

Matthew 26:58; John 18:15-16

Sunday 7/7/2013

Then you can't live without it. So what a blessing to come up here to the heartland and get bluegrass. Amen. That's a blessing.

Before I get started, let me just thank this church. Once again, I thank so many people individually, but this place is the most hospitable place I've ever been in my life. That's a good testimony for this church, and I thank you. We come here, and it's like, I do feel at home. I do feel at home. I was talking to you last night, and I was talking to your brother at one point. It's like, here we are across the country, but yet we get together, and this is my brother in Christ. We have something in common, and I can sit and talk with these people all day. That's what Jesus Christ brings. The world wants to bring unity, and it isn't going to happen. All you're going to do is set up another Tower of Babel. The only unity you'll have is Jesus Christ. That's it. There are probably people in here that are completely different backgrounds than other people. Some of you have been as clean as can be since the day you were born, and some of you are coming out of a prison, but in Christ, you can get together and be buddies. I praise God for that. I really do.

Okay, take your Bibles and turn to Matthew chapter 26 in one hand and John 18 in the other. You're pretty much going to keep your hands in both of those spots for the majority of the message, because we're going to be bouncing back and forth between the two. Sound people, everything good back there? You all hear okay? Are we okay? Mike in the right spot? Good. All right.

Now today, what we're going to look at is a very common story. This is one of the most familiar stories you've got, and it's about Peter's denial of Jesus Christ. I'm going to look at it kind of in particular, one verse in this section about Peter denying Jesus Christ, and then kind of expound on that one verse. So take your Bibles. The first verse we're going to look at is Matthew chapter 26, verse 58.

Matthew 26:58

And Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.

Let's pray. Lord, I just thank you for this place. I thank you for the time we've had, the blessing that it's been, the hospitality we've been shown. Lord, I just look at it like, Lord, I feel like a beggar. I don't deserve anything, but Lord, I'm getting it anyway. That's what you've done with me so many times, and with everybody else here that's been saved. Lord, we show up as a beggar, and we get invited into the palace. I just thank you so much for salvation through Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray for this message, for the people here in it today, that you deal with some hearts, Lord, some Christians that might be wandering afar off. Lord, deal with them today. Help them to get close, help them to get tight. Lord, maybe somebody here is so far off they've never received you as their Savior yet. Lord, deal with them today, and Lord, let this be the day that they come to you and trust you as their Lord and Savior. We love you and thank you and pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I. Following From Afar

Anyway, the text I'm looking at today is, "And Peter followed him afar off." So the title of the message will be "Following from Afar."

Just to give you a little background of the story, most of you know it. I don't need to give it to you, but I'm going to anyways, in case you don't. Jesus Christ gets arrested in the garden. Peter's with Him. Peter basically takes off. There's a little more to it than that, but we're going to look at that later. Peter goes and follows Him. Jesus is getting tried, and Peter is asked three times, "Aren't you one of His disciples?" "No, I'm not." "Are you one of His disciples?" "No, yeah, no." Three times, and then Peter takes off. So that's the story in a very small nutshell of Peter denying Jesus Christ.

But we're going to look at four things associated with that. That didn't just come up. Most people look at that and go, "Peter's afraid." No, no, we're going to look at the reasons why Peter was following afar off. As we look at the reasons Peter is following afar off, I want you to put yourself in the position of Peter and see why you might be following afar off, and why you have followed afar off at some point in your life, because you are going to fit the mold. The people we have in the Bible are learning, are an example. They're going the same direction that we've gone. We're going the same direction that they've gone, and you're going to see that in Peter today. So put yourself there, and if you're in Peter's position right now, and you're afar off from the Lord, take today to get close. That's what we want to look at.

II. Reasons for Following Afar Off

The first thing we're going to look at is the reason Peter was following afar off. We're going to look at a section of scripture here in Matthew chapter 26.

Matthew 26:31

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

Matthew 26:32-35

But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

The first reason he was following afar off is because a point of contention came up between him and Jesus Christ. Matthew chapter 26, verse 31. Like I said, put your bookmark there because we're going to be there all morning. Verse 31 says, "Then saith Jesus unto them," this is at the Last Supper, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." Peter answered and said unto him, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

A point of contention came up between Jesus Christ and Peter where Jesus Christ said, "Hey, the scripture says all are going to run. All are going to forsake Me." And Peter said, "Everybody except me. I am the exception to the rule, Lord. I know what the book says, but you don't know my circumstances. You don't know my willpower. I'm a strong guy. I'm a tough fisherman. You think I'm going to back down from these Romans? No way, though everyone forsake you, I'm not forsaking you." "Yes, you are, Peter. The scripture says it." So you had a point of contention come up.

