

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 82: "THE LORD STILL TURNS TOWARD US"

LUKE 22:54-62

Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Introduction

We live in the age of "cancel culture."

"Cancel culture" refers to "a cultural phenomenon in which some who are deemed to have acted or spoken in an unacceptable manner are ostracized, boycotted, or shunned."¹

[“Cancel culture” = a cultural phenomenon in which some who are deemed to have acted or spoken in an unacceptable manner are ostracized, boycotted, or shunned]

Our tendency is to turn away from those who we feel have turned away from us.

Perhaps you've *seen* this done to certain celebrities or organizations.

Perhaps you've *done* this to certain friends or even family members.

But I want us to know that "cancel culture" is extremely *unchristian*.

If we're honest with ourselves, all of us have said or done things in our lives that are deserving of us being "cancelled."

Who doesn't make mistakes? Who doesn't say the wrong things at times? Who doesn't sin against others?

As believers in Jesus Christ, we believe that we're *all* sinners, and though *all* of us are deserving of "cancelling" by our Lord, we rejoice in the fact that he does *not* treat us that way.

But even when we turn away from *him*, he doesn't "cancel" or turn away from *us*, but he still turns *toward* us.

The One Thing

Even when we turn away from the Lord, he still turns toward us.

¹ "Cancel culture," Wikipedia, last modified March 1, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancel_culture.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 22:54-62.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

Everything has slowed down since the beginning of Luke chapter 22, as we've entered into Jesus' last 24 hours before his crucifixion.

- Jesus has eaten his last Passover meal and instituted the Lord's Supper with his disciples.
- He's told them that one of them would betray him, and they all started arguing about who was the greatest.
- He's told them that Satan will sift them like wheat, but specifically assures Peter, saying, "but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."
- But Peter responded, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."
- But Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny *three* times that you know me."
- And later that night, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told his disciples to "pray that [they] may not enter into temptation," but they end up sleeping instead.
- Judas, one of Jesus' twelve apostles, suddenly showed up with the religious leaders and a crowd armed with swords and clubs, and he betrayed Jesus with a kiss.
- Peter impulsively took out a sword and cut off the right ear of the servant of the high priest, but Jesus miraculously healed the man's ear and stopped any further violence by submitting himself to be unjustly arrested.

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 22:54-62.

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in three parts.

- I. Peter followed the Lord at a distance (vv. 54-55)
- II. Peter denied any connection with the Lord (vv. 56-60)
- III. The Lord still turned toward Peter (vv. 61-62)

I. Peter followed the Lord at a distance (vv. 54-55)

Look at verses 54-55.

[⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them.]

This is the setting of the scene.

And it's an anticlimactic arrest because Jesus just submits himself to be arrested. It's only mentioned in passing—in half a sentence—that they “seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house.”²

And then, all the focus turns to Peter, who “was following at a distance.”

<pause>

On the one hand, he was still “*following*” Jesus.

Peter *loved* Jesus and wanted to see what would happen to him (Matt. 26:58). And he's making good on what he said before—that he would follow Jesus “to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33).

Luke focuses on *Peter* being there. John's Gospel account mentions that there was one *other* disciple with him. But all the other disciples have left Jesus and fled (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50).

So this is to Peter's credit. The basic meaning of a disciple is “a follower of Christ,” and Peter is still literally following Christ, even when everyone else wasn't.

<pause>

But on the other hand, Peter was following Jesus “*at a distance*.”

He's just witnessed the arrest of his Master by a crowd of people armed with swords and clubs. He himself just cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, and he's about to walk into the courtyard of the high priest's house. So there's a bit of fear and trepidation with Peter right now.

² Grant R. Osborne (*Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018]) notes: “John 18:13 has him taken first to Annas, former high priest and patriarch of the family, while the others tell only of Caiaphas, current high priest. Most likely John has the whole picture, with Annas a preliminary interrogation to get evidence Caiaphas could use. There were actually three stages: a short time with Annas, a lengthier interrogation with Caiaphas, and then the Sanhedrin trial itself. It is possible that Annas and Caiaphas share the same palace, with Jesus taken briefly to the one and then to the other. The interrogation with Caiaphas took the first part of the night, and the Sanhedrin trial the hours before dawn. Peter's denials occurred during the time with Annas and Caiaphas.”

This was *not* a crowd that was *friendly* toward Jesus or his followers.

So Peter follows “at a distance.”

