

**From First to Worst**  
**Pastor Ty Blackburn**  
**John 13:33, 36-38**  
**August 24, 2014**

Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 13th chapter of John. I mentioned earlier we're going to look at this morning the passage of Scripture there at the end of Chapter 13 where Jesus predicts Peter's denial. The title of the message this morning is 'From First to Worst'. The 11 disciples, excluding Judas, Peter goes from first to worst. Obviously Judas, being an unbeliever, is truly the worst. He is the son of perdition, but among those who Jesus just said earlier this evening. Remember in John 13 we are looking at the night before the crucifixion. The disciples are not aware of what is going on, as we see even in this text we're going to look at tonight, Peter is certainly not. But when Jesus was washing their feet, Peter objected, and Jesus says to him, "What I do you don't understand, but it is necessary. You are clean, but not all of you are clean." He was talking about the 11 are clean. They have been in some sense born again. They don't have the full package of the Holy Spirit, but they have been saved, they've been justified by God. They are already clean, yet they don't have the full benefits of the cross. So among those 11, the title 'From First to Worst' applies. Peter was clearly first, and he quickly goes to worst. The question I want us to consider this morning is: *Why and how did Peter fall so quickly?* He fell so far and so hard, what was his problem? Let's read the passage together. We are going to go ahead and read Verses 31-38. We are going to be focusing in on Verses 33 and 36-38. We looked at the great commandment last time. We want to really look at Peter's dialogue with Jesus, but let's read Verses 31-38 to get the context.

*John 13:31-38 ~ Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus \*said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; 32 if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 33 Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." 36 Simon Peter \*said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." 37 Peter \*said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." 38 Jesus*

*\*answered, “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.*

Let’s pray together.

*Father, we ask that the entrance of Your word might give light. That by Your Holy Spirit, who inspired Your word, You might illuminate Your word in the minds and hearts of all who are present, and that You might take Your word and apply it to our lives. For the glory of Your Son, we pray in His name, Amen.*

‘From First to Worst’. You know one of the things that you see when you look at the Gospels, and you read through the Gospels, is you see that Peter is the exceptional disciple. I mean, Peter’s exceptionalism is on display in each and every Gospel. Of the 11, he is the outstanding disciple. The word ‘*Peter*’, the name ‘*Peter*’, occurs more than any other of the names of the disciples. In fact, when you add ‘*Simon*’ in, it is 120 times. Twenty-three times he is referred to as ‘*Simon*’, and then 97 times ‘*Peter*’, or ‘*Simon Peter*’. One hundred and twenty times, when you add up all of the other 11 disciples it is 125 for them. Peter 120, and Number 2 is Judas with about 30. We know why he is in the list, but of the 11, it is 120 to 95. Next is James with like 22, and most of the time James’ name is mentioned because James is the brother of John.

John MacArthur has a very helpful book, Twelve Ordinary Men, in which he preaches sermons on the various apostles, and he points out in his sermon that though we often think of, he calls Peter ‘*the disciple with a foot-shaped mouth*’, though we see him that way, yet when you really look at it carefully, what you see when you look at Peter is exceptionalism, exceptional leadership. There are four lists of the 12 disciples in the Bible—Matthew 10, Mark 3, Luke 6, and Acts 1. They are listed in order. I mean, the 12 disciples are listed by name. In every list, you have some variation of the ordering of the names, but one thing you do not have varied in any of the lists, in all four lists Peter’s name is first.

In fact, Matthew 10:2, when he refers to Peter, Simon Peter, the first. He uses that adjective ‘*the first*’, ‘*prōtos*’ (πρῶτος), which means ‘*first*’, and the idea is ‘*leader*’. We know from John’s Gospel, he wasn’t the first chosen. Remember we read this in John 1? It was only after Philip and Andrew had come to faith, had come to see that Jesus was Messiah, Andrew goes and gets his brother. He says, “We found the Christ.” Peter wasn’t the first chronologically, but he was the first positionally. When you read the Gospels, what you see is he is the one who asks the questions. He is the one who has enough confidence to ask to the questions.

Haven't you been in situations where you wanted to ask a question but you just felt too timid? Some of you have never done that, a few of you are very bold about that. You are like Peter, but most of us sit back, "But that question may sound too stupid. I don't want to interrupt the flow of thought." Peter didn't have any hesitancy about asking the questions. I mean, in Matthew 15:15, "Please explain this parable to us." Matthew 18:21, "How many times must I forgive my brother?" Matthew 19, "Hey, we've left everything. What will our reward be?" John 13, we just read earlier, "Are You going to wash my feet?" The other disciples were thinking the same thing, but Peter voiced it. He was not only the one to ask the questions, he was the one to answer the questions.

