stretch of Jesus’ journey leading to His arrest, and this very road, this very path would also be traveled along by Judas Iscariot. He had been earlier dismissed from the company of Jesus and the disciples. He was on his way to get the temple police, and he would be following on Jesus’ trail like a bloodhound after a criminal to betray our Lord. It said that during the Passover, the water in the little brook that was in the Kidron Valley that you had to cross to get to the Mount of Olives was mixed with blood from all the Passover lambs that had been slain, really flowing down the temple mount into that little brook, a fitting reminder to Christ of His own shed blood, and certainly that was on His mind as He walked with the disciples to the garden.

But it is amazing as we read these verses that Jesus is calm in the face of such intense pressure, the greatest pressure anyone had ever experienced in the history of the world. That Passover meal had lasted a few hours, beginning at sunset, six o’clock on Thursday, going until about midnight, and in these dark hours, as Jesus walked to Gethsemane, He was amazingly filled with the light of hope and trust in His Father’s will. He was, by the way, walking the same path that David had walked one thousand years earlier, barefoot and weeping as David fled from his own son, Absalom, who had betrayed him. Jesus following that same path, but Jesus wasn’t fleeing Judas. Jesus wasn’t running from the cross. Instead, we see a Jesus ready with full faith to embrace the reality of His betrayal and His arrest. Like a man, Jesus walked, like no other man could do. And on His way, in spite of the prediction that I just read to you from verse 27 that all of the disciples—not just Judas—would abandon Jesus, Jesus has strength. Against the black backdrop of judgment and failure and betrayal, Jesus is faithful in His endurance to the cross. We witness here the strength of Jesus, the resolve of His character in contrast to the weakness, the weak faith, of the disciples. Surely, Hebrews 12:2 was true, that “*for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross.*” Jesus endured and faced the greatest trial that any human being would ever face in the cross. And in light

of that, how did Jesus respond in the face of it all, the seeming defeat that the cross would bring, the impending doom of the Father’s wrath, the abandonment of His own disciples?

Well, in these verses, these brief verses, verse 27 through verse 31, we see Jesus exhibit grace under pressure. He exhibits grace under pressure. His glorious character as the obedient sin-bearer for our iniquities, for our sins is on full display in three encouraging ways. First of all, Jesus exhibits faith, faith in the face of defeat; secondly, hope, hope in the face of despair; and third, truth, truth in the face of denial. And I trust this will encourage our hearts as we remember Christ who endured the wrath of Almighty God to redeem us from our sins.

First of all then, I want you to notice with me that Jesus exhibited, as we see in verse 27, faith, faith in the face of defeat. Jesus doesn’t lose faith in the sovereignty of the Father, even though He knows the disciple are going to fail Him. Notice verse 27, as they are walking, Jesus said to the disciples, “*You will all fall away, for it is written,*” quoting from Zechariah 13:7, “*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*” This is the unwavering trust that Jesus had in the Scriptures, in the plan of God, that it would all be worked out in spite of the unbearable reality that not just Judas would abandon Him, but also the other eleven disciples, and you must ask yourself the question, “How in the world could Jesus have such faith in the midst of the tragic moment of gross sin of the disciples?” Well, first of all, Jesus understood the Scriptures and Jesus knew the Scriptures, and Jesus understood the nature of salvation—this very simple point that salvation is not contingent upon our failings, but upon His success. In other words, securing salvation from Jesus’ vantage point, and from our vantage point, it should be not contingent upon the disciples’ failure on the way to the cross but on Jesus’ success at the cross. And just as Jesus’ faith was not shaken when He knew and predicted Judas’ betrayal, so too His faith isn’t shaken when He predicts the falling away of the other eleven.