He eventually makes his way into the courtyard, filled with the servants of the high priest and probably people from the crowd that just arrested Jesus. Perhaps they’re even still armed with their swords and clubs.

And they’re all huddling around a fire to keep warm, and they’re talking about what’s going on inside and the proceedings with Jesus.³

And “Peter sat down among them.”

You can feel the mixture of feelings in Peter at this point.

He clearly *loved* Jesus. That’s why he followed him here. That’s why he wanted to see what was going to happen to him. That’s why he mustered up the courage to be sitting in this courtyard among some of the people who just arrested Jesus.

But he also clearly *feared* people. That’s why he followed “at a distance.” And even though he’s sitting in the courtyard, he’s clearly trying to blend into the crowd by the fire. He doesn’t want to be noticed by anyone, as we’ll soon see.

And it’s this following Jesus “at a distance” and this desire to want to “blend in” that sets the stage for Peter’s denial of Jesus.

<pause>

If you’re a follower of Jesus, are you following him “at a distance”?

Perhaps you’ll identify yourself as a Christian, but when it actually *costs* you something to follow Jesus, you begin to second-guess your commitment to him. You begin to distance yourself from him to some degree.

- Perhaps it will cost you your family’s approval, so you tell them that you’re just going to church, but you won’t get baptized or become a member.
- Perhaps it will cost you the way that your friends view you, so you never talk about your relationship with Jesus with them.
- Perhaps it will cost you work productivity and advancement, so you get in the habit of skipping the regular worship gathering of God’s people on Sundays.

But if you try to follow Christ “at a distance,” it is only setting the stage for losing sight of Christ and perhaps even denying him.

Think of a car caravan, where there is a group of cars driving to the same destination, with each car following closely to the car in front of them. If one of the cars begins to follow “at a distance”—allowing for 1, 2, 3 cars to get in front of him—it’s only a matter of time when he’s going to lose sight of the car he’s supposed to be following. He’ll end up in a different destination, but it will be too late for him.

³ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

If we're followers of Christ, then we ought to follow him *closely*. To follow Jesus "at a distance" is no safe place to be.

<pause>

Or do you have a desire to "blend in"?

Kids, as you're hanging out with your friends at school, do you want to blend in with the rest of them? Do you fear being noticed as "different"? Are you tempted to engage in conversations that don't honor God or other people because you're afraid to speak up about what you know to be right?

For all of us, do you edit out your relationship with Jesus when you're out in public? When you pray before meals, do you make sure nobody notices? If people ask you what you did this past weekend, do you share that you gathered with your church and how you were encouraged by the message?

Or perhaps for some of us, you love to stand out and *not* blend in. You like being different—at least to some degree—until it costs you. When it's cool to be different, when we are getting applauded for being different, when it *benefits* us to be different, then we love standing out. But when we lose the approval of loved ones, when we're insulted and made fun of for being different, when it *costs* us to be different, then all of us just want to blend in.

All this is to say that this sliding into following Jesus "at a distance" and this desire to want to "blend in" are *not* small things to overlook in our lives, but we ought to notice when we're falling into these tendencies—and pray about them, ask for help to address them, and turn from them.

Just as these set the stage for Peter's *denial* of Jesus—his *turning away* from Jesus—these are warning signs for any of us who identify ourselves as followers of Christ.

<pause>

So first, Peter followed the Lord at a distance; and second...

II. Peter denied any connection with the Lord (vv. 56-60)

Look at verses 56-57.

[⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."]

There's a servant girl in the courtyard, and as the fire is lighting up Peter's face and revealing him a bit more clearly, she's "looking closely at him"—or "staring at him" with close scrutiny⁴—because she's *sure* she recognizes Peter from somewhere, but she can't quite seem to remember where.

I think we all know that feeling. You *know* you've seen someone before, but you can't quite put your finger on who they are quite yet. You're running through names and scenarios in your head. And then finally, you remember! And so, you confidently go to the person and say something like, "I *knew* I met you before. You're so and so."

⁴ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC 3 (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).

That's kind of what this servant girl was doing. She finally remembers where she's seen Peter before, and she says, "This man also was with him."⁵

The "him" is in reference to Jesus. Perhaps she saw Peter with Jesus at the temple earlier that week. Perhaps she was in the crowd that arrested Jesus that night and had seen Peter with Jesus. We're not sure. But somehow, she's able to connect that Peter was *with Jesus*.

