

I. The Three Cups and Gospel Studies

Last time, we focused on the three cups found in the four Gospels. I wanted to show you how, through the New Testament and the Old Testament, each one of these cups really formed for us a major doctrine in the Bible. We looked at the cup of His New Testament blood, which He did at the Last Supper, and how that sets up for us the doctrine of the Lord's Supper for the New Testament Church.

Then we looked at the cup of His physical death, and we examined that and saw how that fit into the doctrine of Him dying on the cross physically. And then we talked about one of the greatest subjects in the Bible: the cup of God's wrath. That cup is poured out on a man in hell and then later in the lake of fire. It is poured out on the world during the Tribulation period. It is the same cup of God's wrath, as we saw last week, that Jesus Christ took and drank and experienced the wrath of God on Himself for you and for me, so you and I would not have to drink of that cup.

These three cups complete the whole aspect of Christ coming to the earth. We know from our previous Bible studies that the number three in numerology basically signifies the completeness of something. So, we now see in these three cups a complete understanding of every aspect of His death on the cross and what it means not only to me and the church, but to me personally for my salvation, and then understanding His death on the cross. We bring them out separately, but then also are able to study them together as they fit into three different aspects of His life, forming for us, as I said, three great Bible doctrines.

I have told you this before: there are so many little key studies in the Gospels that will develop into great truths for us to lay out and study. We talked last week about the synoptic Gospels, and I explained that three of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—go together pretty well, but John is the oddball. All of the liberal scholars were trying to come up with the answer, and then we showed you last week why that is what it is. It is all very interesting. John's writings will always be set apart from all the other writers in the Bible. You just go in knowing that, and when you understand that, then it all pulls together.

We see how important it is to glean as much as you can out of the Word of God. As the book of Ephesians tells us in Ephesians 3:8, when you have the Bible in front of you, you have the unsearchable riches of Christ, and we will never get to the bottom of it. It takes a lifetime to just scratch the surface, but in that scratching of the surface, you will find a lot of truth that will help you through life.

II. Recap of Christ's Betrayal and Peter's Denial

Now, as we look at the story here that is leading up to Christ's crucifixion, and we are moving in that direction, we are going to begin to look at some character studies. As we just naturally move through the story, some men pop up that we need to take a look at and learn from. Character studies are probably one of the great studies that anybody can take in the Bible. There are a

number of books that you can get that will help you learn about individuals in the Bible, but there is much in the Bible that as you grow, you can learn yourself.

We get introduced now to a man and get to see him as one of the great character studies in the Bible. In my mind, he is one of the best. But first, before we do that, let us recap for a moment to set everything up of where we are going and look at what we have learned. We have now been through the Last Supper, the upper room where the cup of the New Testament of His blood was established. We have seen Judas betray Him, and I told you that John chapter 13 all the way up through chapter 18 deals with the upper room during the Last Supper. There is a lot of material that we looked at.

Well, they come out of that upper room and they begin to go down, and they come to take Him. Judas has done his work now, and he comes with them, points them out, and they take them. Then we see that this is where Peter pulls out his sword, and we talked about this last week, and cuts off his ear. Then the Lord heals the man's ear and puts it back on the side of his head. Then He tells Peter to put away his sword, and now we have a reference to Him drinking the Father's cup, which we now know is the cup of God's wrath.

In John 18:12, they now bind Him and take Him. First, they take Him to Annas and then to Caiaphas, who is the high priest. Finally, He goes to the cross, and He drinks the cup of physical death, but He also drinks the cup of the wrath of God. We will get to that in a few weeks, a couple of weeks to come.

So now we want to pick up our story in John 18. As per our rules that we have laid down for the four Gospels, there are four of them, we want to now begin, as we read this, to get all of the accounts together, and you can see how this thing lays itself out.

Let us pray before we jump into this thing. Father, we thank and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. We thank You for all You do for us. Thank You for the Word of God. Thank You for its truth. Thank You for the power that it holds, that it can change the lives of men and women, and Lord, can help us get to a point in our life where, yes, even we in this sinful state can be used of a holy God. We love You. We thank You, Father. Give us out of this text today what we all need, and we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

The man now that we are going to begin to look at today, it is going to take us a couple of weeks to get through everything about him because he is an incredible study. We are going to now look at the Apostle Peter, one of the great character studies in the Bible. But as I said, we want to be able to get all of our accounts together. Not only is Peter clobbered because of his bad swordsmanship, but he bears the distinction of being the Apostle that denied the Lord three times. So we want to look into his life, and we want to begin to see all of the events, and then we want to learn from it.

III. The Comprehensive Account of Peter's Denials

Now, John 18:15-18 says this:

John 18:15-18

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.

Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.

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.

Then we jump down to John 18:25. We pick up the story of Peter again that puts these two passages together.

John 18:25-27

And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not.

One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him?

Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

We have the first denial in John 18:17, the second one in John 18:25, and then the third one in John 18:27. When you just read this one account of the denial, you begin to see that there is key missing information that we need to follow our rules of the four Gospels to get all the accounts together to get the whole picture. I cannot emphasize enough the importance, so when you get into the Gospels, this one aspect, you just have to get all the accounts that there are together.

Because when we look in Luke 22:31-34, Peter tells the Lord in Luke 22:33, he says, "I am willing to die with you and to go to prison with you." Then in Luke 22:31, the Lord answers him and He says this:

Luke 22:31-34

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

Now, that is a key thing; we do not have time to get into it today. You see, Peter was saved in the Old Testament sense because we are still in the Old Testament, but he has not been converted yet like you and I are. That bears some great truth as you study it, but as I said, that is not our goal today. You want to see that you did not get all the information from what we read over there in John. Now there is more added to the conversation. As we look at the next accounts, we see even more information.

All right, look at Luke 22:54-62. This is where he actually denies Him.

Luke 22:54-62

Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.

And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him.

And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.

And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.

And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen.

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.