You remember back in verse 21 in the upper room—look at it. Jesus said, “*For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.*” Jesus is unshaken in His faith, His confidence, His trust in the prophetic Scriptures that the plan of the Father will be worked out, even though Judas would betray Him, even though the other eleven, as He says here and predicts in verse 27, would be scattered like sheep because He, as the Shepherd, would be struck. Notice again the beginning of verse 27, Jesus says, “*You will all fall away.*” That’s His prediction. The word *fall away* is *skandalizō*. It literally means “to cause to stumble.” It’s actually a future passive, indicating the fact that the disciples were, we could say, overtaken in their abandonment of Jesus. This was not a willful defection like Judas. This wasn’t motivated by money as Judas’ was. This wasn’t premeditated. This was a lapse. This was a temporary falling away, a stumbling, a *skandalizō* as they walked with Jesus. They eventually in the garden would be overtaken by their sin. They would stumble in their faith out of fear for their own lives; and the fact that this is not the sin of apostasy is made clear by the fact that just a verse later, they are adamant to Jesus about the fact they would never deny Him; and then even further as we read in the gospels, they repented of this sin; and as history records for us, they all suffered martyr’s deaths.

So, this is a temporary lapse, a temporary falling away, but what is true about them is also true about us. We often don’t plan on sinning, at least I hope that we don’t plan on sinning. We’re often guilty of stumbling in the weakness of our flesh, but here we see that Jesus had faith in the Father’s

plan. Jesus had faith in the Father’s plan from eternity past, that the point of the gospel, the good news is that salvation is not based upon our weakness or our fitness but on the strength of Christ, on the resolve of Christ to obey the Father. Jesus’ focus here in verse 27 is really not on the failure of the eleven, though He predicts that. He says, “*You will all fall away.*” But really, it’s on His trustworthiness of the Father’s plan, that His trustworthiness of the sacred Scriptures fulfilling prophecy because He quotes Zechariah 13:7. Notice your Bibles. “*For it is written,*” Jesus says, in the Old Testament, you know it, “*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered,*” a common Old Testament figure for God and His people. Again, Jesus views these eleven as His true sheep. This is not a sin leading to apostasy. These are His sheep. Psalm 95:7: “*For he is our God, and we are [his] people.*” We are the “*sheep of his hand,*” “*the people of his pasture.*” Jesus sees these other eleven as true sheep who will fall into sin, *skandalizō*. They will stumble into sin, but remember Jesus said, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*”

This is the Good Shepherd holding and preserving the ultimate faith of these disciples. And to be sure, the Father, according to His plan before the foundation of the world, would strike Jesus the Shepherd. We read about that in Isaiah 53:10: “*It was the will of the LORD to crush him.*” We read about the fact in Isaiah 53:6 that “*All we like sheep have gone astray,*” and that is why Isaiah says, “*But he was pierced for our transgressions...crushed for our iniquities.*” He bears our griefs, carries our sorrows, and He was “*stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*” And because the shepherd, Jesus, is struck, Jesus says, quoting Zechariah 13, “*The sheep will be scattered.*” And to a man, that was true. When Jesus was arrested in the garden, the disciples stumbled in their faith. They panicked and they fled. I want you to notice the brief statement that Mark makes in verse 50. It says, “*And they all left him and fled.*” That’s referring to the disciples, a statement of their stumbling, a statement of their falling away—just as the Scriptures predicted. Jesus has calm resolve in the face of the reality of this great trial of the cross because He knows that their falling away fulfills Scripture itself. Jesus had told them earlier, “*Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.*” This is the faith of Jesus. And just as Judas’ betrayal was sinful but followed the fulfillment of the Scriptures, so too the falling away of the other disciples fulfills Scripture, their abandonment of Jesus. But Jesus has faith in the midst of this seeming defeat.