But Peter denied it, saying "Woman, I do not know him."⁶ Those are the *exact* words that Jesus mentioned before—that Peter would deny that he *knows* him (Luke 22:34).

But this was just a flat out *lie*. Peter was denying any connection with Jesus whatsoever.

That was his first denial.

Now look at verse 58.

[⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not."]

Some time has passed since Peter's first denial. He's had some time to think over his initial denial. He's had the opportunity to acknowledge his sin and turn from it, and to make things right. But then, an almost identical situation comes up again: "Someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.'"⁷

It must have felt like *déjà vu* for Peter.

This was his opportunity to make things right, to come clean and acknowledge himself as a disciple of Christ.

But sadly, Peter responds in pretty much the exact same way: "Man, I am not."

This was a more comprehensive denial. This time, he not only denies any connection with *Jesus*, but he also denies any connection with the other *disciples* as well.

This was his second denial.

Now look at verses 59-60.

[⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.]

⁵ John's Gospel account mentions that there was one other disciple with him, presumably John himself, so the "also" is probably in reference to him (i.e., "John was with Jesus, and this man [Peter] was also with him.").

⁶ "*Woman*" was a polite form of address (see BDAG 208-9 s.v. *γυνή*), similar to 'Madam' or 'Ma'am' used in English in different regions" (NET footnote).

⁷ Grant R. Osborne (*Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018]) notes: "In Mark 14:68 Peter leaves the fire and goes out to stand in the entryway, but Luke keeps the story simple, centering entirely on the drama of the confrontation." Leon L. Morris (*Luke*, TNTC 3 [Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008]) also notes: "In Mark the second denial appears to be elicited by a question from the same slave girl, in Matthew from a different slave girl, in Luke from a man and in John from a number of people. A little reflection shows that in such a situation a question once posed is likely to have been taken up by others round the fire. Different people telling about it would stress different participants in the drama."

Again, some time has passed—"about an hour"—and another person⁸ comes up to Peter and "insisted"—which really means that he "*kept insisting repeatedly*"⁹—saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." In another Gospel account, he makes that clear by saying, "for your accent betrays you" (Matt. 26:73).¹⁰

You can see the *escalation* of accusations against Peter at this point. You get the sense that the people *know* that Peter is lying, and so their accusations are getting stronger and stronger.

And this man makes a logical argument: *Jesus* is a Galilean and *Peter* is also a Galilean because his accent gives him away (cf Matt. 26:69, 73), so why would a Galilean be warming himself by a fire in the high priest's house among *non-Galileans* in the middle of the night unless he was somehow connected with Jesus, another Galilean?¹¹

At this point, Peter is cornered, but he responds, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." It's almost as if he's saying, "Accent? What accent? I've never heard of Galilee. Jesus? Who is Jesus? Never heard of him."

Mark's Gospel account even says that Peter began to call down covenant curses on his own head and to make oaths to swear that he had no connection to Jesus whatsoever (Mark 14:71).

Essentially, Peter was saying, "I swear I'm telling the truth. If I'm lying, then may God kill me and cut me into pieces."

At this point, there's no question regarding Peter's denial of Jesus. There's no way he could have rationalized this to himself or justified this to others. This was as complete and explicit of a denial that anyone could ever make.

Basically, as the people became more insistent and more explicit in calling him out as a disciple of Christ, the more insistent and more explicit he became in lying and denying that he had any connection with Jesus whatsoever.

The tragic irony of all this is that Peter bravely made his way into the courtyard *because* he loved Jesus and he wanted to support his Lord and see what would happen to him. And yet, filled with fear, here he is disowning his beloved Lord and looking out for only himself.

So Peter utters his third denial—"And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed."

<pause>

There's much we can draw from Peter's three *denials* of Jesus—his *turning away* from Jesus—but I'll only mention three lessons.

First, we must either deny self or deny Christ.

⁸ John's Gospel account adds that this third accuser was actually in the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus and was a relative of the servant of the high priest whose ear Peter had cut off there (John 18:26).

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Luke" in *Matthew-Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary 8 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

¹⁰ "The Aramaic spoken in Galilee was different than that spoken in Jerusalem. Galilee was far more open to international influences than was Jerusalem, including influences of Greek on Aramaic and Hebrew. Because Greek does not have the guttural sounds found in Aramaic or Hebrew, the gutturals of Aramaic speakers in Galilee were softened and blended under the influence of Greek speech. In contrast, the gutturals spoken by Aramaic speakers in Jerusalem remained sharp" (study note on Matt. 26:73 in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]).