Remember when Jesus says, "Who touched Me?" It wasn't the woman who touched Him who answers, but Peter, "It's this woman right here." "Will You also leave me?" Who answers? Peter. John 6, "Where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. Who do men say that I am?" They all answer that part. "Who do you say that I am?" Peter jumps up and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus says, "Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood does not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. I tell you, you shall be called Peter, and upon this rock I'll build My church."

He is the one who takes action. We often think about the failures that he makes. When we think about him walking on the water, he is the one who sunk. Remember? But you think about this, the other 11 are still in the boat. Peter is the one that got out of the boat to walk to Jesus. Even this night, after he makes his bold assertion in the text that he will lay down his life for Jesus, that is dripping with irony, isn't it? "I will lay down my life for you," and Jesus asks the question, "You will lay down your life for Me?" and then He hammers him with that next statement, but he was willing to jump out there. That same night what happens? He is the one who when the soldiers come to arrest Him, we're told in two of the other Gospels, actually in all three Gospels, but only identified in one, that he is the one who cuts off the servant's ear. Peter is like, "We're going down," and he just attacks him. They only had two swords, but he had one of them. He might have had both of them, doing like this. It is true that he denies the Lord three times, and in that sense he becomes the worst, but in reality, when you step back from it and look at it, he and John are the only two who had the confidence to follow Jesus into the high priest area, His house, the courtyard. You see he is trying to follow through, isn't he? On his promise. He was recognized by the outsiders as being the leader. You remember in Matthew 17 when they come up and they say, "Hey, has your teacher paid the temple tax?" The guys that are sent to collect the tax go to Peter and ask him because they know he is the leader. It is just obvious. Jesus

addresses him more often, asks more questions directly to Peter than anyone else, and even after his failure, even after his horrible failure, three-fold denial, after God restores him, and we're going to look at this a little bit later, the restoration, then he is the one who leads the church.

I mean, he is the one who preaches that amazing message at Pentecost where 3,000 people are converted like that. He was the one who does the miracle at the temple in Acts 5 and heals the lame man. In fact, Acts 1-12 are about Peter. He is at the center of what is going on. So it is clear he is first, but he goes to worst, because the word '*deny*', when Jesus says, "You will deny Me," the word '*deny*' means '*disowned, disassociate*'. "Not only will you not lay down your life for Me, you will deny Me! You will disown me, you will disassociate yourself from Me, you will reject Me. And not only that, you will do it three times." All four Gospels are careful to record the denial of Peter, that it happened three times. All four Gospels record all three statements of denial. Isn't that interesting? I mean, we've talked about when we look at John, all of the Gospel-writers are selective. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they are including certain things they want us to see. Why is it that Peter's denial is in all four Gospels? I think one of the reasons it is there, this isn't the main reason, but this is one of the reasons, is so that we would not make a hero out of Peter. If Roman Catholics read their Bibles better there would be no way they thought anything about papal infallibility. Peter is not infallible, and in fact, God makes it even more emphatic that he's not by after he receives the Holy Spirit in Galatians 2, Paul has to call him out publicly, remember?

Peter is kind of separating himself from the Gentile believers because some of the Judaizers had come, the Christians who may be truly Christians, but they are all about the law. Peter realizes, "I can't be sitting down eating with the Gentiles now," and he comes over and sits at their table, and Paul realizes a public sin, he calls him out publicly, and Paul says, "I stood up to his face. I know who he is, but I stood up to his face because he was in the wrong." I think one of the reasons it's that way is because it is making clear, we are to have no heroes except one. There are no heroes except one! There is no one who is infallible save one, and His name is Jesus. Forget Peter, forget Mary, forget everyone else, Jesus Christ alone. This is one of the reasons that John is including this at this point. He is showing us in an emphatic way, it's not about what we do for Jesus, it is only exclusively, 100% about what He does for us. Now how is it that he went from, how did he fall into this trap? Because I really believe he's saved. I mean, Jesus said in John 13, "You are clean." He said that to Peter, He said, "You're clean and all of you except one, not all of you," for He knew the one who would betray Him.

How did he go from first to worst? Keep that question in mind. Now what I want us to do is, I think this outline is going to be a little different than normal. I've really got, let me see if I can explain this clearly, I think what we need to do is make a couple of passes over the text. We've got to fly over it once, at a little higher altitude, and we're going to cover four points along the way, okay? Then we are going to fly over lower, maybe in a helicopter, and we're going to observe more carefully, and the same four points will come up again. Then after we've done that we're going to try to make some applications, okay? So let's say that the two points are first, '*A Quick Survey*', and secondly, '*A Closer Look*', and there are four sub-points in each one of those. Is everybody with me now? So a quick survey of the narrative. What you want to do is you want to hear the narrative, and hear what you are supposed to hear, and see what you are supposed to see. So rather than get right into some kind of carefully crafted outline, I want us just to look at it carefully, and hear what is being said.

