

**Luke 22:54-62**  
**A Lesson in Overconfidence**

As believers, we have all experienced what C. S. Lewis called the “law of undulation.” What he meant by that was that if you have been a believer for any length of time, you have experienced the profound highs of closeness with God. Those moments of prayer, meditation, and worship where the experience and sense of God’s presence is too deep for words. Those moments inspire us to do great things for the kingdom of God. They compel us to be more devoted to Scripture, more loving to our families, and more serious about the disciples of our faith.

But then there are other times. Those times when sin has us in its grip. When failure and disappointment seem to overwhelm us. We feel shame and mortification. We are afraid to face the God Whom we have offended. We are embarrassed to have committed the same sin again. We avoid prayer, We avoid fellowship, We close our Bibles and try to make it all go away. These ups and downs were what Lewis termed the “law of undulation.”

The disciples were no different. Perhaps, because they experienced God in the flesh, their extremes of high and low were even more exaggerated. There were moments where they demonstrated great acts of faith. Remember when Peter, James and John “left everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:11). Remember when all others were leaving Jesus, and He asked if they, too, were going to fall away, Peter answered “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (John 6: 68).

But there were also times when they lacked understanding. On one occasion when they had failed to grasp the point Jesus was making, He said with some exasperation, “are you so lacking in understanding also?” (Mark 7:18). And there were times when their faith was weak.

“<sup>23</sup>But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. <sup>24</sup>They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. <sup>25</sup>And He said to them, ‘where is your faith?’” (Luke 8:23-25).

“<sup>8</sup>But Jesus, aware of this, said, ‘you men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup>Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? <sup>10</sup>Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up?’” (Matthew 16:8-10).

Peter was no exception to this rule. Matthew recounted the story when Jesus was teaching a large crowd of people and “the disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves” (Matthew 14:15). The disciples watched as Jesus, demonstrating His power and authority, produced food for thousands so that “they all ate and were satisfied” (Matthew 14:20). Following that, Jesus went away to pray and sent the disciples on ahead in across the Sea of Galilee. The boat was struggling against the wind when “in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea” (Matthew 14:25). Naturally, the disciples

were terrified, but Peter, still infused with the spiritual enthusiasm of seeing the Son of God perform a miracle, “said to Him, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water’” (Matthew 14:28). Jesus encouraged him to come, and Peter stepped out of the boat onto the water. “But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’” (Matthew 14:30). Jesus pulled Peter up and onto the boat and then said “you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:32). Peter had experienced spiritual highs and lows in the matter of a few hours. He had shown great faith, and then great fear, almost simultaneously.

Another incident that demonstrated Peter’s ability to experience great swings of success and failure was also recorded by Matthew. Jesus asked His disciples “who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). After several possible answers were offered, “Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16). This was spiritual wisdom so profound that Jesus publically commended him for his great faith. Later, however, after Jesus had tried to explain to His followers that “<sup>21</sup>He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. <sup>22</sup>Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You’” (Matthew 16:21-22). This was spiritual foolishness so flagrant that Jesus publicly rebuked him.

Perhaps no incident in the life of Peter better demonstrated this tendency all believers have to fluctuate between spiritual growth and spiritual decay than that recorded by Luke after Jesus’ arrest. In no other story is there such spiritual boldness followed by such spiritual disaster. This was Peter’s worst moment.

### **The Worst**

The events Luke recorded in these few verses encompass a few hours. The Roman soldiers and temple guards, “having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest” (v. 54). Peter, Luke informs us “was following at a distance” (v. 54). The high priest’s house was built, as were many of its time, with a courtyard surrounded by the inner rooms of the house itself. One entered through a gate and the rooms around the courtyard were often like a gallery. That is, one could easily observe from there what was happening in the courtyard. And people in the courtyard could look up into the open rooms.

It was the home of the high priest, Caiaphas, though his father-in-law, the former high priest Annas, likely lived there as well. It was here that the first two of Jesus’ trials took place. The first was before Annas, which was perhaps more of an interview than a trial. Then Jesus was taken to, or perhaps they were joined by, Caiaphas and members of the Sanhedrin. This confrontation must have taken at least an hour or two, moving the events well into the early morning hours. Eventually, Jesus would be taken away to be held until daylight, when the Sanhedrin could officially meet and pass their final judgment.

Though all the disciples had fled, “<sup>15</sup>Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, <sup>16</sup>but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in” (John 18:15-16). They had followed “at a distance”

no doubt out of fear. Though the Roman soldiers had by this time returned to Fort Antonia, the temple guard remained and so did the servants of the high priest. This was not a crowd to be taken lightly.