¹¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

[Three lessons

1. We must either deny self or deny Christ.]

Jesus uses the word “deny” twice. The first time, he says to Peter and the rest of his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself**” (Luke 9:23; Matt. 16:24). The second time, he says to Peter, “you will **deny me**” (Matt. 26:34; cf. Luke 22:34).

There is really no other option; we must either deny self or deny Christ.¹²

Jesus said the same thing another way: “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Luke 16:13).

In those hours in the courtyard, amidst the fear that Peter was feeling, he only had two choices: to deny himself or to deny Christ.

And in the most tragic and foolish of ways, Peter, in order to preserve his own life, he denied the Lord of life (John 6:68).

And for all of us, when fear of *pain* or the temptation of *pleasure* is put before us, we *also* only have two choices: we must either deny self or deny Christ.

The way this often works out in our lives may not be in this momentous moment like Peter had in the courtyard, but in the everyday moments of our lives where we either live like *we* are lord over our lives or *Jesus* is Lord over our lives.

In our everyday decisions, we are either denying ourselves and honoring Jesus, or we are denying Jesus and indulging ourselves.

For example, how do you treat your Grab driver when he makes a mistake? You can choose to be gracious and encouraging to him, or you can choose to be very vindictive. And if you choose to be vindictive, it’s the same as you saying, “Lord, in this moment, I’m saying ‘No’ to you; I’m denying you and I’m saying ‘Yes’ to myself. In this particular area of my life, you’re *not* my Lord, but I am the lord of my life.”

- When you get annoyed with your staff or co-workers, how do you treat them?
- When you’re physically and emotionally drained, how do you treat your family members?
- When someone cuts you off in traffic, how do you respond?
- When your parent or sibling does something that upsets you, what do you do?

It’s in those everyday moments where you are faced with the same decision that Peter was facing in the courtyard: will I deny myself or will I deny Christ?

It’s just in different contexts with different words. We may not outright say, “I don’t know him,” but in our choice to indulge ourselves, we are essentially making the same statement, “Jesus is not my Lord.”

And we need to understand the gravity of that.

We must either deny self or deny Christ.

¹² Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 59.

Second, you may be a very sincere, godly, devoted believer, but whose sinful nature is still very strong.¹³

[Three lessons

1. We must either deny self or deny Christ.

2. You may be a very sincere, godly, devoted believer, but whose sinful nature is still very strong.]

Remember, this was *Peter* who denied Christ—not *once* or *twice*, but *three* times!

This was *Peter*...

- the man who once walked on water with Jesus (Matt. 14:28-29);
- the man who was *first* to recognize Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:15-16);
- the man who refused to leave Jesus when everyone else did.

In many ways, Peter was a very sincere, godly, devoted believer. And yet, that sinful nature in him—the old man, the flesh, or the self—was still very strong within him.

We saw glimpses of that throughout his time with Jesus.

- He had the audacity to rebuke and protest Jesus, thinking that he knew better than his Lord (Matt. 16:22; John 13:8).
- He thought that he, in his own strength, would be faithful to Jesus to the end (Mark 14:27-29).
- He argued with the other disciples about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24).
- He acted impulsively to cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest before listening to his Lord (Luke 22:49-50).

His sinful, self-centered nature was still very much present in his life. And so, *even* such a sincere, godly, devoted believer could deny his Lord.

He still loved *himself* more than he loved *Christ*.

<pause>

When I first became a believer, I was on fire for Jesus.

- I immediately quit drinking and smoking and cursing,
- I never missed a church-wide gathering or small group gathering,
- I read the entire Bible cover to cover,
- I started going to morning prayer each weekday,
- I invited my entire dormitory to my baptism,
- and I regularly shared the gospel with people on campus.

But there was one summer when I came back to my hometown and there was kind of a reunion gathering with a bunch of my high school friends. They all knew that I was a Christian and how my life had completely changed.

And during that reunion, one of my friends had shared with me that who was now openly gay. He had already shared *privately* with my other friends at that gathering. But when he shared with me, it was *public*—or at least, it felt that way.

And then he asked me point blank, “Do you think I’m going to hell?”

¹³ Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 62.

And in that moment, so much fear welled up inside of me. I was the only Christian there. All my friends' eyes were on me. I wasn't in any *physical* danger, but I felt so much *social* danger—as if I would lose all my friends' approval or somehow be a terrible witness to them if I offended them with the truth.