A quick survey, what you really see is that the narrative flows with four sub-points, and here are the sub-points that will be in both of the main points. You have '*Jesus' Statement*', then you have '*Peter's Two Questions*', then you have '*Peter's Promise*', and you have '*Jesus' Reply*', okay? We are going to follow those four points. We're going to do that two times through.

#### 1) A Quick Survey:

##### A) Jesus' Statement:

What is it that Jesus says? He says, in Verse 33, and we're looking really at Verses 33, and 36-38 because we noted last time the context of the great commandment is interestingly in this setting where He is talking about being separated from them. They are being separated from Him. What are you supposed to do when you are overwhelmed? You are supposed to love one another. We saw that last time. Now what we see is Peter and the disciples, when they heard the great commandment, they weren't able to think much about it at the time because they were just overwhelmed by what He had already said—He's leaving. And that is the focus, 33, 36-38 really are out focus in this message. Jesus' statement in Verse 33:

***John 13:33 ~ Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'***

First of all, He calls them *'little children'*. That is an interesting statement in itself. The only time it appears in the Gospel of John, this particular phrase, this particular word is from the word for *'child'*, a diminutive phrase that means *'little child'*. It is the language of a nursery, the idea of a toddler, a child who needs to be looked after, who can't be left alone. He says, "Little children," the only time we have this on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels is right here. Paul uses it once in Galatians 4 to talk to the Galatian Christians. And interestingly enough, the other seven times it occurs in the New Testament, it occurs in 1 John, where John, the author of this Gospel, uses it in talking to his followers, little children. Little children, He is saying, "You are in need of supervision. You are in need of care." In the heart of Jesus, here as He's just talked about in Verses 31 and 32, "I'm about to go to the cross, but look at the heart of the Savior. Here He is thinking about them again. "I look at you and My heart is overwhelmed for you. You are little children that I have to leave." He says, ...*I am with you a little while longer*. "I'm about to have to leave you." He means He is about to have to go to the cross, and then He's going to be with them just over a period of 40 days, occasional appearances of the resurrected Christ with the disciples. Then after that, no more, in body, until he returns again.

He has been with them for three years, three and a half years probably. I mean, these 11 men have been with Him continuously. He has been pouring His life into them. He's been preparing them for this moment, and now He is about to leave their presence physically so that He can send the Spirit, so that He can do the work of the cross which has to be done, but His heart is burdened for them. So you have this sense of like a parent going off to war or something, "I'm not going to see you. I may never see you again." Think about the child that can comprehend enough of, "Daddy's going. He's not going to be here." That is the anguish that is felt in the room. "I tell you what I told the Jews earlier," He refers back to John 7, and John 8 where He told the Jews, "You will seek Me, and you will not find Me. Where I go you cannot come." They were like, "Where is He going? Is He going to the diaspora? Is He going away? Well Peter and the apostles pick up on the fact clearly that He is saying, that He is definitively stating, "I am leaving you physically."

#### B) Peter's Question:

So even after He says, "A new commandment I give you," there is no question, "Hey, haven't we already had that commandment. What makes it new?" They didn't ask any questions about that statement. They skipped right over it and Peter says, "Lord, where are You going?" Peter's questions now, we're to Peter's questions. His first question is *Where?* and his second question is *Why?* His first

question, “Where are You going?” A perfectly reasonable question. “Hey, where are You going? We left everything to follow You. You told us follow You and I’ll make you fishers of men. I thought we were following You until we die. What do You mean You are leaving?” A perfectly reasonable question. “Where are You going?” Jesus, in a way, seems to answer evasively, and now it’s not evasive because, well it is evasive in one sense. The Lord answers the questions He needs to answer. He doesn’t always answer the question we want Him to answer. Peter says, “Where are You going?” Now He’s going to tell them very shortly where He is going, but what He basically says is, “Really, you need to know not so much the answer to your first question as your second question.” He already answers the second question. He says in Verse 36, ...“**Where I go, you cannot follow Me now;**... I’m not going to tell you where I’m going, I’m just telling you you cannot follow Me now.”