And what is the point of all of this for our own spiritual walks with the Lord? Well, first of all, I hope that you’re a Christian this morning. I hope that you’re trusting in Christ. I hope that you’re resting in Him alone for your salvation because what verse 27 teaches us with this prediction of the falling away of the disciples, quoting from Zechariah 13, is simply that the essence of the gospel highlights our sin. The essence of the gospel is a highlighting of our sin, our failings, being overcome by the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, even the faith of Jesus to trust the will of the Father in light of all the rejection, all of the betrayal, all of the abandonment, not only by the disciples but even the Father Himself leaving His only begotten Son in the dark hours of the cross at Mount Calvary. In the face of such abandonment, Jesus demonstrates faith when the disciples could not. In the face of what was viewed as sure defeat on the cross, Jesus had faith in the Father according to the Scriptures that this, the cross, along with the arrest and the betrayal was God’s plan of victory over sin and faithlessness. That’s the point. And perhaps we may also learn here something about following after Jesus’ example in the midst of our own trials. Now, I understand that surely Jesus had faith in a unique sense, leading to the greatest victory of all over

sin and Satan through the gospel. Going to the cross was the essence of “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way,” but is there something here we can learn by the example of Jesus, and I think that Peter thought so.

Turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 2. Peter is the one, as we’re going to see later in this passage, who is adamant he would never deny Jesus, but Peter learned his lesson. And he writes in 1 Peter chapter 2 some wonderfully encouraging words, pointing to Jesus as an example for us when we’re going through trial, when we’re going through struggle. Verse 21:

“For to this you have been called,” Peter says, “because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

That means He continued in faith to trust the plan of the Father for His life, the plan of the Father to sovereignly work out the salvation of sinners. Verse 24, therefore, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”* Like Jesus and Peter later sought to be, our lives should be marked by submission to God’s will, submission to God’s Word, no matter how severe the trial. We can learn from the example of Jesus as He trusted in His Father and He trusted that his Father would sovereignly work out, as was predicted in the Scriptures, not only the fact that He would be raised from the dead, but also by His obedience to the Father in spite of the betrayal and the arrest and the abandonment and the darkness, that the light of the gospel would prevail. And folks, that’s our hope this morning. That’s our only hope. That’s not just our hope during Christmas; that’s our hope during the whole year, that in this one who dressed Himself in human flesh, who came from heaven to earth to die on the cross for our sins, rose again victorious, ascended to the right hand of God, the Father’s perfect plan was fulfilled. In light of the sin of the disciples, in light of the crucifixion of Jesus, in light of the lack of your faith, it’s Jesus that saves you—not your faith. It’s the gospel, the good news, that there’s nothing we can do to earn our salvation. We are totally and entirely and fully and eternally dependent upon Jesus Christ, and we see that beautifully here in verse 27. Jesus in the face of this intense pressure of the agony of the cross, His character shines through, and He exhibits faith, faith in the face of defeat.

But there’s a second thing that Jesus exhibits: not only faith in the face of defeat, but number two, hope in the face of despair in verse 28. Jesus goes on to say, *“But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”* Now, obviously the mood of despair brought about by Jesus’ prediction of the disciples backsliding and falling away now comes with a ray of hope as Jesus promises His resurrection. And not only just His resurrection, but a regathering of these sheep that would be scattered. That’s really the essence of what verse 28 is saying, that the dark and sinful days of Gethsemane are going to give way to the light of the resurrection in Galilee, that they would abandon Him in the garden. But like the Good Shepherd that He is, He would regather His sheep in Galilee. As Peter said—I read it to you earlier—1 Peter 2: *“For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”* And that’s exactly what happened upon Jesus’ resurrection, and of course that’s true of all elect sheep. Isaiah 53:6: *“All of us like sheep have [turned] astray.”* We have gone our own way and rebelled against God. The

essence of the gospel is that He has raised us from our deadness in sins and trespasses. He has united us together. He has regathered us with our Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you remember, Jesus says, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”* *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.”*