I don't know how exactly I rationalized it to myself in that split second, but I said something that I still regret even to this day. I said, "Only God knows."

And what my friend said wrecked me inside. He said something like, "You're right. You don't know. I don't know. So we should just all live in whatever way we want."

To be clear, *all* of us deserve to go to hell—not because of any particular sexual struggle or sin, but because we are *all* sinners before a holy God.

That is *not* to minimize any sin, but that is to be clear that, if I *were* truthful with my friend—that he *would be* going to hell—that is *not* because he shared with me *at that moment* that he was openly gay, but it was true *long before* that because he did *not* know Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior. And therefore, he along with everyone else who has *not* trusted in Christ will stand guilty and condemned before a holy God.

To this day, I feel like that is one of my biggest fails as a Christian. In that moment, I prioritized my own self-preservation over my love for Christ and my love for my friend. In that moment, I would not deny *myself*, and so I denied *Christ*.

And this happened while I seemed to be growing *rapidly* in my faith.

So for all of us, yes, be encouraged by progress and growth in spiritual maturity, but never lose sight of the fact that you may be a very sincere, godly, devoted believer, but whose sinful nature is still very strong.

Third, we must prepare ourselves not to enter into temptation.

[Three lessons

1. We must either deny self or deny Christ.
2. You may be a very sincere, godly, devoted believer, but whose sinful nature is still very strong.
3. We must prepare ourselves not to enter into temptation.]

How did Peter get to that point of denying Christ? In the larger context, it's because Peter ignored Jesus' repeated command in the garden to "pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40, 46). Instead, he slept. So in this moment of temptation, he was *not* prepared to fight sin. He was *not* prayerful, and so he was caught off guard and he instinctively acted according to his sinful nature.

Kids, if you know that your friends are doing things that are *not* right—cheating, bullying, gossiping, or engaging in other things that you know from God's Word to be right—then don't wait until you're put in a situation where you're caught off guard and you fall into sin. But pray *now* that God would give you the courage and wisdom to always do what is right—to speak the truth in love, to stand up for the marginalized, to find your true security in Christ, even if there is social cost. Prepare yourself *now* for those moments.

If you struggle with pornography or other forms of sexual sin, you probably already notice a pattern that takes place. There's a certain time or place or access point that you particularly struggle with.

So if possible, don't put yourself in those scenarios where you know you're going to be tempted. If the access point is your phone at night in your bedroom, then don't bring your phone into your bedroom at night. And make sure you get other trusted brothers or sisters to pray for you and confess to them if you ever bring your phone into your bedroom at night. Train yourself not to even be in those scenarios where you know you'll be tempted.

If you can't avoid those situations for whatever reason, then pray *beforehand*. If you struggle in the bathroom, pray *before* you enter the bathroom. If you struggle in your bedroom, then pray *before* you enter your bedroom. And, again, tell other trusted brothers or sisters, preferably those who don't struggle with those things to the same degree, who you will proactively *share* with and who will proactively *ask* you and *help* you and *pray* with you to flee from sin and run to Christ.

We must prepare ourselves not to enter into temptation.

<pause>

So first, Peter followed the Lord at a distance; second, Peter denied any connection with the Lord; and third...

III. The Lord still turned toward Peter (vv. 61-62)

Look at verses 61-62.

[⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.]

So while Peter was still speaking his third denial of Christ, the rooster crowed, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter."

We don't know exactly where Jesus was at this moment. Perhaps he was overlooking the courtyard, or in a room looking out to it, or even passing through the courtyard.¹⁴ We don't know for sure, but from wherever he was, Jesus could *see* Peter and he "*turned and looked* at Peter" at this very moment.

And immediately, with one look, Peter remembered what Jesus had told him earlier that night—that "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."

Luke doesn't describe the *kind* of look he gave Peter, but I don't believe this was a look of *rebuke* but a look of *love*.

When Jesus encountered the rich ruler who *thought* he had obeyed all of God's commandments but whom Jesus knew actually failed miserably at even keeping the first commandment, we're told the *kind* of look Jesus gave him. It says, "And Jesus, *looking* at him, *loved* him," and then he exposed him of his hidden sin (Mark 10:21).

So I understand this as Jesus turning *toward* and looking in *love* at Peter.

Remember, Jesus is *not* surprised.