Peter’s next question is basically, “Why can’t I follow You?” “Well, you can’t. You are unable to follow Me now.” That’s his second question, Peter’s second question, Verse 37, “**Lord, why can I not follow You right now?** That’s actually a good question. He is actually asking the right question. Here is Peter, like I said, he is a leader and right now, to this point, he’s on track. Now he’s really going to mess up in his next statement, but his questions are reasonable. “Why can’t I follow You now?” But then he steps over the line when he says, “I will lay down my life for You.” He is basically saying, “You say I cannot follow You. I’m saying I am determined to follow You.” Peter is basically saying, “I don’t care what You say about my inability, I am determined to follow You. I will lay down my life for You.” You don’t talk like that to God. There are a lot of times we feel like that though. We wish the Lord would do something. We don’t understand why He’s doing something. We think it should happen this way. We wonder, “Why have you let this happen on top of this, on top of this? I need an answer.” And He says, “No, you don’t. You don’t need an answer, You need to trust Me.”

How we respond to that makes all the difference. Will we trust Him? Here is where Peter should say, “He’s told me,” again, I mean, Jesus repeated, He said earlier, in Verse 33, ‘**Where I am going, you cannot come.**’ Peter says, “Where are You going.” Look at Verse 36, Jesus says, ...“**Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.**” The emphasis is on ‘cannot’, and Peter gets the emphasis, but he rejects it. He says, “Why can I not follow You?” So the word is repeated three times, it’s the Greek word ‘*dynamai*’. It is a verb which means ‘*to be able, to be capable, to have the power*’. I wish they had translated it this way, “What I said to the Jews, I say to you now. Where I am going you are not able to come. I’m not forbidding you. I’m telling you you do not have the power to come

where I'm going." Then when Peter asks Him the question, "Where are You going? He says, "Listen, where I am going, you do not have the power to follow Me now, but you will follow Me later. You will have the power to go where I am going later. You don't now." So Peter's promise, in a sense, when he says, "I will lay down my life for You," he is missing the whole point.

#### C) Peter's Promise:

The emphasis on 'now', three times in the passage He talks about now. Look at Verse 33, *...as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'* "You are not able to come. I'm saying this to you now." Then Verse 36, *... "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now;... You are not able to follow Me now, but you will follow Me later."* Do you see that emphasis on now and later? Now and later. "Right now you do not have the power," and then Peter even gets out and he says, "Why am I not able to follow You *right* now?" That question is still right if he would just stop right there and listen. "Why am I not able to follow You right now?" but he runs ahead, and he says, "I will lay down my life for you, Jesus. Let me tell You what I will do for You." Now that is the quick survey. Well, I'm sorry, Jesus' reply.

#### D) Jesus' Reply:

Jesus' reply is to ask the question, "Will you lay down your life for Me?" and then he makes a decree. It's not really just a statement, it is a decree.

***John 13:38 ~ ...Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.***

He decrees, "Not only are you not going to do something for Me, not only are you not going to do something positively for Me, you are going to do something against Me. Three times!"

#### 2) A Closer Look:

Now let's step back for a moment. We've surveyed and what I want to do now is go back and look again, a closer look, second point, so we can see what the Lord wants us to really see here. Let's look at Jesus' statement again. "Where I am going you cannot follow." In the original, the 'I' and the 'you' are emphatic. That is, in the Greek, remember I've talked about this before that Greek is like a lot of languages that the subject is already present in the verb. It is not like English, we

have to always put a subject beside a verb, right? The Greek, it's already there. A verb, therefore, has person and number. It is like a singular verb, or it is a masculine verb, it's a feminine verb, all that kind of thing, it has the pronoun already in it. When He says, "Where I am going," He could just say that with the verb, '*where I am going*', but He adds in an additional pronoun, '*egō*', which has the force of, "Where I Myself am going..." Then He has the verb '*you cannot come*', the form of '*dynamai*' which has the second person plural already in it. "You cannot come..." He adds the pronoun which means, "You yourselves cannot come. Where I Myself am going, you yourselves cannot come." He is really highlighting the difference between Jesus and the apostles. He is showing the chasm that exists between Jesus and everyone else. "I am going somewhere, I Myself am going somewhere. You do not have the power to go." Now he says this, it's not that he is making the statement as boldly as I am, and it is, but he adds, "Little children, I'm only going to be with you a little while longer." I mean, think about this. We know as parents, when you have children that are toddlers, I taught this, the little children can be like a toddler. Spiritually you are toddlers. You don't leave a toddler alone for long, right?

I mean, it's one of those things when they're playing in a room and it gets quiet, "Uh oh," especially if it's a boy. They've discovered how to take something apart. Well, you don't leave a child alone. It's a criminal act at times, right? You don't leave the child alone. That's negligence. Well, God only does it when it's necessary, and there are times when we have to. You leave your child alone when you put them on the operating table and you walk away from them. Your toddler doesn't understand why you're doing it, but you're doing it because you love them and this is what is required. This is what I have to do to bless you.

