

Human Depravity, Divine Sovereignty, and Peter's Denials

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[0 : 00] Of all the lies that our culture has bought into, one of those that I think has done the most damage, perhaps more than almost any other cultural lie that we've bought into, and led to our acceptance of many other falsehoods, has been the lie that human beings, you and I, are basically good and decent.

That at the core of who we are, we are essentially good. And so because people have bought into that lie, you hear the calls all around you for people to have self-esteem, and self-confidence, and self-assurance, all of which are deadly to us.

Because the Bible teaches not that we are at the core of who we are as good, the Bible teaches us that we are depraved and sinful. That's who we are as human beings.

We are not the divine spark. Somehow sent into the world to change the world. We are fallen, broken sinners, with the image of God that has been shattered and needs desperately to be renewed within us.

But over and over we see around us in the culture, we see this lie being perpetrated. So that people no longer long to be redeemed from their sins, they long to have themselves exalted and lifted up.

[1 : 23] People no longer look for someone to rescue them and deliver them from themselves.

They look to have someone affirm them and lift them up. While we need to be aware of our radical depravity, we are all sort of, we are all bombarded with the thought that we are okay.

That we are, at the core, good and decent people, and if we will just try to seek after some sort of self-actualization, and if we will have confidence in ourselves, if we will believe in ourselves, we will be able to accomplish great things.

And we see the danger of that kind of thinking illustrated for us, I think probably in no one better than the Apostle Peter, and in no passage better than in this passage in the Gospel of Mark, where we see Peter come to the end of self-confidence, and the end of self-assurance, and confronted with his own depravity.

In fact, I want you to take a look. I want us to see, in these verses, I want you to see how Peter comes face to face with his own sinfulness, and the failure of the self-confidence that he had.

But before we do that, I want to remind you that this Gospel is, church historians tell us, very early church traditions tell us, that this Gospel is essentially Peter's recollection of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

[2 : 53] This is Peter's account of his years that he spent with Jesus. We know that because Mark became Peter's assistant, Peter's right-hand man at some point in the city of Rome.

And we are told by very early church historians, that Mark's Gospel is really Mark's account of Peter's recollection of the things that happened when Peter was with Jesus for those three or so years.

And so it's important when we're reading through this Gospel to take notice of how Peter is portrayed throughout this Gospel, and to compare it to how he is portrayed in the other Gospels. And what you'll find when you begin to do that kind of a comparison, is you will find that the Gospel of Mark does not highlight the triumphs of Peter at all.

The Gospel of Mark does not lay great emphasis upon the leadership role of Peter among the disciples. The Gospel of Mark does not lift Peter up and hold him up as an example, which causes a great irony to be present in our day and throughout most of church history, for while the Roman Catholic Church exalts Peter to a high status, higher above any of the other apostles, highest in all the church, Peter himself in his own recollections, he lowers his estimate of himself.

I'll give you a couple of examples here. If you just turn back a few pages to chapter 8 of the Gospel of Mark, there's a very familiar passage that is recorded for us here.

[4 : 26] It begins in verse 27 of Mark chapter 8. We're told that Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, Who do people say that I am?

And they told him, John the Baptist, and others say Elijah, and others one of the prophets. And he asked them, But who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, You are the Christ.

And he strictly charged him to tell no one about him. Mark does not record the entire conversation. Mark doesn't record what Jesus said immediately after Peter's confession.

And if you remember from the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 16, when Peter made the confession, You are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus looked at Peter and said, I tell you, you are Peter, which means rock.

That word means rock. Petros means rock. He says, I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church. Now that verse has been used by the Roman Catholic Church to build the entire edifice upon which the papacy, the Pope, stands.

[5 : 34] And it has been used throughout church history to exalt the name of Peter. And I think most Protestants interpret that passage to say, well, the rock refers to the confession that Peter made.

I don't think so. I think the rock there is Peter. Peter, as he confesses Christ, and Peter, as one of the apostles, is one of the foundation stones on which the church is built. That is true.

He's not the first pope. He's not any of those things that the Catholic Church proclaims. But he had a position, a great position in the early church. And yet here, in Peter's recollection, Peter does not have Mark record those words of Jesus.

Probably the place where Peter is singled out more than any other place. And it's not present here. It's just skipped over.

You are the Christ, and he strictly charges him to tell no one about him. You move down one more chapter where Peter is also featured prominently in one of the events that occurs, the transfiguration.