You see, you got more information now than you had. It is building. You see how it is building? This is how you build a story from each account. You put them down, you look at them, and then you glean out of it, and then you piece together what you have.

Now look at Mark 14:65-72.

Mark 14:65-72

And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest:

And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.

But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.

And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them.

And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.

But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.

And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

Now, this is important. This is important. I want you to see, because forget Peter for a moment, this is for us. The girl says, "You have to be one of his because you talk the way he talks. Your speech betrays you that you were with him." So what does he do? Mark 14:71, "But he began to curse and swear." See? If you want to prove you are really not with Christ, do not talk like Him; just curse and swear. Because at this point, I am sure when they heard him rattle off a few four-letter words, they looked at each other and said, "Yeah, he could not be with them." See how it works? If you are really a Christian, your speech should betray you against the world. But so many times, we talk just like the world. Here the cock crows twice. See? You only got it one time in the other ones. And now we see he starts to use a little four-letter word adjectives here. This one leaves out the fact that the Lord looked at him.

The reason why God does these things the way He does it is because we need to study to show ourselves approved. If you want a complete picture out of anything in the Gospels, you have to get all the accounts together, systematically lay them side by side, and then piece the picture together to get the whole story.

Finally, our fourth account is in Matthew 26:69-75.

Matthew 26:69-75

Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

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 not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Now we begin to see the importance of getting it all together. Not one place alone will give you the complete entirety of what is going on here. It is so vital to see that if you are going to take the Bible seriously. Every one of them is different. Every one of them adds another piece to this picture. You never, never, never want to forsake, when it comes to the Gospels, the four rules that you have to follow.

IV. The Context of the Twelve Apostles: Knowing the Flock

I cannot overemphasize the importance of Peter. Unfortunately, all you ever hear, in most cases, will be about his denying the Lord and his swordsmanship ability and cutting off the guy's ear. But there is so much more to Peter. Peter is, for you and for me, probably one of the greatest single studies in the Bible based on your spiritual growth.

Before we get into all this and his life and his ministry and his relationship to Christ, his denial, all the things that he does, I think we have to establish a context. I think it is vital to see Peter within the context of the twelve apostles. When you look at the twelve apostles, you have a great picture emerging here that comes to light of what is really going on and where these guys all fit in. In time, as we develop this, as I said, you are going to see an incredible inspirational application that every one of us can apply to ourselves.

I have no doubt in my mind, in time, God's time, many of you young men and young ladies will be solid leaders in this church ministry. I am talking to you young ones now that have come in that are growing, and many of you are already on your way. Some of you guys, a couple of you, have talked to me about someday your aspirations that maybe you too could pastor a church. In our own personal time together, we have talked about it; you brought it up, and I gave you some pre-advice of what you needed to do.

But I want to say this to you: if that ever happens, if you ever find yourself behind a pulpit where you are responsible for a body of people, or you find yourself in a key place in this church where you are responsible for people, this study of the twelve apostles and Peter, how he fits in, will be absolutely invaluable. Not only does Peter represent a New Testament Christian that you will meet within ministry, all twelve of these apostles will be an example of the kinds of people you have to deal with and work with and be with within the ministry. I have found over the years, just by observation and dealing with time, you are going to find about five or six kinds of people that you find in the ministry in Christianity.

To me, as a pastor, in Proverbs 27:23, God has given any pastor an incredible verse that he better pay attention to and at least learn how this thing works.

Proverbs 27:23

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.

For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?

What He is telling any man who is in a pastor's position, or men and women who are in leadership positions within a church, is that you need to know the state of your people. He says

that riches, which the world is all about, will not cut it for them. He also says that the crown will not endure forever. The crown here is the crown of the world. What He is saying to a pastor or to a leader is, you need to be the watch care of your people, and you need to know the state of their spiritual condition to the best of your ability so you can help them get wherever God wants them to be. He also can keep them from the things of the riches of this world and the crowns and the popularity and all the things of this world that will rob you from the crown that God wants you to have.

Now the question obviously comes up: How in the world do you do that? The answer to that question is understanding the example of the twelve apostles. Every church, I do not care where you go, I do not care who the pastor is, I do not care if it is a good church, bad church, in between, big church, little church, meeting in a phone booth on Sunday, I do not care. Every church will be a mixture of these twelve men.

V. The Problem of Repentance and Evidence of Salvation

First of all, let us get the bad guys out of the way: Judas. That tells me right out of the box that not everybody in church is truly born again and saved, any church. I will tell you right now, in my years in ministry and dealing with people, there are people that I have really worried about if they were ever truly born again. It is not a judgment on my part; it really is not. I am not sitting there saying they are or they are not. It is certainly not being critical of them. But they do keep me up at night because my job is to know the state of the flocks. If you ever pastor, that is going to be your job. If you do not learn to do that, there is J Truck Driving School or Barber College for you probably.

As a pastor, you want the best for your people. My home pastor in Canton, Ohio, Canton Baptist Temple, was Dr. Harold Henniger. Harold was not a great Bible scholar. Harold was one of J. Frank Norris' boys. Harold was not someone who really had a depth in the Bible. Harold built a church of probably five or six thousand people in its heyday simply because he loved people. I have never met a man who loved his people more than Harold Henniger. He was smart enough to have people around him who knew the Bible, and it kind of worked as a good balance. But he built that church single-handedly on his love for the people that God gave him.

We used to have a little church brochure. I do not remember what it was called. It was a paper about that big, and all the church was doing, the plan of salvation was in it. It had little things from his sermons. Wherever he went, I do not care where he went, he had a stack of that. He would go into a restaurant. He would walk around before he ever sat down and give everybody in that restaurant one of those little papers. People knew who he was. He had a reputation of kindness. He had a reputation of loving people. He cared about his people. Mel used to tell me in their staff meetings that he would worry about this guy or worry about this family or worry about that. I did not understand all that at the time, but years and years later, I looked back and I understand that that guy had five heart attacks. Five. Before he finally went home to be with the Lord. Five heart attacks. I am telling you right now, those heart attacks came out of a love and burden for people that he cared about.