If you get to following Jesus Christ from afar, most times it starts with a point of contention or a crossroads, so to speak, where your will goes this way and God's will goes that way. You come to the crossroads and you go God's way or my way. When you go your way, you're traveling from afar. You might still be able to see Jesus Christ. You might still have some Bible knowledge in your head, but it's irrelevant because you're traveling from afar. That point of contention, God says one thing and you want something else. What could it be? Name it. It could be anything.

There are sometimes you're reading your Bible that you should be praying. There are sometimes you're out witnessing to somebody and you actually should be spending some time at home with your family. There are times when you're spending time home with your family that you should be out witnessing. There are certain times where God wants you to do things and your will goes contrary to His. It's about you going your way, Him going His, and you need to be walking close with Jesus Christ, not traveling afar, not wandering afar off like Peter was.

The next thing we're going to go to John 18. We're going to look at the second problem.

John 18:10-11

Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

Peter was angry with the Lord. Why? "Because I'm ready to fight. I'm ready to die for you right now, Lord." I don't know how many people were out there, the numbers, but Peter was ready to fight to the death right there. The problem was not with his bravery. He was willing to die a martyr for Jesus Christ right there on the spot. What did Jesus Christ do? "Peter, it's time to die. It's not time to fight."

He had the willing heart, and sometimes you'll have the willing heart, and a willing heart is wonderful. But sometimes you go charging in, you're not even listening to the Lord. A lot of this reminds me of my early Christian walk when I got some knowledge about the Bible and just charged in like a wild wildebeest and just made a complete wreck of things, and then looked back at the path of destruction that I created and went, "Yes, God is with me." No, God wasn't with me. I was grieving the Lord because of my foolishness.

You can go charging in like a chicken with his head cut off when the Lord doesn't want you to. "Now it's time to be quiet, Peter. Now it's time to go and die, Peter." "But Lord, everybody's going to forsake you." "No, Peter, stand here and take it." Sometimes in your Christian walk, you need to stand and take it. People want to get on you. People want to mock you. People want to

make fun of you. Take it. "But I'm a man." No, you're a saved Christian. Jesus Christ is more of a man than any man here, and He sat there and took it. "What about swinging?" No, take it. Just take it for His sake and nothing else.

My associate pastor said one of his biggest regrets, he said, "I've been out on the street many years and I've never been assaulted or anything like that." He said, "The one time somebody swung at me, I dodged it." He's like, "I wished I hadn't dodged that." I know that's kind of funny, but we don't deal with much persecution in America yet. But we deal with words, and you're always so quick to defend yourself when somebody attacks you. Me too, you, I'm in the same boat. But the second somebody's saying, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa," just take it, man. Sometimes the best is just take it. You know why? Because maybe they're lying about you now, maybe they'll lie about you much better than the truth about you.

What will happen is you can get angry with the Lord. Why do you get angry? You can get angry at a lot of things. You can get mad at your pastor. Why? "He said something I didn't like. He offended me. He picked so and so to head up such and such and not me." You can get mad at another brother or sister in Christ. You can get mad at another Christian. Why? "Because they're doing this and I could do a lot better job than that. And I know what they're doing. I know how they run their mouth, and I know they don't even read their Bible, and I know this and this and this, and why aren't I there?" Because of that attitude. That's why you're not there.

God's putting you in places, in positions. I hope you're willing, but sometimes God will put somebody, just to use the term, lesser than you, so to speak, in front of you to test you out. Do you pray for them still, or do you pray for them to fail so you can step in and be the big shot? It happens. Not at Christ. Yeah, with Christians. Christians backbiting, and I mean, it's disgusting. Such things ought not to be, but they are. That's why I'm preaching against it. That's why I'm preaching at you. I'm aiming at you. I want to hit somebody here. Why? Because it hit me. It's hitting the preacher here. Now, I'm taking all my frustration and getting beat up from this and shooting it out at you.