[6 : 32] And here, what do we get? We get Peter's bubbling, stumbling mistake. So he neglects to record the places where Jesus praises him, but he makes sure that he records the places where he makes mistakes.

So, you see in verse 5, it says, Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it's good that we are here. Let us make three tents. One for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And then Mark says, For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

So Mark pictures Peter speaking out of fear and ignorance and just saying the first thing that comes to his mind that might seem somewhat appropriate to a man in this situation. So, Peter is not pictured in a positive light throughout this gospel.

His high points are either diminished or not even spoken of, and his low points are described in detail. This is the portrait of Peter that we see.

We see one more time. We've seen this in this very chapter, and it's going to be referenced in the passage that we're looking at today. When Jesus predicted Peter's denial, beginning in verse 26 of chapter 14, it says that when they had sung him after their Passover meal, they went out to the Mount of Olives, and Jesus said to them, You will all fall away.

[7 : 47] For it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. And Peter said to him, Even though they all fall away, I will not.

So here's Peter, brash and overconfident, filled with self-confidence, filled with self-assurance.

Yeah, I get it, Jesus. You're saying we're going to fall away, but I think you're wrong, because I am not going to, because I will stand with you all the way to the end.

That's self-confidence for you. If ever there was anyone with a load of confidence in themselves, it was Peter, and it's on full display there as he looks right at Jesus and says, I think you're wrong about me.

I'm going to do better than you think that I will. To which Jesus responds, I tell you this very night before the rooster crows twice, you'll deny me three times.

And Peter again contradicts Jesus. He said, emphatically, if I must die with you, I will not deny you. So Peter is confident in himself. So confident is he in himself that even when Jesus predicts what he's going to do, he's willing to go against the word of Christ himself.

[8 : 57] Peter is not portrayed in the best of light in the gospel that he himself inspired. His high points are diminished.

His low points are emphasized. And then we come to our passage now where we see Peter at his lowest, where we see the death blow is self-confidence.

Verse 66, And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.

Now pause just for a second there because I want you to get a good mental image of what's happening here. I want you to understand the circumstances that surround this. And they say that he's in the courtyard. He's in the courtyard of the palace of the high priest.

So this would have been the palace in which Caiaphas and all of his family lived. I told you last week that Annas had been one of the high priests years before.

[10 : 00] And Annas was removed from high priests by the Romans, but he connived and tricked and was able to get several of his sons to succeed him as high priest. And then he was able to get Caiaphas, who was his son-in-law, to become high priest.

So Annas, I told you, was like the godfather over the high priesthood in these days, sort of pulling the strings from behind the scenes. And so Annas would have lived most likely in this palace as well, the entire family, which makes sense because first Jesus was brought to Annas, we're told in the Gospel of John, and then Annas sent him off to Caiaphas.

So this is all happening very quickly. It's in this very large palace. And these homes, the way that they were built in the first century, were normally built as very large rectangular structures. In the middle was an open courtyard. In the middle of the rectangle was an open courtyard and all the rooms surrounded the courtyard. Which meant that in order to get into the courtyard, you had to enter in through a door into one of the rooms from outside, or a gate, and then come through another gate.

You had to go through two entryways through Roman soldiers to get into the courtyard. And so you have to ask yourself, what in the world is Peter doing in this courtyard? How did he get there?

[11 : 15] What connections does Peter, could he possibly have as an uneducated fisherman from Galilee, how could he possibly have the kinds of connections that are necessary to get into the courtyard!

of the high priest? How did he get there? Well, the Gospel of John tells us. The Gospel of John tells us that John, one of Jesus' other disciples, John knew one of the servant girls who was standing at the gate.

And it was John who went to this servant girl and asked her to allow Peter entrance into the palace. And so through John, Peter is able to get entrance into the palace, and he's now there in this inner courtyard while Jesus' trial is going on in one of the rooms in the house.

So that's the situation, that's where Jesus is, and we're told that as he's warming himself in the fire because the nights were chilly and frequently they would build fires in the middle of the courtyards of these large homes. Peter is sitting there along with some of the soldiers warming himself at the fire, no doubt trying to hide his identity.

It's nighttime, so it's dark. It's sometime between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. It's in the middle of the night and so it's dark. And so all he has to really do is hide his face from the light of the fire as he warms himself at the fire.

[12 : 35] No doubt some of the Roman soldiers who were there in the courtyards were the same ones who had arrested Jesus. Maybe even the soldier whose ear Peter cut off in the Garden of Gethsemane was there.

We don't know. But Peter would want to go unnoticed as best he could. You might ask yourself, why would he put himself in such danger? Why would he do that?