¹⁴ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC 3 (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).

- He told Peter explicitly *that* he would deny him,
- he told him *when* it would happen (before the rooster crows today),
- he told him *how many times* it would happen (three times),
- and he even told him the language that Peter was going to use (that he would deny that he *knows* him).¹⁵

You could say that *Peter* was surprised by his sin, but *Jesus* was not.

And even in what Jesus said to him earlier, he didn't just say that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed that day.

Jesus *also* said that he was *praying* for Peter that his faith in him may not fail; that Peter would *turn again* (that is, he would *repent*); and *when* he repented, Jesus commanded him to *strengthen* his brothers in the faith (Luke 22:32).

Jesus knew all of this *in advance*, and he told Peter all of this *in advance*, so when Jesus gave this look in love at Peter at this very moment of his third denial, Peter would know that Jesus *still* loved him despite his series of major failures that night.

<pause>

One theologian made this comment about Jesus' look toward Peter: "As our Savior was being tried and preparing to bear the sins of us all on the cross, He had time to give one glance to a faltering disciple and so save his soul in the saving of the world" (B. B. Warfield).¹⁶

When Jesus first spoke his words of prophecy that night to Peter, he never thought he would ever betray and deny his Lord. And yet, having done so *three* times with greater boldness and intensity each time, he came face to face with how *sinful* he truly was.¹⁷

It's as if he was brought back to when Jesus *first* called him to be his disciple, when Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Somehow, over the course of those three years, Peter had forgotten that about himself. But here, it was again undeniable to him how sinful he truly was. He became convinced all over again with greater intensity that he is, in fact, *still* a sinful man.

And yet, just like the Lord first called him to himself when he *knew* he was a sinful man, the Lord is *still* turning *toward* and looking in *love* at him as Peter realizes once again how sinful he really is.

And it was this look of love and the saying (or the word) of the Lord¹⁸ that it brought to remembrance that just *wrecked* Peter—"he went out and wept bitterly."

<pause>

¹⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

¹⁶ Quoted in J. Ligon Duncan III, "I Do Not Know Him. I Am Not One of Them. And I Don't Know What You Are Talking About." September 18, 2011, <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/i-do-not-know-him-i-am-not-one-of-them-and-i-don-t-know-what-you-are-talking-about>.

¹⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Luke" in *Matthew–Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary 8 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

¹⁸ "'The word of the Lord' is a technical expression in OT literature, often referring to a divine prophetic utterance (e.g., Gen 15:1, Isa 1:10, Jonah 1:1). In the NT it occurs 15 times: 3 times as ῥῆμα τοῦ κυρίου (*rhēma tou kuriou*; here and in Acts 11:16, 1 Pet 1:25) and 12 times as λόγος τοῦ κυρίου (*logos tou kuriou*; Acts 8:25; 13:44, 48, 49; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10, 20; 1 Thess 1:8; 4:15; 2 Thess 3:1). As in the OT, this phrase focuses on the prophetic nature and divine origin of what has been said" (NET footnote).

Just think what Peter must have been thinking and feeling when he saw his Lord crucified and buried later that day: “My Lord is gone; my hope is gone forever; and I denied my Lord. After that life of love, after that blessed fellowship of three years, I denied my Lord. God have mercy upon me!”¹⁹

I don’t think we can begin to imagine the depth of grief that Peter fell into then. But by God’s grace, we know that this was what the Bible calls a *godly* grief that produced repentance and led to salvation in Peter rather than a *worldly* grief that produced death in Judas (2 Cor. 7:10).

Judas *also* felt grief for his sin in betraying Jesus. Later, he returned to the religious leaders to return the blood money and to confess that Jesus was innocent. Like Peter, perhaps he also wept bitterly. But his tears did not lead him to repentance, but they led him to hang himself (Matt. 27:3-5). It was a *worldly* grief that produced death.

It’s been said, “Remorse can make a man miserable, like Judas Iscariot, but it can do no more. It does not lead him to God” (J. C. Ryle).²⁰

Remorse—or “worldly grief”—may shed many tears for sin, but it stops there. There is no life of increasing obedience that results from those tears. Their guilt and tears make no difference in the person’s life; their heart remains unchanged, and so their life remains unchanged.

Repentance—which is a result of “godly grief”—may or may not include tears, but there is a genuine change of heart that *turns back* toward the Lord, which is evidenced in a life of increasing obedience.