He was an incredible example to me. Where Mel Sabaka was an incredible example of the Bible, Harold Henniger was an incredible example on caring for people and loving people. As a pastor, if you are worth your salt at all, you want the best for your people. Sometimes your people do not want the best for themselves. But your job is to know the state of them and to care for them and to want them to have the very best in their life, even when they do not want it for themselves. I have looked at people all my ministry and worried about them just like Harold did.

I mean, you are told to know the state of your flocks, the apostles and their picture of what they are, and I am telling you right now, in any church, probably this one too, maybe not here this morning, but in this church, maybe here this morning, there are people who claim to be saved but have never truly been born again. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

I am telling you right now, whether you like it or not, or whether you agree with it or not, it is simply down to this: when you truly get saved, some things need to change in your life. We live in a Christianity where you can come down and say you get saved, pray the prayer, do whatever, and then you go right back out to the same old lifestyle. Nothing changes. Now, there is either something wrong with your salvation or there is something wrong with the verse. When you do not see any change, it worries me because I know in my absolute model of the twelve, that Jesus Himself had someone in His twelve apostles that was not legitimate.

The missing word today, as far as I am concerned, and I have told you this before, the missing word today is the simple one word: repentance. Because without repentance, there is no salvation. Everybody has their different idea and definition of what repentance is. You will talk to some people and you will say, "Well, repentance means that you are sorry for your sins, so you are going to repent, that means you are sorry." That is not the Bible definition of repentance. Repentance in the Bible has nothing to do with you being sorry. Repentance in the Bible is after you get saved, you change the direction of your life. It is not that I am sorry I have done all these bad things, so I am going to get saved, so I repented. That is the mindset today. That is not the Bible definition of repentance.

The Bible definition of repentance is that when you become a new Christian in Christ Jesus, old things do pass away. Now I am going to take the definition one step further. Repentance is not only a change in direction in your life, but even more than that. You know what repentance is? It is the evidence of your salvation. It is the evidence of your salvation. Romans 10:9-10 says:

Romans 10:9-10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

I am telling you, in the Christianity that we live in today, in the Christianity that we all have to wade through, I am afraid that many, many people will confess with their mouth, but there is something wrong in their heart with something called repentance. That is why this is not a judgment. It is not a criticism. I worry about it. I mean, look at it purely from a Bible standpoint. How can anybody get truly saved and still be part of the world?

We use the word hypocrite. That is a Greek word. For us, the word hypocrite means somebody who claims to be this, but is really something else. So we see somebody that claims to be a Christian, and you see them at a bar someplace chugging down, and you say, "What a hypocrite." But that is not the real meaning of the word. The real meaning of the word for the word hypocrite is actor, someone that acts out something, something that is not real, that pretends there is something when they are really not.

You have to ask yourself purely from a Bible standpoint: How do you get saved? How does that thing really change in your life, and yet you put God off, you put the Bible off, you put churches far away from you as you can? You have not been in the Bible for months, if not years. All that stuff goes on the back burner of your life, and yet you consistently, if somebody would ask you, and you know the thing that bothers me about dealing with somebody like that? You really cannot, because the moment I come up to somebody and say, "Hey, I do not really think you are saved," oh, you are kidding me? You are going to hear all the great story of their life. They went to so and so, they came down, they went forward. You will hear everything but a reasonable explanation why they now claim to be saved, but nothing ever changed. We like just to pretend that we do not see those things. We like just to pretend that what I am saying is not really true.

Now let me say this, and I get it: you have people who are truly saved who get in backslidden conditions. The word backsliding, you probably already know this, is not a New Testament word. You find it in the Old Testament only in connection with Israel, but it certainly fits where we are at sometimes. I get that. I do understand this, believe me, because my job is to look to the state of my flocks and look well to the herd. If you guys are not a herd, I do not know what you are. I realize that God's people who are truly saved can get out of fellowship with God. I understand that. I am not sitting here, standing here this morning, telling you that if you are out of fellowship with God that you are not saved. I am not telling you you are saved, but I am telling you this: one of the great doctrines in the Bible, that is an unknown doctrine in the Bible, is found in Romans 8:14-16. It is called the witness of the Spirit.

Romans 8:14-16

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

Saved people have a witness between them of the Spirit of God if they are truly saved. I have been in countries where I did not speak the language. Yet there were churches and Christians who were truly there, even though we could not communicate other than through a translator,

you felt the witness of that Spirit that they were truly born again. That is one of the great doctrines of the Bible that you better figure out at some point in your life. When you do not see that, and you see a life from the get-go, they have never done anything, you are dealing with that element that every church has to deal with.

I get it. Oh, I can hear it right now. This is why you cannot go to anybody. There are guys that I absolutely, tremendously worry about. Yet I am hog-tied. I am handcuffed. Because the moment I would go to them and I would really express my concern about their maybe not being saved, I can tell you what I am going to get. I am going to get a gas bag story, and they are going to say, "I mean, you have somebody who does nothing, has been nothing, part of anything, gives nothing, has never been involved, claims they are saved." There is not one piece of evidence in their life. Yet they would stand toe to toe to me and say, "Hey, I am saved." You know what my answer would be to that? "Well, you are not saved because you say you are." It means nothing.

If we may just move from a church to a courtroom for a moment, and you are on trial for murder. I picked that because there are more murders going on today in this last couple of weeks, so it all fits in here. You are on trial for murder, and I am your defense attorney. The prosecutor wants to give you the death penalty. You killed everybody in your family, including your dog and your cat, and you are a terrible person. You have said, "I am not guilty." It is my job to make him prove beyond a reasonable shadow of a doubt that you did not do it. You know you did not do it. You know the only way he is going to prove you are a real, real bonafide murderer? Evidence.