And I think it's probably driven by his confidence and by his assertions that he made earlier. Maybe by a little bit of guilt even. I will die with you if I have to, Jesus.

He ran away in Gethsemane and now he's back maybe driven by guilt maybe driven by a desire to somehow make up for the statements he made earlier but he's there in the courtyard hiding himself

from the soldiers and others around him.

We're told in verse 67 that one of the servant girls recognized him and said, you were with the Nazarene. Now that's probably not a compliment. Jesus is on trial in one of the rooms right over here and this servant girl kind of spits it out.

[13:41] You're with the Nazarene. Nazareth, it was a backwater town in the upper region of Galilee that was looked down upon already by those who lived in Judea and so this servant girl says, you were with that Nazarene, that Jesus who's on trial.

You're one of his followers. In verse 68 we're told he denied it and he denies it in strong terms. I neither know nor understand what you mean and then he tries to get out because if somebody started to recognize you you would want to get out so we're told that he went to the gateway so he's going to the gate he's going to try to get out but remember he's got to go through two exits in order to get out and he's got to get through the Roman soldiers.

It's not a quick exit. There's no way out of there in a hurry and as he's going we're told the rooster crowed and then another servant girl sees him and she begins to say to him he's one of them and again he denies and after a little while bystanders so other people who were in the courtyard they begin to say to Peter you've got to be one of them because you're a Galilean because Galileans had very distinct accents very different from a Judean or a Jerusalem accent very distinct they had they had some difficulty historians say in the north they had some difficulty with a lot of the guttural sounds that were present in Aramaic and Hebrew and so as Peter spoke his native Aramaic to the other Jews they would have been able to tell you're from Galilee imagine today if Jesus were alive and his disciples were with him today and they were all from the Bronx and they came to Texas okay and Jesus were on trial in Texas and someone accused

Peter of being with Jesus and as he says I don't even know who you're talking about he says with a very thick accent clearly indicating that he's from the Bronx it's the same kind of thing here the more that Peter protests the more he proves that he's one of Jesus disciples the more he speaks the more he shows them that he is who they are saying that he is certainly you are one of them for you are a Galilean but Peter does not shut his mouth it says but he began to invoke a curse on himself and swear I do not know this man of whom you speak this is serious business now now Peter is calling down curses on himself if he's lying may God strike me dead if I'm one of his disciples or something along those lines he is gone so far away from the confidence that he had just earlier in this chapter so far away and immediately verse 72 the rooster crowed a second time and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him before the rooster crows twice you will deny me three times and then here it is here's the end of

Peter and he broke down and wept from self assurance and self confidence to a heap of a man broken and weeping that's the danger that comes with self confidence that's the danger that accompanies anyone who denied their own depravity the apostle Paul when he thinks of himself cries out to God oh wretched man that I am but here today not only in our culture but sad to say in many of our churches we don't cry out wretched man that I am we cry out worthy am I how good am I but we teach our children over and over not to view themselves as created in the image of God and to see value and worth in the fact that they're in the image of God to see themselves as having worth in and of themselves self-esteem is the rallying cry of the day but Paul would rather cry out wretched man that I am this is the journey from self-confidence and self-assurance to a realization of your own depravity and you ask yourself what hope is there in that movement what hope is [18:12] Peter supposed to have in this darkest moment in his deepest moment of despair where he comes face to face with his own depravity what hope is Peter supposed to have and I would submit to you that in the context of the gospel of Mark Peter should have hope because of the divine sovereignty of Jesus it's at this moment that Peter is reminded of Jesus sovereign prediction of his failure this has not come as a surprise to God Peter's deep depravity does not take God by storm it does not surprise him it does not shape him he's fully aware and he fully knows all that's going to happen in Peter's life but he knows more than Peter's failure he knows more than that Peter is going to come face to face with his depravity he knows more than that because what did Jesus say at the end of his prediction what did

Jesus say he said I will go before you to Galilee you will all fall away but after I'm raised I will go before you to Galilee do you know what happens in Galilee Mark doesn't record it because again Peter Peter is not concerned to exalt himself so Mark doesn't record the story but the other gospels do Jesus comes to Peter and says Peter do you love me and broken Peter says you know that I do

Peter do you love me Lord you know that I do Peter do you love me you know that I do and then Jesus answered feed my sheep in other words I'm not finished with you Peter I'm not done with you this is not over with I was not surprised by your failure in the courtyard I told you it was going to happen I am not surprised by your depravity it in no way impedes my plans for you