There is no explicit mention of Peter’s repentance here, but when we remember what Jesus said to Peter earlier that night and when we look at the rest of history, we know that Peter was undoubtedly repentant.

When Christ resurrected from the grave, he had that memorable personal chat with Peter by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:15-19). Three times, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” and three times, Peter responded “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

Just as Peter denied his Lord three times, the Lord Jesus Christ graciously gave Peter the threefold opportunity to reaffirm his love for him. And in each time, Jesus told him to care for his church like a good shepherd, which was really just what he had said to him earlier—“And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32).

And Peter’s life was evidently changed.

- A few weeks later, he would stand before thousands of people and boldly preach the gospel, unashamedly identifying himself as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and calling others to repentance and faith in him (Acts 2:14-41).
- In his letter to the churches across Asia Minor, he calls fellow believers to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that they have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15) and to be prepared to suffer for the sake of his name (1 Pet. 4:12-19).
- And he remained faithful to Christ until the very end of his life, never to deny him again but continuing to proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ until his own death by crucifixion (cf. John 21:19).

<pause>

¹⁹ Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 59-60.

²⁰ Quoted in Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

As we think about the Lord Jesus *still* turning toward Peter in love, let's consider three lessons.

First, your *own* love for Jesus is never going to carry you in the Christian life, but you must be driven by *his* love for you.

[Three lessons

1. Your *own* love for Jesus is never going to carry you in the Christian life, but you must be driven by *his* love for you.]

Remember, Peter clearly loved Jesus. That's *why* he was in the courtyard. But his love for Jesus was *not* enough to deny *himself* in that moment; he *still* chose to deny Christ *despite* how much he loved him.

But what the turning point for Peter? In the midst of his denial, his Lord still turned toward him in love. In the very moment of his massive failures and sins against his Lord, the Lord reassured him of his unfailing love for him.

And over the course of the next few days, Peter would see that love demonstrated in the cross and resurrection of Christ on his behalf. The punishment that he deserved for his sin was laid upon the Lord that he denied. Jesus suffered and died *for him*.

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were *still* sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8 NIV).

It was only when Peter truly began to grasp the depths of *his* sin and the greater depths of *Christ's* love for him that he could deny himself and take up his cross and follow Jesus to the end (Matt. 16:24).

Just consider this for a moment: The Lord knows *all* your *future* sins—what your sins will be; when you will commit them; how many times you'll sin; the exact thoughts, words, and actions you'll use to sin... he knows them *all* to the most *minute* detail. He knows that, even as a Christian, you will be prone to wander and prone to leave the God you love.

And yet, if you are truly united to him by faith, then he *still* turns *toward* you and looks in *love* at you.

[**TGR:** We often sing the song, "He Will Hold Me Fast," which has these lines that capture this well: "For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast... For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast."]

[**JKT:** We sang the song "He Will Hold Me Fast" earlier in our service. And it has these lines that capture this well: "For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast... For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast."]

We need to know that our Lord is holding onto us *more* than we are holding onto him. And if we are his, then no one can snatch us out of his hands (John 10:28).

So your *own* love for Jesus is never going to carry you in the Christian life, but you must be driven by *his* love for you.

Second, genuine repentance is always evidenced by a life of increasing obedience.

[Three lessons

1. Your *own* love for Jesus is never going to carry you in the Christian life, but you must be driven by *his* love for you.
2. Genuine repentance is always evidenced by a life of increasing obedience.]

Peter didn't just weep bitterly, but he *repented*. It was not just mere remorse for sin that he felt, but Peter had a genuine change of heart that turned him back toward the Lord, which was evidenced in his life of increasing obedience.

Going back to my cowardice response to my old high school friend, I didn't go out to weep bitterly like Peter did; I can't really remember the rest of that night or even *when* exactly I came to the Lord in repentance. But I remember a bit of what I prayed. I kept repeating to the Lord, "Please give me another opportunity. Please give me another opportunity."

And soon afterwards, I found myself hanging out with another childhood friend at the mall, and he *also* knew that I had become a Christian. And he asked me, pretty much word for word what my other friend had asked me, "Do you think I'm going to hell?"

This was the opportunity that I had been praying for. So would I deny my Lord again? Or would I deny myself, confront the fears that I felt all over again, and speak the truth in love to my friend?

I took a deep breath, and I said something like, "Honestly, yes, but I believe that I also deserve to go to hell for my sins. And that's why Jesus came." And then, I began to share the gospel with him.