If he gets before the jury and he says, "Now, Anna claims she is innocent. Yet in her family, everybody was savagely murdered. This woman killed the dog. I want to say to you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, she is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. We found in her basement a bloody knife. On that bloody knife were her fingerprints, her DNA, and the blood of the people that she killed. We took the clothes. We found clothes that she had hidden in the basement. Did an analysis on them and found blood splatter all over those clothes. Ladies and gentlemen, I say to you of the jury, she is guilty of murder. The same knife that killed those people was hidden in her basement. The clothes are splattered with blood that she killed those people. The evidence against her is overwhelming. Everything. Her cell phone. She lives four or five miles away. She took her cell phone. It pinged right outside the house of the murders. Ladies and gentlemen, she is guilty. Your honor, that is all the questions I have."

Now it is my turn. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, after hearing that great speech, I agree, she is guilty. We need to kill her." Evidence. You say, "I am saved." Where is the evidence? You can go to court and you can say, "I did not do it. I am not guilty." When they present the evidence, you have nowhere to go. Do not tell me you are saved. Show me the evidence. You have a world out there that is dying and going to hell. Do not tell me you are saved. Where is the evidence? See? The evidence is repentance, a changing life.

Now, having said that, I want to say it again: I know there are people out there that are truly saved. They get out of fellowship with God, and it is hard to tell them from unsaved people sometimes, but I will tell you the difference: the difference of the spirit. You see, the Bible says that we ought to know the state of our flocks, and we use every tool to be able to do that. The

only evidence that you have that you are saved, my dear friend, is a change of the direction of your life.

Now, I am not saying you get saved and you drop every bad habit you have. I am not saying that. As you are going to see here in a moment, maybe not totally today, but as we go through Peter's life, it is a process. You know me, I mean, the latest thing in church today, I am very skeptical of salvation today because of a lack of repentance. I know when I deal with someone, I take my time, and I walk through it, and I talk about repentance, but there is nothing that is done with that today in most churches.

When Billy Graham had his great crusades, and I have told you this before, they would gather people from all the churches around who believed nothing, anything, different doctrines, and they would use them for personal workers. When a man came forward in a Billy Graham crusade, you could not talk to him about baptism. You could not talk to him about anything that had to do with doctrine. You simply gave him a piece of paper or a little card. He was instructed to read that prayer, and then he is saved. Are you kidding me?

I am not big on deathbed confessions for salvation. I am just going to tell you right now, and I am not judging it. I am just saying, "Hey, I know what it takes to be saved." Now, you are not going to kid me that you get somebody that is almost dead, and I have been in those situations, hey, I do the best job I can. Believe me, I will crawl in bed with a guy if I have to and do the best job that I can, but I am not under any illusion. But in his moment of stepping out, or she stepping out into eternity, and the few moments that we have, she is doped up, he is doped up under drugs. Do they really understand repentance? It is tough, man. Hey, it is tough. I get it. But again, that is not a criticism. It is a worry. It is a worry to my former pastor that cost him to have five heart attacks because he loved his people. He cared about his people. I do not know of another man who, and I do not even know that he knew that verse in Proverbs, but he sure was the example of it. He cared for the state of his flocks.

In churches today, just like the twelve, you are going to have a man like Judas. Forget his betrayal; it had nothing to do with it. It had to do with the fact that he was part of the program, but he had never truly been with God. It worries me to death. I am just being honest. I am going to tell you, you young guys, if you ever pastor someday, you are going to have people like that, and you are going to have to deal with them. You are going to have to worry about them. You are going to have to have your own heart attacks, and you are going to have to find a way to know the state of your flocks.

VI. The Inner Three and Levels of Spiritual Growth

After Judas, we have, putting all this thing in a context, we have eight more apostles. I do not have to give you their names. They were found in Matthew 10. You hear me talk a lot about levels of spiritual growth. When you look at these eight, and the whole twelve is a picture of Christianity, what you have, you will see that out of these eight, they really do not do much.

You have Mark, and he is the John Mark of Acts that goes on one of the mission trips, bails out, and then is profitable to Paul at the end of his life. He also writes the Book of Mark. You have

Matthew, who is a tax collector, who you really do not hear anything about. He writes Matthew, but I get that. Matthew is a political book on the kingdom of heaven, and Matthew was a tax collector; he was part of that system. I get that. But you really do not find of those eight where they do anything. Nothing really more is said about them. In the early Book of Acts, chapter 1 in particular, they are there trying to find a replacement for Judas. I get that. But Acts 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, you do not find them. Nothing is mentioned about them. Where did they go?

In any church, you are going to have people just like that. Let me just say this before. Again, this is not a criticism. This is a fact. Most of them are really good people. I believe that most of them really love the Lord, most of them. You find some that do not, but they are a very small segment. Most of them come to every church every Sunday. Most of them tithe. Most of them support the ministry. Most of them in their own personal life, they are very, they pay their bills, they raise their kids as bright as they can. They never cause an issue. They are faithful people, most of them. Most of them in any church, they will do whatever you ask them to do within reason. They are a blessing. If somebody has a baby, they will take food. Somebody dies, they will bring food to the funeral dinner. They are a blessing to other people many times. They are good people whom you will learn to love and you will care for very, very, very much.

But many of them will never get outside their comfort zone. They hit a point in their Christian life, and then they just settle into it. Again, this is not a criticism. Do not go out of here and say, "I am not talking about anybody." I am talking about twelve apostles and what you find in the church. Now get it in your head. But for the most part, they are really good people. You are going to find that churches across this country are filled with people like this. Again, it is not a criticism toward them. But it is a truth of reality of what you have to deal with, and you just know what the state of your flocks are. I will get to something in a minute here.