I am sovereign not only over the good parts of your life I am sovereign over your sin I'm in control of it that denial in in the courtyard of the high priest was a part of my plan to humble you and shape you and mold you into the man that I want you to be Jesus has a plan for the sinfulness of Peter he has a plan for all of our sinfulness he takes and turns and uses our depravity and redeems us from it and uses the mistakes that we have made and the failures that we have made he uses those to further his purposes consider probably the most famous example of that consider the story of Joseph and his brothers his brothers sold him into slavery they told his father that he had been eaten by wolves imagine bringing upon your own father the grief of the death of a child what a terrible horrible thing to do and yet

Joseph at the end of the story when he speaks to his brother says to him it was not you who sent me here it was God who sent me here God had a plan his plan included the brothers of Joseph selling him into slavery so that Joseph would end up in Egypt so that Joseph would rise to a high position of authority so that Joseph could save the covenant people of God in a time of famine God used the depravity of Joseph's brothers to execute his plan God now uses the depravity of Peter to shape and mold Peter into the man that he would have him be we know from reading the other gospels that Peter that Peter's denials would not be the end of him because Jesus says to Peter even as he predicts his denials in the gospel of Luke he tells us that Peter I prayed for you so that you may not finally fully ultimately fall away we see in

Christ one who is so powerful and sovereign one who has not mere knowledge of the future but one who controls the future in such a way that when he tests his servants and when he puts him through the flame and when he knows they will fail he himself intercedes on their behalf and ensures that their failure will not be final the hope for us all when we come face to face with our depravity if we are in Christ our hope is that he is sovereign over all things and he will use even our worst moments to accomplish his greatest plans in our lives he can do it he has done it and will do it I don't know how many times I have been talking to people and counseling people who have made terrible mistakes and they come with an attitude like this they come with a thought process that says well I've made a mistake and

[23 : 41] I have missed out now on God's best for me and I have missed out on God's perfect will for me or I have missed out on plan A that God had in place for me I've missed that and I know that but I believe that he has a plan B for me that's not as good as plan A but it's pretty good and so I'm trying to follow plan B when the scriptures tell us that God has one plan there's no plan B for you there's no there's no there's no sidetrack for you your sins do not thwart God's plans in your life he sees them he knows them he includes them in his plans and just as he did to Joseph's brothers he uses our sins not not to create an alternate reality in which he can somehow work some good for us he uses those he sees those ahead of time to get us to where he wanted us to be in the first place there's no plan

B there's only plan A that includes us coming face to face with our own depravity at various times in our lives and to know and to be confident that even in our greatest failures the plans of God for us and for our lives have not been shattered have not been deterred have not been thrown off track is to instill us with confidence not in ourselves to cause us not to esteem ourselves but to be filled with confidence in a divinely sovereign savior to esteem Christ above all else this is what Peter learns here Peter learns that he is radically totally depraved and he is reminded that he serves a savior who possesses absolute total divine sovereignty and because of that he can stand only weeks later it's not years later after

Peter's been in training for a long time only weeks later he can stand before crowds crowds! who would threaten his life the same religious leaders who put Jesus to death he could stand before them and proclaim you you crucify him but if you turn and you repent he will forgive you of your sins that kind of boldness and that kind of confidence does not come from looking inward it comes from having looked inward and seen your depravity and turned toward Christ and seen his sovereignty and trusted in it Peter filled with the spirit of God after Pentecost having learned his lessons and learned the truth about divine sovereignty Peter now is not perfect he will have his issues he will have his run ins with the apostle Paul but now now he can be an instrument through which the

gospel goes to the nations now he can be an instrument through which Christ accomplishes his purposes not only for Peter but for the whole world and if you and I would take a step back and we would turn down the noise of our culture and we would stop looking within ourselves to find strength stop looking within ourselves to be inspired to do great things stop looking within ourselves for some shred of goodness and begin to look toward him and trust in his power and his sovereignty that we we too could come to be instruments used for the furthering of the gospel but so long as we look to ourselves so long as we tout our own goodness so long as we depend upon ourselves we will see no success with the gospel the challenge for us at all times is having come face to face with our depravity having turned away from it and repented and trusted in Christ and been saved and delivered by him is to continue to turn toward him to continue to face him and to continue to trust in his power and his sovereignty and never ever begin once again to assert our own and if we do that and if you do that you can do great things for the kingdom Christ through the spirit and through the power of his word will do great things for you for the sake of his kingdom if you turn away from yourself and trust in him let's pray