Jesus is preaching that theology tucked away in this tiny verse, verse 28, when Jesus says, *“But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”* You see, Jesus is hinting at the fact here in verse 28 that the gospel, because of the resurrection, would prove victorious over my failure, your failure, our deadness in sins and trespasses as egregious as our sins are; that Jesus will bring victory. And not just individual victory to individual sinners but victory to the whole world. *“And this is the victory that has overcome the world,”* 1 John 5:4 says, *“—our faith.”* Notice Jesus says, *“But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”* Of course, this is true. This is exactly what happened. For example, turn with me to chapter 16. You remember upon the resurrection of Christ, the messenger tells the women in verse 7, *“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”* There’s that language again: *“He is going before you to Galilee.”* This was part of Jesus’ promise. He was going to go away for a short period of time, but that He would appear before them again in Galilee. Or turn back with me to Matthew chapter 28 where this is reiterated by Matthew’s account. The angel says, in Matthew 28:6, *“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples,”* the angel tells the women, *“that he has risen from the dead, and behold,”* here’s the phrase again, *“he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”* And what exactly did Jesus do when He went before them into Galilee? Well, we read, if you pick up with me in verse 10, *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me,’”* Matthew 28:10. And what happens in Galilee? Verse 16 of Matthew 28:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

You see, what Jesus is predicting here in Mark 16 is not only the sad reality of His abandonment by the other disciples—they like sheep would be scattered—but in verse 28, what He is predicting is that He would be raised up. He would go before them into Galilee. As the raised Shepherd, He would gather His sheep to Himself on the mountain, and He would commission them. He would give His sheep a mission that would tell the whole world the victory of the gospel; that all authority had been given to Jesus, and therefore, the disciples must go into all the world and preach the gospel, discipling the nations, baptizing the nations. You see, the first prediction, verse 27, was one of failure, but the second prediction, verse 28, that He would be raised up and go before them into Galilee was a prediction of hope, hope in the midst of despair. This is unexpected optimism. Jesus is promising the worldwide success of the gospel from Galilee, in Galilee, with the Great Commission, that though they would abandon Him in His most needful hour, He promises not to abandon us in the world’s most needful and desperate hour. He says in the Great Commission,

“Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that it wasn’t just the eleven disciples, but there were more than five hundred Christians that witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And what did they do in the first century? The book of Acts tells us they “turned the world upside down” as they went and proclaimed the gospel to the nations. But back in Matthew chapter 28, it says that “some doubted.” “When they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.” That is not at all unlike some of us. When we look at the world today and we see the darkness and the despair, we sometimes wonder, I think, in the honesty of our hearts about how successful the gospel is going to be. Well, the hope this morning is not in ourselves. It’s in the promise of Jesus. It’s in the power of the Holy Spirit. When they had come together, they said at this time:

“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

You see, what Jesus is doing here is He is strengthening the faith of the apostles, and as we read this text, our faith ought to be strengthened. Man’s doubts don’t thwart God’s plans. Jesus is regathering, just as He called the disciples along the Sea of Galilee. After He is raised, He is commissioning these same disciples to go into the world, the foundation of the church, the twelve apostles. The one replacing Judas would become the twelfth. They would represent the new twelve tribes, the newly reconstituted Israel, the people that Peter calls in 1 Peter 2:9, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” He would commission the church of the new covenant—not at Jerusalem, not at the temple, but in Galilee to go into all the world and to proclaim the gospel. The resurrected Lord commissions the church today to do this. And if you pick up Calvin’s commentary, Calvin comments that in Jesus quoting Zechariah 13, He is also speaking about something that was fulfilled in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes after the death of Alexander the Great, some 150, 170 years before the birth of Christ. Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek Hellenistic king of the Seleucid empire rose up, and Calvin says rose up in fulfillment of Zechariah 13; that the shepherds of ethnic Israel would be struck and the sheep would be scattered, and that’s exactly what happened under Antiochus Epiphanes. A great persecution of the Jews in which they were dispersed abroad, and in the context of Zechariah 13, Calvin says that the great prophet speaks about the regathering of these sheep, the regathering of a remnant of true believers that God would preserve.