Then the next part of the twelve, we saw the unsaved guy. Then we saw the eight intermediate people. That brings us to a total of nine. Then we have Peter, James, and John. This will max out our twelve. They are called by anybody, I do not care who you read, even the liberal guys, they are called the inner three. They form a really good balance together. You will notice that they are really key in the Lord's ministry, even more than the eight. They will also be key whenever you have a church. If you are paying attention, you cannot deny it, the facts and the evidence are clear. Whenever something really of biblical significance happens in the Bible, in the Gospels, those three are there. Now that means something.

You have in Matthew 17, the great Mount of Transfiguration. I do not have time to go into all of that, but it was an incredible event. You are told when God took His Son and took Him beyond the cross and glorified Him at the second coming of Christ, guess who is there? Peter, James, and John. Where are the rest of them?

In Mark 5, when Jesus goes in and you have Jairus' daughter who is dead and Christ brings her back to life. What an incredible event that was. Not only for what happened there, but the insight to you and to me of what that is a picture of. But when you read the account, on that great event, Peter, James, and John were there. Where were the rest?

In Mark 13 on the Mount of Olives, it is Peter, James, and John. In Mark 14:33, when He is going through the great agony in the garden, it is Peter, James, and John. Where are the rest? What are they doing?

You see, what you learn in this context, what you learn by this structuring of the twelve, that is an incredible picture of any church, any church, any church, is you learn that some of God's people will experience greater things that others do not experience. Let me just say this here, going through these things, I need to make this point, because you get the idea that maybe some of these people have been predestined to be on this particular level. No, not true. The only one that limits where your spiritual goals are, are you. There is no limit for any of us if you are truly saved. If you have the Holy Spirit of God inside you, you have everything that you need to be whatever God wants you to be.

We love as human beings, and I get it, it is a trait of being human, I get it. We love to blame our lack of spirituality on other people. We love to have kids who do not do what is right and blame them on somebody else's kids. We love to have things that fall down and blame it on somebody else. At the end of the day, every man and woman stands before God on their own. Nobody has more power over you than you do. Nobody wants or should have more power over you if you are saved than the Holy Spirit of God. When you give that up, I mean, you are still saved, but when you put that aside, when you allow something from the world to come in and take the place of God in your life, that is on you.

Every one of you, hey, I love you to death, man. There is not one of you here, if we were in a foreign country someplace doing missionary work, and I got about ten or fifteen people here on a team were doing something, and things go to pieces, and the rebels start coming at us, and you have to get evacuated, and one of you, any one of you, any one of you, any one of you, you were wounded so bad that you could not be airlifted out, and the guy comes to, the chopper comes to me and says, "Hey, look, Bob, we cannot, we cannot take that person. We are going to have to leave them. They are not going to make it. And I got other people I need to take. We cannot take them." I do not care which one of you it would be. I would not leave you. I think that much of you. I would not leave you. Well, you say, if you were in that situation, you would probably leave it. Well, no, I would not. I would not leave you. I am that committed to you that if you do not get out, I do not get out. I would find my next guy that was there and I would say, "Get these kids back, get these people out, but I am staying with so and so. I am not leaving them." That is how much I care for you.

Nobody is limited here. Not in this church. You have everything at your fingertips to be everything God wants you to be. The only thing that stops you from getting from level to level to level is go look in the mirror. It is you. For the most part, you all do what you need to do. It comes down to simply this: How much of ourselves are we willing to give to God versus what we are going to keep for ourselves?

I used to hear the old story, well, I have heard it a thousand times, about D.L. Moody, who was a great preacher out of Chicago, and he went around the world holding evangelistic messages. Great guy. This one particular church had had him like six or seven years in a row, and they were

having a meeting to plan their next year, and the pastor said, "This year again, we are going to, if you will come, we are going to have Moody back." Well, in the meeting, there was one of the deacons, you know, that you always have a deacon someplace that is cracked out crazy, you know. And he says, "Why do we have to have Moody again?" He says, "Has Moody got a corner on the Holy Spirit of God?" Pastor said, "No, no. I think it is the other way around. The Holy Spirit of God has a corner on Moody. That is why we are going to have him." Does the Holy Spirit of God have the corner on you? You see, that is the question.

Do not blame the person sitting next to you or in front of you or behind you. Do not blame it on your mom. Do not blame it on your dad. I know we have had parents in my ministry that did not do what is right with the kid, but for the most part, they turn the corner and they do what is right, and they absolve themselves of any wrong that they did. Now, kid, it is on you. You cannot blame your mom and dad the rest of your life. You cannot blame your teacher. You cannot blame this person. You cannot say, "Well, so and so did this to me." No, no, no. It is on you. Never on anybody else. How much of God are you going to let Him have of you?

You will find in any church that some people will always want to have a deeper walk with God; they just want to keep on growing. That option is open to everybody. It is not a thing where God preordained you to be stuck in level one, two, or three. You will see there in life the hand of God in a greater way than most of God's people, just like Peter, James, and John. I am telling you.

I mean, briefly, let us just look at the other two to get them out of the way. Before we get to Peter, you have James. You know what James represents? He represents to me in any church a good, solid, behind-the-scenes guy or woman who is absolutely committed to the work and just sees what is going on, and without any fanfare, you do not hear a lot about him. He is not in the forefront, but he is always behind the scenes, and he is getting the job done. He is faithful unto death. He is killed by Herod in Acts 12:1-2.

Acts 12:1-2

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

Then you have John. We will get into John much later as a character study, but he is the perfect model for all of us. He goes all the way to the cross. He writes completely different than the rest. He sees things that the others never see because of the completeness of what he does. God will show him greater things than the rest. He writes the Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, the book of Revelation. In other words, and I have told you this before, John writes the five wisdom books of the New Testament that match up to the five wisdom books in the Old Testament. He is an incredible guy. You will not have many like him in your church, but when you do, you have something very special. We will get into him a little later on, not today, but down the line someplace.

VII. Peter: The Lifeblood of the Church

But then we have our man Peter. Now I am going to go completely the wrong way, the other way from where most people go with Peter, because I see him much differently than most pastors who probably have never looked at the state of their flock and do not even know where the verse is at and probably could not do anything with it if they had it. But Peter will be a picture of the lifeblood of any church. Now I know that seems strange to say that, does it not? Because he represents a young man or a young Christian woman that just comes into a new life with Christ.