But you can get mad at God. Why? Because God did something in your life that you didn't like. I just lost one of my best friends last two, it's two weeks now. I don't like it. I don't like it at all. I'm not close to a lot of people. I'm not. I got one good friend here. I got maybe two or three good friends, I can say, back in Pensacola. One of them the Lord takes. It's like, "Why, Lord? Look at what was he doing? He was going from Pensacola, Ohio, to witness to his lost dad, and he got killed on the way up." Why? The preacher at the funeral said something. He goes, "My first thought was, Lord, why didn't you take one of these worthless Christians? Why did you take a Ricky?" There are lots of Christians that aren't doing anything for God. "Why take, why not take one of them? Nobody'd miss them." The work for Jesus Christ wouldn't miss them.

Anyway, it came to a point where I'm like, "Lord, I'm mad." "Thank you." "In all things give thanks," man. You got to give thanks to God for taking your friend. At some point, maybe some of you will have to give thanks to God for taking your child, for taking your mother, for taking your father. Why? Because when you are able to give thanks in something like that, then you get the victory, and God can use you. You don't want to get angry and bitter. There are Christians in

Pensacola, there are Christians in this town that have not been in a church for 20 years. Why? "Because so and so did this."

Honestly, I'm talking to each one of you here, what could somebody do to you that would be enough to make you stop doing something for Jesus Christ? What could I do? Call you a name, talk about you behind your back. That's all it took to get you to quit. That's all it took to get you bitter. There are bitter Christians today at home this morning, not coming here, not coming to any other church. Why? "Well, so and so did it." Is that what you're going to do at the judgment seat of Christ? Stand before God and God go, "What's up with all this wood, hay, and stubble? Didn't you do anything?" "Well, so and so talked about me." You see this, you see this, you see this, somebody talked about you. There are women here, but man up. Come on. Don't get angry with the Lord. It will ruin your life. Don't get angry and bitter against other believers. You got a problem with them, go to them and deal with it. "Well, what if they don't want to deal with it?" Fine. You're clean. Amen. If they don't want to forgive you, they don't want to get right with you, who cares? You're in this for your walk with Jesus Christ, not theirs. I'm sure you want them to do good. You want them to get right. But hey, if there's something there, something there between you and a brother, go to them, get the thing cleaned up. There's something between you and the preacher. Say, "Preacher, I had a problem with the way you did this." You know what? It might be the smallest thing he ever did and has no clue. It's like, "You're upset at that?"

I have a tendency to make just kind of, when I get comfortable around people, I'll make just kind of offhand comments. Just razzing, messing around sort of thing like that. I don't realize that sometimes those comments hurt people. I just, I think I'm funny. I said something that really hurt somebody. I've had people say something to me and it's like, "Oh, God, I'm sorry. I really am." And I am sorry. I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. Sometimes you just don't know. One time I have a tendency to zone out, especially if I got something going on. This was five or six years ago. I'm walking in the parking lot back in Pensacola, and I thought I heard something, but I didn't know. I'm just thinking about what I got coming up. Then later a brother came up to me and said, "Brother, do you have a problem with me?" This is like the guy who said it is one of the nicest people you've ever met in your life. I'm like, "No, why would you say that?" "Well, like three times now I've said hi to you and you just walk by and just totally ignored me." It's like, "Dude, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." No, I just had my mind on other things. I didn't, but he handled it the right way. He could have sat there and got bitter against me. "Well, this guy, who's he think he is walking by, snubbing me and blah, blah," and he could have got bitter at what over me just being so scatterbrained that I'm not even paying attention. I didn't notice him. I wouldn't have snubbed the brother intentionally. But then when he talked, I said, "Man, I'm really sorry." After that, I tried to make it a point, "Okay. Try and be a little more aware of your surroundings." I try, and sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. But sometimes people get upset for, I say, for no reason. Well, they think they have a reason, but it's just, you just kind of clashed. Things just didn't work out, but he handled the thing right. He's a good brother.

Now some of you that might still be angry with the Lord for years, get over it, get the thing settled. Why? So you can go forward. So you don't have to stand afar. There's no reason to stand afar off when Jesus Christ wants you close. All right. That's the first thing we looked at. The

reason you're following afar off: contention and anger. There would be a lot more reasons, but we don't have time for them because we're just focusing on Peter here.

III. Revelation of Following Afar Off

The second thing to look at is the revelation that Peter was following afar off. Do you realize the fact he was following afar off was not manifest until trouble came? The fact that you're following afar off right now might not be manifest until some trouble comes up. Trouble where? In the home, in the marriage, in the church, at work. That's where your true colors will show that you're not walking with Jesus by how you respond to those troubles.