And so, I think that by Jesus quoting Zechariah 13 and speaking about the fact that the shepherd would be struck, that the sheep would be scattered, He’s alluding to the fact that most of ethnic Israel rejected Jesus. They scattered, and they were never regathered, but the Twelve were regathered, and the new Israel was reconstituted around the cornerstone of the Lord Jesus Christ to be a witness for the gospel in the world. The point of what Jesus is saying in verse 28, “But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee,” is just this fact: we can have hope today that “Lo, [he is] with you always, even to the end of the age.” We don’t serve merely a crucified Christ. We serve a resurrected, gloriously ascended Christ who has established His kingdom, and His gospel is spreading in all of the world. And it matters not how strong or weak the church may be. It matters not how many blunders the church may have, even though it may be crippled and compromised by the ways of the world; God is always faithful to call His elect sheep from the four

corners of the world until, as the prophet Habakkuk tells us in Habakkuk 2:14, “*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*” I think all of that theology is embedded in verse 28, in this promise of the resurrection and the shepherd regathering these fallen, failing apostles, a reminder to us that the Lord does not throw away His true sheep.

And I don’t know what is going on in your life this morning. I don’t know what kind of sins lay in the secret recesses of your heart and your mind, sin yet unconfessed because you’re fearful to go to Jesus, but this I know; Jesus never throws away His true sheep. In the midst of this despair, there is this hopeful reality that Jesus is with us, that the gospel will prevail. And it won’t merely prevail in your heart and in your life, but it will prevail in the whole world. This hope in the face of despair comes out even in the agony that Jesus faces as being the sin-bearer for His people. But there is a third encouragement from our text this morning as Jesus faces the agony of bearing the sins of the world, the abandonment of His own disciples. Not only faith, faith in the face of defeat; hope, hope in the face of despair; but, number three, truth, truth in the face of denial. We see this in verses 29 through 31. Something happens that we could probably predict, and that is that Peter is going to have something to say to the situation, and we see that in verse 29: “*Peter said to him,*” after Jesus makes these predictions in verse 27 and verse 28, “*Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not.’*” Just like Peter to make a statement like this, but Peter’s statement is filled not with just with one sin or two sins, but three sins. First of all, he disbelieves Christ’s prediction in verse 27. Jesus had just said, “*You will all fall away,*” so Peter is sinning by doubting the prediction of Christ. But secondly, Peter assumes a sort of spiritual superiority above the other disciples, doesn’t he? He thinks that he is better, which is the sin of pride. And third, he reveals, Peter does, that he has no clue what he’s talking about because he hasn’t searched his own heart. Above all the other disciples, it was Peter’s denial of Jesus, his falling away, which was the most sinful.

An amazing sidenote to make here, how much sin that we can commit with our lips. How much sin we can commit with one statement from our lips. That’s why the half brother of our Lord, James, tells us we do good to tame the tongue. Here in pride, Peter claims in verse 29, “*Even though they all fall away, I will not.*” This is par for the course, by the way. Peter had already done this earlier in the upper room. Mark doesn’t record this, but Luke does record this in Luke 22, in the upper room, in verse 31 Jesus says to Peter:

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” [But] Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

That was in the upper room, and here again, after Peter is adamant that he’s not going to deny our Lord, and in the face of that lie and that deception, Jesus rebukes him with the truth of another prediction. Notice with me in verse 30: “*And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’*” Jesus lovingly, firmly, and truthfully refuses to allow Peter to think that he’s above sin. This is Jesus speaking the truth but speaking the truth in love. The truth part is what Jesus says. The rooster, He says, is going to crow twice, and before it does that, you’re going to deny Me three times. The rooster crowing was

essentially a time indicator. It marked the third watch of the night, which would have been about 3:00 a.m., just a couple of hours prior to dawn. And so, as Jesus makes this prediction here in verse 30 around midnight, as they are walking to the garden of Gethsemane, then it would only be a matter of a few hours. *“This very night.”* as Jesus says in verse 30, that Peter would deny our Lord not once, not twice, but three times, and yet Peter is still adamant about this fact. Jesus not only reveals the truth of this reality, but He reveals the truth in love, found in the fact that Jesus’ statement of truth and the crow of the rooster would actually be embedded in Peter’s mind so that his conscience would be tugged at in that very moment of denial so that Peter would actually repent. Jesus’ words of truth and words of rebuke were filled with love because He had Peter’s heart in His mind, his best interests at heart.