This is what is in the heart of Christ. He's saying, "My little children, I have to leave you now," and He's laying them down, and He feels that sense of weight. You see this in the other Gospels. Do you remember when we talked—He says relating to this same thing, we don't have this part of the dialogue in John, but He tells Peter, "Peter, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, but I prayed for you. So I know all that's going on. I know the perils that await you, and I prayed for you. And after you repent, encourage your brothers." He tells him that before he needs to repent. So there is this tenderness in the heart of God, but there is also this sense in which God is God and we are not. "I am going somewhere you do not have the power to come now. You will later." Jesus is saying the now and the later is the cross. "You do not have the power to go where I'm going now." Where is Jesus going? Well, let's go to the second thing again.

Jesus' statement, Peter's questions, Peter has the right question. "Where are You going?" Though Jesus doesn't take time to answer that directly, because He's more interested in showing, "What you need to know, Peter, is not so much where I'm going right now as you need to know you can't come." You have to understand that to be saved. The pride of man is so great we think we can go. Isn't it amazing you hear surveys where people are asked, "Do you believe in God? Do you believe in the Bible? Do you believe in Jesus?" and they'll say sometimes, "Yes, yes, yes. Whatever. I believe the Bible. Yes, mostly." Then you start asking particular questions. "I reject that. I reject that. I don't really believe Jesus is the only way to heaven." Sometimes you ask an atheist. "I'm an atheist." "Do you believe you're going to heaven?" They don't believe in heaven, but they say, "Yeah, I think I'm going." "Why?" "Because I'm a pretty good guy."

The overwhelming majority of people think they are above average. That's impossible statistically. We have just such self-confidence, self-reliance, and it must be smashed if you are going to really go into the presence of God. So Peter's question, "Where are You going?" Jesus says, "Really you need to understand that you can't go there." But it still was a good question, and Jesus is going to make clear where He's going, in John 14. In fact, Verses 1 to 5 make it really clear, and all throughout the rest of the discussion, this farewell discourse, He's going to allude to it again and again.

Look at Verse 1 of Chapter 14. Right after this—remember the chapter divisions are given later just as reference points—the dialogue is continuing.

***John 14:1 ~ "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.***

Where am I going? I'm going to My Father's house. He talks about going four times—in Verse 2, Verse 3, Verse 4, and Verse 5. Verse 28:

***John 14:28 ~ You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.***

Another seven or eight in John 16 and John 17, He talks about that He's going to the Father. Where is Jesus going? He's going to the Father. And what He's saying is before the cross, even though these guys are great compared to the average person—they've been following Jesus—what He says is, "Where I'm going, you

cannot come. You do not have the power to come into the presence of God.” Peter’s saying, “Why can’t I follow You?” That’s an excellent question, Peter. Why can’t you follow? You’re asking the right question. Let’s just look at what the Scripture says. You can’t follow, because you were conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity. You can’t follow, because you are dead in trespasses and sins. You can’t follow, because you must be born again to see the Kingdom of God. You cannot follow, because even your righteousness is filthy rags in His sight. God is holy and pure, and you and I are vile and filthy. That is God’s assessment of you, and if you will not receive that, you will not receive Him.

Let’s look at Peter’s promise then. We’ve looked again at Jesus’ statement and Peter’s question. Now we’ll look more closely at Peter’s promise. Peter’s promise is really blasphemy. He doesn’t understand it, of course. “I will lay down my life for You. Look at what I will do for You. I want to go where You’re going, and look what I will do for You.” The other Gospels even fill this in a little bit. When you really look at him, though he was the exceptional apostle and he’s the one that God uses so mightily, he really had an issue with pride. We all do, but in the other Gospels he says stuff like, “Though all fall away, yet I will not leave You. These other guys, I wouldn’t trust them for anything, but just trust me.”

What was it? Why did Peter fall so quickly? How did he go from first to worst? He had a haughty sense of self-confidence and self-reliance, and Jesus’ reply as we look at it a second time a little closer, “Will you lay down your life for Me?” He didn’t have to ask that question. He’s asking that question to expose how ridiculous what you just said is. “What have I been telling you My whole ministry?” What did we hear in John 10? The Good Shepherd, who is the Good Shepherd? There’s only one Good Shepherd, and what does He do? He lays down His life for the sheep. The sheep don’t lay down their lives for the Shepherd. How absurd is that? And Peter is saying this incredibly stupid thing because pride makes you stupid. It makes all of us stupid. “Lord, I will die for You.” “Will you die for Me?” And what Jesus does here is He is the Good Shepherd and He hits the sheep in the mouth when the sheep needs it, and this is what He does right now.

***John 13:38 ~ ... Truly, truly, I say to you,...***

That’s a favorite phrase of Jesus recorded in John. “Truly, truly, I say to you,...” He’s basically saying, “Listen carefully. What I’m about to say is a decree. Everything I say is true, but I want you to really listen in to what I’m about to say.”