Peter gets criticized by preachers for some of the dumb things that he does, and I must be the first to tell you that he does some dumb, stupid things. Obviously, he denies Christ. We will get into all this in deep level, but just bear with me. He is always interrupting the Lord because he thinks he has got a better idea than God does. In Matthew 17:4, Peter, James, and John are with Him, they are standing there, and what does Peter say? "Lord, do you think we really should be here?" No, I just asked you here because you did not need to be here. He cannot see spiritual things. He is like so many young Christians when they first get saved.

In Matthew 16:22, he is trying to talk Jesus out of going to the cross. Well, that would have worked for us, would it not? We already covered the cutting off of the ear in John 18. In Luke 12:41, he cannot get the parable. Out of John 13, he does not understand why he cannot follow the Lord. After everything that the Lord has told them, and He has given them, if you look at it, He has given them very clear direction of where He is at, where He is going, and what He wants them to do. Peter just cannot get it. Peter is like most young Christians; he has a hard time seeing the spiritual application of things. I get that. I totally understand that.

When you look at Peter, and you are going to have these kind of guys in your church if you are a pastor, the thing you want to remember about a guy like Peter is that he always has the right motive, but he does not always have the right method. That is major. But looking at the picture of the twelve and putting Peter in the context of the New Testament church of the twelve, what they represent, Peter will be a picture of a young man or a young lady who has, as the Bible tells us in Romans 10:2-4, a zeal but not according to knowledge.

Romans 10:2-4

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

What you have in his life is some great stuff, and we will develop it over the next couple of weeks. Now, if you have people like Peter in your church, and every church will have them, whether you believe this or not, when you pastor for twenty, thirty years, maybe you will get it: it is a sign that you are doing something right. You look at Peter and see all the bad things that he does and say, "Who would want somebody like Peter?" That is because you do not understand what he represents. You have guys or gals like Peter in your church, you are doing something right. You are bringing folks in who are right out of the world. As 1 Peter 2:2 says that they are new babes in Christ.

1 Peter 2:2

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

They just came out of the darkness into the light. God has now begun to work in their life. Do you think they are going to totally get it? Do you think they are going to just pick it up? As a pastor someday, you will need to look and know the state of your flocks and be able to identify the folks on different levels to be able to help them the right way. Honestly, I think sometimes we get too spiritual. There is a big difference between being spiritual and being biblical. When we have people, young Christians who do dumb things or say dumb things, sometimes we forget all the dumb things we did and said when we first got saved.

I think I like Peter so much because he reminds me of me, the king of dumb things in my early years. I could take the rest of our morning and this afternoon and list them out for you, but I would be embarrassed in some of them. Like leading a covert team, I had just gotten out of the army. We had a guy leading a covert team to Brennerdale Cemetery and going in and breaking in one night and going in and putting anti-Catholic tracts all over the statues and putting cigarettes between them. Not a good thing. I was the king of dumb things and probably still am.

But when it comes to Peter for you and for me, I want to focus on three things. We will not get them all today. I want to look past what he does that is dumb and stupid because we all know now who and what he represents to us in any church: a brand new Christian who is saved but does not have it all together yet. We can learn some things about him.

VIII. Patience, Longsuffering, and Compassion in Ministry

In the ministry, there are three key words that if you are ever going to pastor a guy someday, you better get these three down, and if you are going to work with people on any extensive level, you need to get these three down.

The first word that you better get down is the word patience. It takes time for God to do the work in a person's life. Many times, we think that it takes too long. I have men and women in my church that it took them fifteen, twenty years to get it all sorted out, but when they did, they were well worth the wait. I have had people that have to go through things. They have to struggle through things, and they have a hard time getting the victory. But they make it in time. It takes patience on our part.

I think back to the Old Testament with the tabernacle, where there again you have the outer court where the brazen altar is, where the sacrifice is made, a picture of the day you got saved. Then you walk into that inner court, and there in there is the tabernacle, which is completely covered by animal skins, and no light from the outside can get in. So when the priest walked in there from the outside on a bright sunny day with the sacrifice, he walked into a completely darkened tent that the only light in there was seven candlesticks over on the one side, which obviously did not give a lot of light.

If you ever go to a movie theater and you are out there getting your popcorn and your drink, and the movie has not really started yet, but it is still dark in there, or maybe they are showing the

stuff that they are going to show you in weeks to come, and you walk in there, and the first thing you do, you have to stop. You have to let your eyes get adjusted from coming from the outside light into the dark theater. Otherwise, the person sitting there is going to be wearing your popcorn and your Diet Pepsi. Well, that is what the priest had to do. He came out of the sunlight of a bright day into that tent, and he had to stop before he could do anything more. He had to wait until his eyes got adjusted to the light of God.

I am going to tell you right now, I know the state of my flock, and when I see some of you young men and young ladies who really like a Peter, when you come in and you just do not have it all together yet, I have the patience to realize the weight on you. It will take time for your eyes to get adjusted coming from the light of the world to now the light of the seven candlesticks. Patience. Would I like to hurry you up? You bet I would. But I know that that is not the way it works.

The second word is long suffering. That is going the extra mile with people and putting up with people. You never give up on people. Now people will give up on themselves. I say this, and there are always exceptions to some rules, you know, when you get something that in one way or the other. But in most cases, you never give up on people. People will give up on themselves.

The third word is the word compassion. You know, fourteen times in the Gospels, we get an example of the Lord's compassion. You have to see those fourteen times and the different scenarios that it is in. You see, compassion is putting yourself in their shoes and understanding why they are the way they are. I have seen some young men in our church that had a tough time getting off ground zero. But when you looked at the parents that they had, it was a miracle that they ever got saved to begin with. You have to put yourself in their shoes and see why they struggle. It is easy to say, "Well, they are struggling because they are no good or they are worthless," or, "No, no, no, no, no." You have to look beyond that. You have to see how they got in the situation that they got in.