And to my surprise, he thanked me for sharing that with him.

I wish I could say that my friend is now a follower of Christ, but he's not...yet.

Still, the Lord, in his grace, provided me another opportunity and enabled me to respond differently and truthfully. And the Lord, in his grace, *assured* me of my repentance because I was *evidencing* a life of increasing obedience.

<pause>

If you're a follower of Christ, the Lord is gracious to help us towards repentance. He often provides these opportunities for us to demonstrate genuine repentance not only with tears but with *obedience*.

Sometimes, it's not a matter of waiting for opportunities, but we ought to proactively approach someone, apologize without justifications, and ask for forgiveness.

But sometimes, as we're praying for opportunities, a similar scenario repeats itself, or that particular person approaches us.

This is God's *grace* to us.

- If we find that we are unwilling to act according to our supposed repentance, then God graciously *exposes* us of our *unrepentance*.
- If we find that our actions are in line with our repentance, then God graciously *assures* us of our *repentance*.

So genuine repentance is always evidenced by a life of increasing obedience.

Third, we're called to strengthen one another in our faith and followership of Christ.

[Three lessons

1. Your *own* love for Jesus is never going to carry you in the Christian life, but you must be driven by *his* love for you.
2. Genuine repentance is always evidenced by a life of increasing obedience.
3. We're called to strengthen one another in our faith and followership of Christ.]

We were never meant to walk the Christian life alone.

Jesus said to Peter, "And when you have turned again, strengthen your *brothers*" (Luke 22:32).

The very fact that Jesus said to "*strengthen* you brothers" implies that we are *weak*, and we need strengthening.

And that's why Jesus designed the church to be for our mutual strengthening and our mutual building up of one another in our faith and followership of Christ.

When we are isolated from other brothers and sisters, we are more prone to respond like Peter—following at a distance, desiring to blend in, and eventually turning away from and denying our Lord.

But when we are strengthening one another in our faith and followership of Christ, as the Lord commanded us to do, we are more prone to be hold fast to our confession that Jesus alone is Lord and Savior (Heb. 10:23-25).

And that's part of the reason that the New Testament has no paradigm of Christians who are not members of local churches. The Christian life is inseparable from life in a local church.

So if you're a Christian and not yet a member of a church, then one of the primary application points for you is to join a local church—whether that's this church or another gospel-proclaiming church.

If you *are* a member of our church, then the regular gathering of your church to worship the Lord and to be fed and strengthened in the reading, singing, praying, and preaching of God's Word together ought to be *non-negotiable*.

And being in *relationship* with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, intentionally helping one another to follow Christ *also* ought to be *non-negotiable*.

We cannot strengthen one another in our faith and followership of Christ if we are *not* present when we gather and if we are *not* living in relationship with one another.

This past weekend was our joint congregational retreat, and I was so encouraged to see how we were living this out together.

- We were gaining a better understanding of God's design for the church as we heard preaching through the book of Ephesians.
- We were immediately applying what we were learning as we were praying for one another and building relationships with those in our churches that we didn't previously know.
- We were sharing how we came to know Christ and important milestones in our faith with one another.
- We were connecting one another to different people in our churches that we thought they would relate well with.

And in all that, we were strengthening one another in our faith and followership of Christ. And now that we're back in **Jakarta / Tangerang**, I pray that we would continue to do so, knowing that *this* is how our Lord Jesus has called us to live as his people—for our good and for his glory.

Conclusion

As we close, let's return to Peter and the Lord.

Peter turning away from the Lord and the Lord still turning towards him in love is a personal picture of the gospel.

As sinners, *all* of us have turned away from the Lord who created us. But rather than turning *away* from us and looking at us in *wrath* as our sins deserve, the Lord *still* turns *toward* us and looks at us in *love*.

And he demonstrated that love to us by being our substitute—living the perfect life we were supposed to live, taking the wrath we deserved for our sins by dying on the cross, and giving us new and eternal life as he resurrected three days later.

So now, if we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus as our only Lord and Savior, we are not only assured of our *salvation* but assured of his *love* for us—no matter what.

For we are convinced that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

If you're *not* a believer in Jesus Christ, that is the good news available for you today.

And if you're *already* a believer in Jesus Christ, that is the good news that we *still* need every day as we continue to walk toward our heavenly home.

The One Thing

Even when we turn away from the Lord, he still turns toward us.

Let's pray.