Trouble, man, trouble causes you to respond. A few years ago, one of my close friends lost a baby. His wife was nine months and basically going in to deliver, and the baby came out and the baby was dead. I remember that next, I think maybe a day or two later, a Wednesday night prayer service, Mark stood up and said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Wow. That's how I want to respond to trouble. I want to respond to trouble by exalting Jesus Christ and turning to Him. He's quoting Job, if some of you don't know. That's the proper way to respond.

But how is the human way to respond? The blame game. That's one way. Looking back, regret. Now regret. Regret can be a big sin, people. Living in the past. "Well, if I'd have done this and done this and that." Yeah, but you didn't. So just go on. "Forgetting the things that are behind, I press forward." Not, "I'm looking at what's going on behind me my whole life." So I can't even living in the past, man, get over it. The revelation that you're following afar off is by how you respond to trouble.

Now I understand your first instinct is generally going to be wrong. At least mine is. My first instinct is this: "Why, Lord? Ain't right, Lord?" Well, good. Get it out. When you think the Lord is wrong, tell Him. "Oh, no." Why? Because you're fake. Oh, dear God in heaven. No. Say, "Lord, you're wrong. I hate this." Ten minutes later you're crying and you're getting right. Why? Because you're straight up. He knows what's in your heart. So just talk straight to the Lord. You got a problem. Tell Him you have a problem. Weep over the fact you have a problem with how He handled this. I'll tell you, by the end of it, you're getting right and you'll have some peace. Talk to the Lord. Talk to the Lord. Don't just hide everything. He knows it anyway. So just be straight. Don't bottle it up. Don't let that build. Don't let that bitterness build because once the things come, it's revealed. You're not close to the Lord. You want everybody to think you're close to the Lord, but it'll manifest itself eventually.

IV. Results of Following Afar Off

Now the result of following afar off. That's the third thing we're going to look at. This is the bulk of the message. The result of traveling afar off or following afar off. Go to John 18. You might still be there.

John 18:15-16

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

The first result of traveling afar off is you won't be associated with Jesus anymore. You realize John went in with Jesus, and one of those times you read in the three denials, one of them was a servant girl. Who sent that servant girl out? John did. John was close to Jesus. Sure he scattered when they came, but he recovered awful quick and he got in there and was close to Jesus, and he saw Peter from afar and said, "Hey young lady, that man's one of his disciples. Go out and tell him to come in and stand with me. Be associated with Jesus." And she went out there and Peter, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no."

That's something, you know, you can be associated with right people. It's good to be associated with Jesus. It's good to be associated with Christians. I like it. I'd rather be associated with a saved person than any other person in the world. When Jesus Christ is here, Peter's here, and Peter, John was giving him a chance to come in. So he sent just somebody non-threatening, a little servant girl. Boy, here Peter is ready to lop off a Roman soldier's head, and he cowered at a little girl. There's been times I've cowered at little girls. There's been times I've cowered at things that you shouldn't be afraid of.

You remember Elijah? Elijah takes on everybody. But then Jezebel says, "You tell him, he ain't, the sun ain't going down, man, I'm cutting him, he dead." And then what does Elijah do? "Oh, it's me." It's like, "You're afraid of this lady and you just took on everyone?" Well, that's how it goes sometimes. Sometimes you're bold as a lion. Other times you're afraid of a mouse, and that's exactly what it is in this case. But Peter was no longer associated with Jesus.

Next thing, you'll end up in the wrong crowd.

John 18:18

And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

Who's Peter standing with? The servants and officers. Who's that? The people who just arrested Jesus Christ. Peter's with them. What's Peter doing in that crowd? See, now this message is very personal to me because there were four, five, six years in my life where I was afar, and I wasn't a stone's throw afar, man. I was a rocket launch away. I was far away from God for many years. So I can speak on this, and I remember how it went.

"I'm going to church." "I don't know. Church is too far away so I'm not going much anymore, but I'm still reading my Bible." "Probably reading my Bible more than a lot of you." "I'm reading my Bible and, well, I'm hanging out with, I'm not hanging out with any Christian friends anymore, but I'm reading my Bible." "Then I'm reading my Bible every other day, not so much." "Then I'm going with these friends to the bar. I'm not drinking so I'm okay, but I'm reading my Bible, but I'm not drinking at the bar." "I'm not reading my Bible anymore, but I still haven't went back to the booze. That's no good. Drinking's bad." "Then I'm at the bar and I'm passed out onto the

table." What happened? A progression happened where I'm walking with God's people, and a very gradual thing happened. The next thing you know, I'm way afar off.