I have seen people before who their parents just left them, let them fend for themselves, put them out on the street. They had to learn to survive. When they get saved at some place down the line, sometimes it is hard to turn control over all that they have had control over to the Lord because they had to do that to survive all their lives. It is easy to criticize people like that. It is easy not to like them. It is easy to look at them and say, "Well, that is not what I do," or, "What is wrong with them?" I will tell you what is wrong. Nothing is wrong with them. It is wrong with you. You do not have any compassion for them. I say that knowing clear well that there are some people that I get it. I understand. That is not the case in most cases. In dealing with people, you never, never, never not try to help them wherever you can. I am telling you right now, as well as I am standing here, and you will learn this through bitter tears and hard times: there are some people you cannot help, but that does not mean you do not want to.

You see the exact same sequence in the life of Peter, God dealing with him, that God dealt with the nation of Israel. It does not mean that you do not have to deal and address some issues. Certainly you do. But I will tell you what, when it comes to Peter, we are going to see this in weeks to come. This is the main event. We are building a case right now. God will always make a

way back for you if you want one. You look at Peter, he really messes some things up. The denial that God makes a way for him to get back. We are going to see it in a couple of weeks. One of the most incredible personal things for my life, and hopefully for yours, that you will ever unearth in the Word of God. What a great study it is. God will always make a way back no matter where you are at. If you want to get back, God has made a way to get back.

IX. God's Perspective on Failure and Potential

Now when we come through this study, there are three things that I want to talk about Peter as we look at his life. It builds on it as we go through this.

1. The first thing that I want to look at Peter in, and we were not going to get through these today so breathe easy, I want to focus on his spiritual growth. Most folks never even consider Peter in a spiritual growth mode.
2. To me, and this is most important because I look at this in my own life, of all the dumb things that he did, the thing accumulating with him actually denying the Lord not once, not twice, but three times. Why did God tolerate all the dumb things that he did?
3. The third thing I want to look at as we develop this is actually his loving, devoted relationship to the Lord, which most people miss.

You need to see and understand these three areas to really get the story down. If you want a character study of Peter, it is in those three areas. As we build this story, I want you to see this because if you ever lead people, if you ever work with people, if you ever get to that level as a pastor, you will have to have your share of people just like Peter. You better know how to bring them along, and it is all laid out in our story.

Now the first thing I ask you is this: Why did God put up with Peter? All the dumb things that he did. You cannot tell me that there would not have been times in the Lord's ministry that from a human standpoint, God would have been better off without him than with him. So why did God put up with Peter? That is the first thing we all have to ask ourselves. The answer is so clear. Boy, you better get it because He saw something in Peter that nobody else saw.

God has the ability to look beyond our failures. God has the ability, and praise the Lord for it, He has the ability to look beyond our own stupidity and see what nobody else sees. If there is anybody that will teach us patience, longsuffering, and compassion, it will be what God has displayed to every one of us in this room today. The Lord had the ability to look beyond the dumb things that people do, you and I, and see what God sees in them. You know what? As a pastor or a leader of people, that better be your best earmarked quality of seeing the state of your flock. Looking at somebody no matter what spiritual level they are on or what condition that they are in, and looking past that and seeing what they really could be, and then trying to help them get there. Now maybe it will not happen, but if it does not happen, make sure it does not happen because you do not do it. Make sure it happens because they do not want it.

For me, I see God dealing with that with the nation of Israel. I remember back in the book of Haggai, and this is a great example of what we have got here everywhere. In Haggai, the prophet writes that book because sixteen years earlier, when Ezra and Nehemiah went back, they began

to rebuild Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Now sixteen years later, they all quit. Nothing is being done. So God sends them Haggai, and Haggai kind of lights a fire under them because they are taking—and boy, what a picture of Christianity today because so many of God's people start to build their own body, discipleship one, discipleship two, and they quit building it.

He says to them, "You know what you are doing? You are taking all of this stuff that has been dedicated to the temple, and you are building your own homes with it. You are doing everything that is dedicated to God, and you are dedicating it to yourself." The greatest thing that comes out of that story—and boy, this is so true of you and me. You know what he says? He says, "You people do not understand what building the temple, your body, really means. You look at it as a building that you are building here for now, but oh, it is so much more than that. You are not just building the temple for now. You are building the temple for the future of your nation. You are not just building your temple, your body now for you. You are building it for the future of your family, your sons, your daughters, the people you work with. You are not just building it today because, oh, ho, hum, here we are, we are here. You are building it for your future."

People are not perfect. Pastors are not perfect. Churches are not perfect. There is a little church right down the road from me that I was driving down the street the other day, and they had a sign on the marquee, and I think we ought to put it out here. The sign simply said, "No perfect people allowed." There are no perfect people. There is no perfect pastor. There is no perfect church. That is why we perfect ourselves daily in the Word of God, as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

But when I look at Peter, I look past the dumb things that he did. This is the key to understanding the state of your flock. He did some really stupid, dumb things and got him in some trouble. But I do not even want to talk about those today because when I see Peter, I see five characteristics that he has, and even though he is not spiritually mature yet, even though he has zero discernment, zero understanding, zero perception. But the reason why God put up with him is the reason why every pastor has to put up with people like Peter in their churches and everybody else because of what he looks past and he sees.

I have told you many times, I do not care what you have done, where you have been, all I care about is where you are at and where you want to go. When you look at Peter, and we will define these in weeks to come, I am just going to give them to you today.

- The first thing I see about him is what I look for in every young man or young lady when they come into this church, and I watch God deal with them and watch them have to deal with things. The first thing he has is courage.
- The second thing that he has, he has loyalty.
- The third thing that he has, he has passion. It may be misdirected at times, but he has got it.
- The fourth thing he has got is he has got zeal, according to the knowledge.