“Truly, truly, I say to you,…” What’s He going to say next?

*... a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.*

In fact, the word order is emphatic in the sense that it emphasizes His rejection and repudiation of Peter and what he’s just said. Now, He’s not ultimately rejecting him. We know He’s going to save him. He already has saved him and He’s going to continue working in his life, but He is rejecting in the same way—remember when we talked about earlier when Peter answered the question, “Who do men say that I am?” Remember Peter jumps up, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

*Matthew 16:17 ~ And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

Man, look at that. Right after that it says Jesus began teaching them that He was going to have to suffer at the hands of sinners and die. And Peter takes Him aside, “Hey Jesus, You and I need to have a private conversation.” He was thoughtful enough that if you’re going to rebuke somebody, you ought to do it privately. He takes Him aside, and says, “Hey, I don’t know what You’re thinking, but I mean, You’re the Son of God. I just told You who You are.” The audacity! Isn’t that astonishing how you go from, I mean, that’s first to worst. This is why it’s so easy for him. He’s done it before. He’s been here before. He’s gone from first to worst. Because what does Jesus say to him when he says, “This will never happen to you”? Jesus looks at Peter and says, “Get thee behind Me, Satan.” What He realizes is, “You now, you were the voice of God when you said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ I’m telling you God revealed that to you. Now you are voicing the will of Satan. Get thee behind Me, Satan, for you have on your heart and your mind the things of man and not the things of God.”

It shows us as believers how far we can fall even as true believers. We can go from first to worst. And so what Jesus does in John 13, “Truly, truly, I say to you…” and He makes this decree, because this kind of audacity must be smashed. God will not abide in it. He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, if He loves you and me, what He wants to do is smash our pride. That’s the great obstacle to you experiencing the blessing of God is your pride. Aren’t you glad God is committed to smashing it? He’ll smash it, but there will be no collateral damage. That’s the beauty of God. He only damages what needs to be damaged,

and He is a gentle Savior. A bruised reed He won't break. A smoking flax He won't extinguish. He'll smash your pride and He'll bruise you, and then He'll comfort you. That's what He's going to do to Peter. Peter's problem was he was trying to live the Christian life without reference to the cross. This is why he went from first to worst. He was trying to live the Christian life without reference to the cross. He was trying to live without depending upon the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Now, that's the message in this, and this is why God left this in for us. This is the main reason it's in all four Gospels. It's to show us the peril of spiritual pride. It's to show us we're to have no heroes but Jesus, but it's also to show us that don't let yourself become your own hero. We have to discipline ourselves to never say, "I would never do that." This stuff is just so basic to us. Think about this. I mean, if I'm telling you, "I never want to dishonor Christ," that's my heart. But if I say, "I would never do that," I've crossed the line into presumption and pride. I, that is, who I am, would never do that. If you say, "I would never be unfaithful to my spouse. I would never do that!" Well, there's a grain of truth, in that the good thing is you don't want to. That's wonderful, but the problem is you're saying you're not able, that you don't even have to worry about that. That's ungodly. That needs to be smashed.

What you should say is, "God helping me, may I never do that. By God's grace I'm able to never do that. I know it's His will. If I'm clinging to grace, I won't do that, but only if I'm clinging to grace. The only reason I haven't done that already is by His grace." So think about how this applies then. Let's think about this in our salvation. "Little children, I have to go away because I have to go do the work of the cross, because there's no way for you to come where I'm going unless I do the work of the cross." Jesus' death on Calvary for our sins is payment in full for receiving the wrath of God, all of God's wrath against every sin that I've ever committed, that you've ever committed if you're a believer. Every sin of everyone who would ever believe, He took that wrath and He absorbed it in Himself, and He bore it on the cross, and He took it out of the way. And then He rose again from the dead because He was pure and spotless in Himself, and death has no sting for someone who has not sinned. So as Peter himself in that first glorious sermon says, "It was impossible for death to hold Him." Satan thought he had Him. "I have the Son of God. He's dead. The Christ is dead. He's in my clutches." He only had Him for an instant. He didn't ever have Him really.

In fact, Jesus says late in this Gospel, “Satan has nothing on Me.” When He breathed His last, He went straight into the throne room of God in His Spirit. That’s why He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit.” And because He has done that, He was then able to rise from the dead, and His resurrection says the cross took care of every sin that you’ve ever committed, and the resurrection proves that you are robed in His righteousness, that it’s true that when God looks at you, if you are repenting and believing in Jesus, when God looks at you, He sees you as if you had never sinned. Not only that, He sees you as if you had lived a life of perfect righteousness. That’s the difference now. He doesn’t merely see you as if you’d never sinned. He sees you as if you’d never sinned and you’d always lived a life of perfect righteousness. That is the glory of the Gospel, and that is Christ, and Christ alone.