There's, I think it's Psalm 1 that blesses a man who standeth not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. Within that progression, what is it? I might be throwing it backwards. You're standing with him, where you're walking with him, then you're standing with him, then you're sitting with him. That's the progression that you will take when you get afar off from the Lord. You'll end up, I ended up as a Christian, as a saved Christian, out in the world doing things that I never did as a lost man, living like the devil. Granted, a lot of it because I wasn't old enough at the time when I got saved. I got saved at 16. A lot of stuff wasn't legal to do then, but nevertheless, I was afar off, and it just started by hanging around the wrong crowd.

Little here, I'm not talking about, I'm not associating myself in any way with the world. I'm not talking about, "Well, I'm not inviting them over to supper because they're lost." No, invite them over, man. You're still in the soul winning business here. You still got to deal with people, but when your 100% company becomes the unsaved and they don't even know you're a Christian, you're afar off. You are afar off. Some of you, no, let me hit this next point. I've heard it said before, it's best to stay cold. It's better to stay cold than to warm yourself by the devil's fire. That's a very true statement. Peter did not belong there. Peter belonged inside with Jesus.

The third thing, third result of traveling afar off, is you'll lose your testimony. That's what we get in Matthew. Go back to Matthew 26. See Matthew 26, John 18, back and forth is where we're going.

Matthew 26:73-74

And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

Sometimes as a Christian, your speech will bewray thee. You get so used to talking to Christians, you go, "Well, Lord, well," and, "Huh," the world ain't used to hearing "Lord well" or, you know, these little Christian terms you'll use or whatnot. His speech told on him. Why? Because he was with Jesus long enough to pick up some speech. And then, "Then immediately began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew." "Well, I can tell by the way you speak, I can tell by some of your terminology, you must be a Christian." Well, boy, did they blink. "No, I'm not. You think I'm with him?" "Well, listen to this. Whoop." "No Christian would talk that way." He's telling the truth. What did Peter do? Peter blew his testimony.

Your testimony, you blow your testimony. That's a hard thing to get back, especially in the eyes of the unsaved, because that's all they remember. God forgets it. That's all they remember. "I've seen him. He's a Christian. Yeah, I've seen what he's done." I got saved in high school and started witnessing a lot. I remember when I was out in the world, sitting around, a guy I hadn't seen in years, but he was a guy from high school. He's like, "What happened to you? You used to be this God Jesus guy. What happened to you?" I'm just sitting there hanging my head, just blitzed out

of my mind. I was out of my mind and felt that big. Why? Because he's right. I knew he was right. I went home and just cried. Said, "Lord, if I'm never going to get right, kill me. I can't take it. I don't want to live my life as an absolute disgrace to you." But if I were to go see that, I haven't seen the guy since, but if I were to see him right now, what would he remember? He'd remember that me sitting out by the fire, passing it around, man. That's what he'd remember. Would he listen to anything I had to say? Maybe not. Maybe, maybe not. "Yeah, you went through that in high school too. You used to do, then you got Jesus. Oh, so you're in the Jesus phase." A testimony is a hard thing to get back once you lose it.

I'll tell you, you work to try and reach somebody. There was at work one time. I was, you know, walking with the Lord and everything, witnessing to this kid, dealt with him. Then, goodness, one night this kid was just under my nerves and just badgering me and badgering me. I grabbed him by the throat and just put him against the coolant. It's like, "Boy, you watch." It was like then after that, what happened? Goodness sake. I went up to him crying and apology. Yeah, then you got to make a fool out of yourself to get it right. But it's one of those things that, man, here I am witnessing to somebody and then just lose it. Just lose it. Lucky I didn't just pound him to a pulp. Thankfully, I didn't. But, you know, you're going to lose your testimony with just one ounce of anger. You can lose your testimony by one wrong look, one wrong word. And it's bombed out. You bombed out. "He began to curse." "Well, he ain't a Christian."

Any of you work anywhere? Hopefully, all of you work somewhere. But any of you guys work someplace and the people call you, "Oh, that's a preacher. That's a preacher." I remember working at a junkyard and all, "That's the preacher." People call you the preacher. Why? Because you're opening your mouth. Because you're associated with Jesus Christ. You have a testimony. You're the preacher. Don't blow that. Don't blow that. Walk close to Jesus. Get you a testimony that you stand for Jesus Christ.