- The fifth thing that he has got, he is honest. The blunders and mistakes that he makes are honest ones. There is no hidden agenda with Peter. He is the equivalent of the saying, "What you see is what you get."

Those are the things you look for in people. That is what God saw in him. You see a person like that in your ministry, you try to get them everything that they need. You try to pour yourself into them. You pray for them. You look at where they are at. You try to find things to put into their world to help them that they do not even know about. People like the twelve apostles will be a picture of New Testament Christianity and what they represent in any church. You will be in a better position to know the state of your flocks to help them get to the next level if you can see it that way.

Over our next couple of weeks, I want to give you a character study, not just on Peter, but really a character study on all of us. Growing through our immaturity, growing to a level of being used by God in a great way. That is Peter.

X. Conclusion: God Always Makes a Way Back

Now listen to me. I love you very much. In the over twenty years we have been here together, not all of us have been that time, but whenever your time, you hit your timetable clock, I have given my life to this church and to many of you in the last twenty-one years or so. I have taken my job seriously, as imperfect as I am and the dumb things that I do, I get that. But my job in the job of this church is to always throw you a life preserver, never an anchor, because you are all living out there in a sea of life that wants to swallow you up and pull you down and drown you. Somebody in life needs to throw you a life preserver.

We all have failures in life. Some of our failures will be minor. Some of them will be major. Some of them will be somewhere in between. Some of our failures will be short term. Some of them will be long term. I would never criticize you for any failure, for I have them in my life just like you do. Failure is really the key to real spiritual growth if you learn from them. There has to come a time in all of our lives when we are done with the way it was, and we are going to start moving in the right direction. You see, as your pastor, I just do not want to show you the way out; I want to walk you the way out.

I am telling you, with all our failures, I have them, you have them, but I am telling you the greatest failure for any child of God will be the failure of not allowing God to develop in you what He sees in you. The day He saved you, He saw your potential. He matched what He saw in you with the Holy Spirit of God, gave you a perfect Bible, gave you a church that all things together He could develop everything about you. He did not care about the dumb things that you did or I did because He looked past that and He saw those five qualities that because you have them, He did not care about the dumb things. You know why? Because He is not going to build on the dumb things. He is going to build on those five good things. As a pastor, you need to be able to see that in people. If you cannot, do not become a pastor. Do not add to the confusion that is already out there.

The day He saved you, He saw your potential. No failure, folks, no failure in all our lives will be greater than the failure of the child of God not to let God develop what He sees in us. It is just that simple. You get up through your spiritual growth. We have talked about the seven stages of spiritual growth many, many times, how that in the infant stages you are a baby, then little children, and then children. This is where Peter is at. This is where so many of you are at. You just came into this church. You got saved. You get your feet on the ground. Now you are beginning to grow.

But you know as well as I do that in a physical family, these three—babies, little children, or children—are the most crucial time in a child's life. They will form everything here that they are going to have when they are twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. Yet we all know that children of this age do dumb things. They spill their milk. They will be out playing and think they have to go to the bathroom and think they can make it when they cannot. You will tell them to do something. They will forget to do it. They will let the dog out when the dog should not be out. They will leave the lights turned on when you need to turn them off because you are going to burn the grid up. You know what? Those are things you do not chastise them for. Those are honest mistakes. But I know parents that beat their kids for things like that. They will slap them. I am telling you right now, God looks past those things that we all do of spilled milk. Because He sees the potential.

Seeing and understanding the state of your flocks and looking well to your herd. Remember this when you pastor a church or you work within a ministry someplace. Within a church for a pastor, for you working with people. If you did not get nothing else that I have said today, you go home with this: when you work with people, it is never about how much you know. But it will always be about how much you care. I said it to you several years ago: it is not just going the extra mile with somebody, but sometimes it is going the extra smile. Because you see what God sees. Because you have the patience. You have the longsuffering. You have the compassion.

Next week, now that we have laid a foundation and put Peter into a context, now we have something to work with. Next week, I want to begin to show you what God actually saw in Peter. I want to translate it into your life and my life what God saw in us. The patience and the longsuffering by God at work in your life and my life. All for one reason: because the day God saved you and He saved me, He saw the potential that you had. There was no accident that He said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." There was no accident that when Moses faltered before God back in Exodus and said, "I cannot do this. I am not able to do it," where God said basically, "I do not care. I know you are not able. I am just asking you to be willing because if you are willing, I am able." That question rings out in the ears of every one of God's people wherever they are at in the world today. God never asked you to be able. God just asked you to be willing. When you have those five qualities that Peter has, He will build on that. Now when a pastor or spiritual leader, you are working with somebody, you see that in somebody, you help build that.

After his failure and his denial, the week after that, I am going to show you how Peter got back. I want to focus on those three things. I want to focus on why God put up with him. I want to focus on what God saw in him, and then I want to show you that no matter who you are, where you are

at, through Peter's life, God always makes our way back. When you see how Peter got back to where he was, it is incredible. The moment I saw it years ago, I fell on my knees, tears running on my face because I immediately saw me in that story. God will always make a way back for you. The question is, do you want back? Back to the question.

Let us pray. Father, thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We do love You. Thank You for all You do. Thank You for Your goodness and Your kindness for the good people here today. Thank You, Father, for men and women in this church who do love You and the many people who are on the levels that want to keep growing. Lord, help me to always give them what they need. Lord, I know I am far from perfect, and I make more mistakes probably than anybody. But nobody will love these people more than I do. Nobody understands my responsibility to them greater than I do. So help us, Lord, together to let You develop in these good people everything that You see, and let us pull together as a team to not let the failure of letting God not develop us ever come into our world. We have enough failures in life that mean nothing compared to that one. Help us. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

God bless you. Do not forget to sign up over here for the Super Bowl party. The two guys that you know who I am, I need to see you in my office right away. God bless you. We will be this fast. Amen. Amen. Amen.