So in salvation, you come as a little child. Jesus said this in Matthew 18. There’s a little child, and He says, “This is how you have to come to salvation. You’ve got to be like a little child.” You have to acknowledge that you are helpless to do anything for yourself. You have to acknowledge that you have nothing to commend yourself to God. You have to come to God with nothing in your hands. The only thing that you can come to Jesus Christ with is with your arms full of your own sin. That’s it. No works. Christ, and Christ alone. You come as a little child. And then the wonder of it is He accepts you because of His great work. It’s not that we died for Him. He died for us. “Little children, I’m doing this for you. I’m making you My own.”

He’s going to tell them later in the night, “Listen, it’s good for you that I go away, for if I go away, I’m going to send the Comforter to you. I’m not going to leave you as orphans. I will come to you in the Person of the Holy Spirit, because Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—One God. I’m going to make My abode with you. I’m going to dwell with you spiritually. Physically, yes, you won’t see Me physically. You won’t touch Me again until you die and come home or until I come back.” That’s salvation, but then the Christian life, this is why the Bible says over and over again that we’re not just saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but we are sanctified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, that is that we become more holy in the Christian life the same way we got saved.

In fact, really it’s better to see *saved* as a three-tense thing. When you truly repented and believed, you were saved. You were saved from the penalty of sin forever, when you truly repent and believe. Some people think they repent and believe, and they really don’t. Some people have very emotional experiences, but they really haven’t been saved. That’s why Jesus says, “Many will say to Me on

that day, ‘Lord, Lord.’” He didn’t say a few. He said many. But when you’re saved, you’re saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but you are being saved. The past tense, you have been saved. The present tense, you are being saved. That’s sanctification. It’s salvation that’s going on.

When you’re growing in holiness, when you’re putting sin to death, it is God saving you, continuing to save you, from sin and its effects. This is what should thrill our hearts. When He’s working in us, He’s exposing what needs to be repented of. When we repent and we turn to Him, and we’re cleansed again, and as we look at the cross, we find out we’re saved more and more, and the message is you cannot be saved without looking at the cross. Peter tried to live the Christian life without reference to the cross. You cannot do it. You can’t be saved without going to the cross, and you can’t be saved on a daily basis without going to the cross. What I’m talking about is sanctification now. Is everybody clear on that? If you want to put off sin, you have to go to the cross. You have to live at the foot of the cross. You can’t be like Peter and say, “I’ve got this one. Let me tell You what I’m going to do for You.” No, every work that will be a good work, a truly good work, begins at the cross. It’s all of Christ, all of His grace, nothing of me. Paul says, “In my flesh dwelleth no good thing.” But Jesus is perfect.

Let’s think about how this looks in life. I was thinking the other day, and this is a daily battle. This is a moment by moment battle. We have to constantly remember the Gospel. I was driving in my car the other morning, and I’d got up too late to really spend time with the Lord. I hadn’t spent any time with the Lord, and that happens from time to time in my life. I try for it not to, and this morning I was driving and I was thinking, “I can’t believe I haven’t spent any time with the Lord,” and these thoughts were going through my mind. Really, I’m disturbed by the fact that I’m not grieved by that like I should be. This is my mind thinking as I’m driving the car. “I should be more concerned about spiritual things than I am. Why was I not feeling the...” I’m thinking like that.

Then I think the Lord just reminded me of the cross, because this is the thought that came to me: “Well, stop looking at yourself and look at Jesus.” Yeah, here I am and I’m interested in other things too much. I’m not interested in the one thing that matters. But I have a Savior who was always interested in the one thing that matters. In His humanity, in His earthly life, what did He live to do? “My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him who sent Me.” He lived every moment in the presence of God. He lived every moment yearning for the presence of God. He lived every moment for the glory of God.

So when I stop and say, “Wait, look where I am,” that’s good that I see myself. Now look at the cross. I have a Savior who died for my distractedness. I have a Savior that died for me loving other things too much. I have a Savior that died for me not loving what I ought to love enough. He died for that and He gives me a perfect righteousness. And as I was thinking about this, this is when you preach to yourself. Remember we talked about that? Don’t listen to yourself so much as you preach to yourself. That is you bring the word of God to bear. “Wait a minute, I have a Savior. I’m a sinner. Of course. I’m reminded of this. I have a Savior.” And this is what’s true of Jesus.