Next thing is, and this is back to John 18:15-16, same verse I read before.

John 18:15-16

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

You won't be there when the Lord needs you. When you follow afar off. What did the Lord need? He needed somebody to stand with Him. What did He need? He could, I mean, He's getting a trial in there. He could have used a witness. He could have used somebody to stand up and testify for Him. Now granted, looking back, He was going to Calvary. We know that, but I'm talking about you now. When you're following afar off, sometimes He's going to need a witness. Sometimes He's going to need somebody to stand up and testify in His defense. And because you're afar off, nobody's there.

I don't know how it's going to be in eternity. I don't know how the great white throne is going to go, but I know there's some people that are going to be going to hell because you weren't there. I

wasn't there. We weren't there. It was a horrible thought. God's going to wipe away all tears from after that. Why? Because there's going to be tears. I can think of a time years, couple years ago, we're in the pet store and we're coming out, and I had some gospel tracts on me, and I saw a girl sitting out there against the wall with her head in her hands. I just know, Lord, deal with her. Deal with her. Give her a tract. Just walked out to the car, got in the car, got my wife, got my kids. We got to schedule the key. We got to this. We got missed opportunity. What do I know that what was this girl going through? I don't know. I hope the Lord sent somebody else that wasn't so pathetic to deal with her. I hope the Lord sent somebody to deal with her who listened. Who's He going to get? I don't know anybody but me because I bailed. I didn't do the job. This is just a couple, maybe five years ago. I'm in Bible school, and I'm walking far off enough from Jesus Christ that I didn't listen to Him, didn't testify for Him, didn't witness for Him. And here's some young girl. Don't know her story. Never got it. But if she stands before that great white throne, "Depart from me, ye cursed," you could have dealt with her. You could have dealt with her. She was ready.

There are sometimes, you ever deal with somebody and lead them to Christ and go, "Wow, that was amazingly easy." Everything just fell into place. Yeah, God had laid everything out. He had lined everything up. All He needed was somebody to come through and harvest. And there was nobody to harvest. Just like it says in Joel, "Wail and lament where the fruit of the field is perished." The fruit in the field is perishing out there because there's nobody to harvest. Why? Because Christians are too busy walking afar off and not opening their mouth for Jesus Christ. The harvest is dying, and it didn't like it dies and you like a field, you plow it and it becomes good nutrients. No, they die and go to hell, and they die and go to hell, and they don't get out. Why? Because Christians walk afar off. Why? You don't want to be associated with Jesus. Why? Because that causes controversy. People will talk one way, people will talk one way. They know you're a Christian. They won't, I mean, I gotta move on, but you won't be there when the Lord needs you.

The Lord needs you. I'm not giving you this modernistic garbage that, "Oh, God woke up today and just is so glad you're in His life and He can't live without you." I'm not giving you that, that just modern garbage you're getting today. "Something good is going to happen to you today." "Yeah, you're going to walk out of here and get hit by a car." I mean, I'm not giving you that garbage. I'm giving you a truth that God needs somebody to make up the hedge and stand in the gap before the land, and what did He do in Ezekiel's day? "I found none." How's He doing today? He looked for one outside of Petland in Pensacola, Florida, to make up the hedge and stand in the gap, and He found none. Why? Because the one Bible school student teacher, esteemed King James Bible believer, was not willing. Yeah, people. Yeah, people. It's quiet in here. Why? Hopefully it's hitting you. See what I mean? I say it hits me. Yeah, it hits me because I'm in the same boat as you are, and I don't want to be in that boat anymore.

I got a buddy of mine. I gave Bob his prayer card, and I see this guy. He's an older guy. He got saved in his 40s. I hear Dan Levita is the guy's name. He's a missionary in Honduras now. I hear him give testimony. He'll stand up, and real soft spoken guy. He'll say, "You know, I was driving back from work." He laid tile. "And I was just driving down the street and I saw this guy walking

and I just, Lord, really impressed upon my heart to go stop and go talk to him. And I'd already driven by him. So I turned around and came back, came back by and got out and said, 'Hey, I just got something I'd like to give to you, you know, and tell you about Jesus Christ.'" The guy is just like, ready. He got out of the car and just there was a guy ready to get saved. He turned around. "Man, well, Lord, I'm already, I'm already past. It's too late. You should have told me a block back. Then I could have stopped." I wonder, man, how does a little V to get those people like that? Because he'd have given a tract to the girl outside of Petland, and the Lord would have been ready to use him then. Why? Because he obeyed here. See? So then he gets this awesome thing here. See, you blow it here. You blow it. You blow it. "Lord, I'll give him a chance next year. I am done with him for this year. I'm sick of him."