In fact, if you skip with me to verse number 72 of Mark 14, we read about what happens here. It says that Peter denies our Lord before the servant girl in verse 69. *“And after a little while,”* verse 70, *“the bystanders again said to Peter, ‘Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’ But he began to involve,”* verse 71, *“a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know this man of whom you speak.’”* And then notice verse 72: *“And immediately the rooster,”* the time indicator to fulfill Jesus’ prophecy. It *“crowed a second time,”* and notice, it says, *“And Peter remembered.”* Because of the crow of the rooster, *“Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’”* And notice the end of verse 72: *“And he broke down and wept.”* Matthew 26:75 says that he *“wept bitterly,”* indicating the fact that this is not superficial remorse; this is spirit-led repentance.

Jesus’ lovingly, truthful rebuke of Peter actually was the very thing that later led to his repentance, but that was then. This is now, and sadly Peter grows more adamant that he would never be disloyal to his Lord. Notice back in Mark 14, our text, verse 31: *“But he said emphatically,”* and in the Greek it’s the idea that he continually said, emphatically, with great emphasis and with great passion. *“If I must die with you, I will not deny you.”* In other words, *“I will die with you before I’ll deny you,”* Peter says. You have to respect his determination. It is admirable, but his doubting Jesus’ words is not admirable, not noble at all. Peter is trusting in his own flesh, which is another reminder to us. Peter is a positive example for us as he encourages us to follow in the example of Jesus, 1 Peter chapter 2, and come under the suffering that God has for us in trusting ourselves to God as Jesus did. And Peter certainly did that, dying a martyr’s death, but we also learn negatively from Peter’s example. Here’s the principle of Proverbs 16:18: *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* Later Peter would write that *“God resists the proud, [and he] gives grace to the humble,”* perhaps even remembering this time that he stumbled and denied our Lord. But here is Peter filled with pride, propping himself up above the other apostles, as if he is better than all of them, as if he is strong and gritty enough, as if he has enough faith or even as much faith as Jesus Himself, so much so that we read at the end of verse 31, *“And they all said the same...”* In other words, Peter’s negative example resulted in the others jumping on the boastful bandwagon. How sad. True enough, verse 31, they all boasted, but verse 50: *“And they all left him and fled.”*

They all boasted, but *“they all left him and fled.”* Complete failure, complete denial, at Jesus’ most needful hour, but all hope is not lost. You remember after Jesus’ resurrection, as He is having breakfast with the disciples on the shore, He asks Peter a question three times. You remember the question, right? He asked Peter, *“In light of everything you’ve said, you talk a big game. In light*

of everything you’ve done, I know your denial of me as I just predicted it.” Jesus asks him, “Peter, do you love me?” Three times: “Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me?” And finally, after the third time, Peter, he says “*Lord, you know everything,*” and I think that Peter is thinking “You know everything. You know my boasting. You know my failure. You know your prediction was true. You know my remorse. You know my repentance.” “*Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.*” You see, Jesus provides here for Peter truth in the midst of denial, a lesson for us that we need to learn from Peter, a lesson regarding humility.