What I found is my heart was overflowing with worship as I was driving in my car, and I was saying to the Lord, “Lord, what I want more than anything else is to be in Your presence forever. What I want more than anything else is to be able to stand and just look at Your glory forever.” And I was saying that from a heart that was full. How does that happen? The only way that you and I as born again sheep can do that is by looking at the cross. Anything else is just smoke and mirrors. It’s not the real thing. Godliness grows out of worship, and worship grows out of looking at the Savior.

This is true of temptation. When you’re tempted to some sin, you realize, “I can’t believe—I would never do that.” Stop thinking like that. “I don’t want to do that. I don’t like being dirty.” Okay, sure. Nobody does. Stop thinking about that so much, and start thinking about Jesus. “Lord, here I am, and here I am wanting to do the thing I ought not do. There’s no health in me, Lord. I can’t believe I still find these desires in this flesh.” What do you do? “But I have a Savior who never allowed sinful desires to take root. They never got one root, no foothold in Jesus, and He died for this. You died for this also so that the blood of Christ cleanses me, and now You see me as if I am righteous in You. You’ve given me the power by looking at You, to walk in victory over this.”

What happens is that temptation is suddenly diminishing in its appeal as the greater joy of loving Christ. This is why He says—in John 15 He’s going to tell them this more clearly—He’s going to say, “I am the true vine and you are the branches. Abide in Me and you’ll bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.” It’s all about Jesus. You know, Peter says, “I’ll lay down my life for You,” and Jesus says basically emphatically, “No, you will not. You have lied, and you’ll deny Me three times.”

In the providence of God, the Lord had to orchestrate that by allowing Satan to work that way to have three different people come up to Peter and say, “Hey, you were with Him.” It could have just happened twice. It might have just happened once. That would have been bad enough, wouldn’t it? To deny Him once? But God ordained that three different times they would do it. That’s taking it to the superlative degree. Remember we talked about this. God is holy, holy, holy. Thrice holy, that’s something. The fullness of it, his denial is to the fullest, three times. “I do not know Him. I do not know Him. I do not know Him.” He’s saying that’s what we are apart from Christ. That’s our best. That’s the best we can do. Peter is our best. He said, “I lay down my life for You.”

There’s an irony, though, a double irony, and John’s going to pick up on that in John 21. Remember after the resurrection when Jesus comes and He fixes fish for them on the beach? They come in from fishing and they eat, and then He says to Peter, He calls him Simon. He uses that name, I think, often to remind him of where he was before. “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He says, “Yes, Lord, you know I love You.” Remember He asked him, how many times? Three times. Why? Peter had denied Him three times, and He recommissions him three times. He says, “The issue is not whether you want to be faithful to Me.” He doesn’t say, “Are you faithful to Me?” He doesn’t say, “Do you want to live for Me?” He says, “Do you love Me?” The real fuel to righteous living is loving Christ, and we love Him because He first loved us. We love Him as we see how much He loved us.

What happens after that in John 21, He says three times, and Peter says finally kind of exasperated, says, “Lord, You know all things. You know that I love you.” Remember what Jesus said? Each time, “Feed My sheep. Tend My lambs. Feed My sheep.” And then after that Jesus says basically, “Remember what you said to Me on the night before the crucifixion? You said you’ll lay down your life for Me. You said you’ll do it now, before the cross. You couldn’t do it. You couldn’t lay down your life for Me. You couldn’t be where I’m going then.” But on this side of the cross He says, “Listen, when you were young, you went where you wanted to go, and you did what you wanted to do. When you’re older, they’re going to lead you where you don’t want to go, and make you do what you don’t want to do. Stretch out your arms and follow Me.” Peter understood what He meant is, “You’re going to die on a cross.” Peter hesitated a little bit here and said, “What about John?” John was with them. Peter’s always ready to ask a question. Jesus said, “What is it if I leave him until I return? You follow Me.” But even in that, the grace of God let him do what he had mistakenly run ahead and said he would do without grace. God is so kind He lets him do it anyway, but with His power, the power of the cross and the power of the Spirit.

This is the God that we serve. He is a God who is so gentle, and gracious, and loving, yet He is holy, and the one thing that He will not abide is pride. All that will hinder you from being received by Him is your pride. But if you are willing to disown yourself, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him, “Lord, I’m no longer living for myself. I deny myself. I don’t have anything to bring to You except my sin, but I come and I look at Jesus and what He’s done, and I surrender to Him.” He will save you and He will keep on saving you from sin. One time saved from the penalty of sin forever, continually saved from the power of sin as we walk in Christ.

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer...

*Our Father, we give You praise and we give You glory for what You have done for us in Jesus Christ. We pray that You would work in our hearts that which is pleasing to You, that You would help us to pour contempt on all our pride, to hate our pride more than we hate anything else, so that we might be, by your grace, humbled, broken at the foot of the cross. We pray these things in Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

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