I don't know how it works, but I know that the more opportunities you take, the more you're given. I'm telling you, I met people and they did. They deal with people, and I'm just amazed at how good they are at dealing with people. They say the right things. They're not jerks there. I mean, and if they are, it works. I mean, it just, it's like what's going on. God is leading them. They're so close to Jesus Christ that they're almost probably saying the words Jesus Christ Himself would say. You need to be there when the Lord needs you. Peter could have been there for a witness.

V. Reconciliation

Lastly, we're going to look at the reconciliation. That's what I'm shooting for today. The reconciliation. Now I got to turn out of our pages in Matthew and Mark and head to Luke. The reconciliation. I think that starts right here in Luke 22.

Luke 22:60-62

And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

This to me is one of the toughest things you read in the Bible, man. This is rough. Luke 22:60 says, "And Peter said," this is his third denial, "Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

Think of that. Those doors are a good distance. Peter standing out here warming himself by the fire. Jesus Christ is standing right through those doors. Peter is just, he didn't even look in that way, but he hears it. They're punching Him, smacking Him. The roar of a crowd you hear coming out of those doors, and Peter around that barrel just fuming. "I was going to stand up for Him. I had a dud for Him right there, and He told me to put down my sword." What does that mean? Hearing that laughter, roaring, yelling, screaming, just hearing it. And he just hears a barrel. Here these guys are who arrested Jesus. Good thing Malchus wasn't there. He'd have probably remembered Peter. But, and then what happens? "I told you, I don't know him." And at that split

second, he looks up, there's a path where all the people parted, and his eyes meet the Lord's eyes. And those eyes right there looked right into his heart, looked right into his soul. And Peter went out and wept bitterly. I'd think so. I think those will probably be those same eyes that we see someday at the judgment seat of Christ. I know they weren't the glorified Jesus. I understand all that, but those eyes looked at Peter, and he went out and wept bitterly. I think that was part of the process that led to him getting right. Let that be part of the process that leads to you getting right, getting closer to Jesus Christ. Those eyes, think of those eyes looking at you. "You blew it." Yeah, you blew it. And the disappointment that the Lord who saved you has in you. Disappointing, would you disappoint? I disappointed God because He wanted to use me, and I didn't because of my selfishness, because of my bitterness, because of my anger, because of, fill in the blank. And those eyes will help you. You'll realize right then, "Oh, God, I'm sorry. Oh, God, I'm sorry."

You know that there was a, go to Mark 16.

Mark 16:7

But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

You know that there was something happened there. You know, you go through the death, and Peter went out and wept bitterly. I hear the speculation that he probably went right out there, right out there to the, where he fell asleep. He didn't sleep that night. He cried and was able to pray all night long then. But you knew there was a split that happened because Mark 16:7, you got this verse, it says, "But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." "Go tell the disciples, yeah, and tell Peter if he's there too." Peter lost something. He lost his discipleship, or what, he lost his fellowship to where he wasn't even numbered with him. Why didn't he say, "Let's go tell the disciples," because Peter wasn't walking with the disciples. Peter was afar off. So go tell the disciples, yeah, and if you see Peter, go tell him. There was broken fellowship between Peter and the Lord that had to be dealt with. Just like if you're walking afar off, there's broken fellowship with you and Jesus Christ that needs to be dealt with. The look wasn't enough. Yes, he cried, he wept, but he had to be restored.

You realize what happened? Now go back to John 21, we'll close out. Go back to John 21. That chapter ends with Peter. "I go off fishing." "Put down your nets, Peter. From now on, you're going to be fishing men." "I go off fishing." Peter went around with those nets back up. I don't know if Peter was heading back out into the world to do things the old way that he used to be doing, but he didn't catch anything. Then somebody, "Hey, cast your net over here." He throws it over, and it happened just like it happened earlier, you know, three years before. Peter sees a guy on the side of the lake and doesn't even recognize him. Doesn't even know who he is. But John, who was close, recognized him. "It's the Lord." And then he went. And he went. Because he had to put on the, he had to act like he was the closest still. And Peter didn't even recognize the Lord anymore.