If the gospel doesn’t humble you, nothing will humble you. And if I’ve said it once, I’ve said it a million times, the most humble people are true Christians. You want a character mark of an unbeliever? It’s someone who’s is filled with pride, and you say, “Well, what about Peter?” Well, yeah, Peter was filled with pride, but he was broken, wasn’t he? He was broken and he repented—a lesson on humility. Folks, I want to encourage you, first of all, don’t think that God is ever surprised by your sinful failings. Flee to Him. Confess your sins quickly. He already knows what you’ve done. He’s already aware of your sin in a more intimate way than you could ever imagine. You don’t ever have to be fearful about coming clean with Jesus. Peter did because Peter understood that Jesus is a tender Shepherd. He’s not going to strike you; He was struck for you. That’s the essence of the gospel, that we can freely and fully confess our sin, and He reaches out to us with the warm, tender hand of a Shepherd, reaching down with the crook of His staff to pull us up, to brush us off, to clothe us with His righteousness, and to embrace us in the bosom of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are safe in our union with Christ. We ought not to fear Christ. We ought to run to Him and flee to Him, and this morning if there is some great sin that you have committed, you must run to Him this morning. You must repent of that sin. Come clean with Jesus for He already knows your hidden faults even when others don’t. And secondly, we learn that we are to stop boasting. We should make our boast in the gospel, and in the gospel alone. Either be humbled like Peter, be humiliated like Peter, or humble yourself.

Pride sometimes can harden us to seek the grace of forgiveness because of what others may think. That is a path of destruction. A hard heart reveals a heart that has never been softened by the gospel. Be humbled or be humiliated. And then third, remember in those moments of temptation that Jesus predicts even in this passage that even the strongest of Christians among us will fail, so we admit that. We acknowledge that. We meditate on His deep love for us in the gospel so that our love for Him is strengthened so that our hatred for sin is strengthened, so that we resolve not to disappoint our Lord as Peter did. We must learn from the example of Peter. Well, Jesus in this passage, His exhibition, really an exhibition of grace under pressure, the pressing weight of the reality of being crushed by the Father for our iniquity, His faith in the face of defeat, His hope in the midst of despair, His truth in the midst of denial should give to us the grace to live under the strains and the pressures and the trials, the temptations of life, knowing that He’s our all in all. Amen? He’s the one that was crushed for us. The weight of the world is on Jesus’ shoulders—not on your shoulders because the weight of the world was upon Jesus’ shoulders at Mount Calvary. We’ve been set free to lovingly and loyally serve Jesus and the interests of His kingdom, building His kingdom, proclaiming the gospel, knowing He said, “*I will build [the] church and the gates of Hades [will] not prevail against it.*” Jesus is not just after conquering your soul or that soul here and that soul there. Jesus is after conquering the whole world for His glory so that all men may bow to the knee of Christ and confess Him as Lord.

So, we learn from these brief verses that when we are weak, and especially because we are weak, He is strong. *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* Glory be to His name. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You this morning for Your words, which encourage us regarding the gospel. That’s what we need reminded of in a world that is filled with sermons this day on self-help, self-pride, ego. Lord, we turn and humble ourselves. We lie prostrate before You because we are humbled by the realities of the gospel. Lord, we thank You for all that Jesus endured for our sakes. We thank you for His faith that reminds us that even when our faith is weak, it matters not. We thank You for His hope in the prevailing reality of the success of the gospel because even in these dark days, we can sometimes doubt the effectiveness of our witness. And Father, we thank You for His truth, His truth in the face of denial. Lord, may we be truth-bearers in this world. May we lovingly and truthfully tell others they are sinners so they may be humbled and might come to know Christ as Savior, confessing their sins. It is faith and hope and truth, which marks the gospel, and it is to mark our lives. It marked the heart and the lips of our Lord, even as He faced the agony of the crushing weight of Your wrath being poured upon Him for our sakes. So, Father, as we continue to worship You in singing this hymn of benediction, and as we then gather later this day to celebrate the incarnation, may you encourage us with the truth of the gospel, the words of Jesus, and the promise and the hope, Lord, that because He was raised, we too can be raised from our deadness in sins and trespasses. We long for His coming. We ask that you regard our hearts. Keep them pure. We ask these things in Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.