I remember maybe in the hypocrite that I was, slash am. I'm dealing with my wife before we get married because she's lost. You know, I know it didn't write to marry a Christian girl. Or to marry a non-Christian girl. Sorry. Sorry about that. So here I am over a beer and cigarettes trying to lead her to the Lord. And I didn't even recognize my Lord anymore. I didn't have my Bible out. I knew it wouldn't write to do it. I mean, come on, man. You see the hypocrisy that you'll have sometimes. So I had to go and I went and dug through my drawers and I found an old Chick tract. I had to use it. "Now you need to get saved because I can't marry somebody who's unsaved. So repeat after." I mean, just stupid as stupid can be. But the thing is, I didn't even recognize Him anymore. I didn't recognize the Lord. It's sad not recognizing the Lord when once we were so close, once He was my reason for getting up in the morning. And I don't even know Him anymore. It's like at some point came and it was like, "Lord, I'm sorry." I went and wept bitterly. And I had to get right.

But the thing is, Peter didn't recognize the Lord. But what happened? Jesus had made him breakfast. And they came and they all ate breakfast. I'm just thinking that conversation. "Oh, it's so good to see you, Jesus." They look over, Peter's quiet because Peter knows he still has an issue to deal with. The Lord's still going to deal with him. When somebody's going to deal with you about something, you have that condemned feeling like, "I know the axe is swinging, but I don't know when." And I'm just waiting. "I know he's going to bring it up. I know he's going to. I know he's going to." You just know he's going to bring it up. The Lord is going to deal with you.

John 21:15-17

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

Then verse 15 says, "So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" He said unto him, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." He said unto him, "Feed my lambs." Peter probably felt so good to get that out of the way. He said to him again a second time. "Why is He asking me again? I just told Him." "He said unto him a second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" He said unto him, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." He said unto him, "Feed my sheep." He said unto him the third time, "Lord, really?" "You know, Lord, I messed up. I know I denied you. I didn't stay close to you like John did, but come on, Lord, quit rubbing it in. Quit rubbing it in. I'm sorry." "Peter, how many times you deny me? Two, three. I want to hear you confess me three." "He said unto him, Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus said unto him, Feed my sheep."

John 21:18-19

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

Peter was restored. Peter made restitution, so to speak. Sometimes when you do wrong, you got to make restitution. Sometimes you make a mess, you know, just like you break the law, you got to pay for it. You hit somebody's car, you got to make restitution and pay for the bumper, you know, whatever. Peter made restitution, and Peter was square with the Lord. How much, four weeks so went by? And Peter preached Acts chapter two, full of the Holy Spirit, and planted the seeds of the New Testament church. But I wonder if any of those men around that fire were at that message and said, "Not listen to this guy. You should have heard what I heard him say a couple weeks ago." I wonder if there were 10 less people who got saved that day because of his words back then, because of the time he was afar off. Now granted he got things right, and Peter became, you know, a martyr, and he stood up for the Lord the rest of his life. But the longer you stay afar off, the worse it's going to be for you, the worse it's going to be for the Lord. He wants you close.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion here, if you're a Christian and you've been following Him afar off, it's time to stop keeping the Lord at a distance and get things right. You'll be a lot happier. You won't be under as much conviction. Granted, the conviction is going to come because the Lord is just going to keep you under conviction and deal with you till the day you die. But the Lord Jesus Christ wants to be close to you. Why don't you quit traveling far off? He needs you to speak up for Him. Your lost friends need you to speak up for Him. "Sought for a man among them who should make up the hedge and stand in the gap, and I found none." Don't let Him find none when He's asking and you're available.

Now, maybe you're here today and you've never even started following Him. You say, "I've never even trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I don't know anything about what is this Christianity? I'd like to know for sure." I remember I asked a lady one time, "How do I know, yeah, this Bible's neat, this prophecy stuff's neat, but how do I know what's going to happen to me when I die?" And somebody opened the Bible and said, "Well, look here," and took me through, and I came and I trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. You're going to get that opportunity today as Pastor Bob comes here and leads us in invitation. I think he's coming. But don't travel afar off, don't wander afar off. Why don't you get up close to Him? I just have every head bowed and every eye closed for just a second, and I think we could all...