As Peter entered, the servant girl, who acted as gatekeeper, noticed him. (John 18:17). Peter was able to enter as a friend of John, and John was known by the high priest. Therefore, since John was a disciple, surely it could be assumed that Peter was as well. We do not know what happened to John after Peter entered. Did he leave? Did he simply stay out of the way? Scripture does not say; the story focuses entirely on the actions of Peter.

Wherever John's whereabouts, Peter must have looked nervous among such a crowd. He tried to blend in and remain unnoticed. After some others "had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together" (v. 55) Peter joined them. They all must have been talking about the events that had brought them out of their beds in the middle of the night. They must have been speculating on who this man was that had captured the attention of the high priest and the Roman soldiers. Some probably had more information than others. Undoubtedly others offered insights that were merely speculative. Peter just tried to stay quiet and calm.

But the girl who served as gatekeeper couldn't take her eyes off Peter. Eventually she came up to the group and "seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, 'this man was with Him too'" (v. 56). The boldness of the servant girl took Peter aback. The difference in the four gospel of her precise words are unimportant, since there is no reason to expect that any of the writers was trying to give an explicit word-for-word account of the evening. The point is that clearly she recognized Peter as having been one of the disciples.

Peter's response was immediate. He did not think; he simply reacted out of fear. "He denied it, saying, 'woman, I do not know Him'" (v. 57). Other gospel accounts are even more emphatic and have Peter asserting "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about" (Mark 14:68). Peter had been ready to go *with* Jesus anywhere, but now that he was alone, he was no match even for a servant girl. All his boasting was gone. All his bravado in the garden had disappeared.

Having been recognized, Peter tried to leave. Despite his curiosity and devotion, he could not compel himself to stay and find out what happened to Jesus. But "when he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him" (Matthew 26:71). She said "you are one of them too!" (v. 58), but again Peter impulsively denied it, this time with an oath (Matthew 26:72). Unable to leave, Peter must have turned back into the courtyard and tried to avoid notice.

But word of the confrontation had spread to others in the courtyard. Peter could not escape attention. Bystanders began to chime in with the authority that comes with those following a crowd. Since he could not leave, he had to simply hang about the courtyard drawing the attention of the onlookers. "About an hour had passed" (v. 59). The people had been distracted, perhaps by trying to gain information on the events going on upstairs between Jesus and Annas. News spread as this prisoner was to be brought before Caiaphas and the entire Sanhedrin.

But Peter was being recognized by others. Perhaps temple guards who were in the garden were brought in to see if they recognized him. His native Galilean accent gave him away every time he spoke. He could not find a friend. He was alone, isolated, and in genuine danger. People were talking to him. People were talking about him. Peter was in a panic. Eventually, Peter's luck ran out, and "another man began to insist, saying, 'certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too'" (v. 59). John gives us more details. "One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, 'did I not see you in the garden with Him?'" (John 18:26).

Peter's impetuous act in the garden had come back to haunt him. A relative of the unfortunate servant of the high priest testified against him. At this, Peter lost all composure. He blurted out for the third time that He did not know anything about this Jesus, "man, I do not know what you are talking about" (v. 60). Matthew, more descriptively wrote Peter "began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!'" (Matthew 26:74). He called down a curse upon himself if he were not telling the truth. It might have been something like, "may God do this to me and more if I ever was a follower of that rabbi."

It is unlikely this convinced anyone, but the crowd was distracted because at that moment Jesus was led out of the room in which He had been questioned. He was probably being taken to a place of confinement to await the further meeting of the Sanhedrin in the morning. From His vantage point above, Jesus could see into the courtyard. Peter was proclaiming his ignorance, and "while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed" (v. 60). Just as Peter looked up to see Jesus, the rooster crowed and the two men made eye contact. "The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times'" (v. 61). One cannot put into words what Peter felt at that moment.

The look Jesus gave Peter is not described. Perhaps it cannot be. Certainly it was a look of pain, as He saw the worst failure of one of His special, chosen disciples. Certainly also it was a look of compassion and forgiveness. We do not know how Peter was able to escape the attention of the crowd and finally get outside the palace. Perhaps their attention had been turned to the prisoner Himself. No matter, Peter, "went out and wept bitterly" (v. 62). He knew he had failed. He knew he had sinned. And to have done so at such a moment must have broken him.

### **The Best**

But we cannot leave Peter like this. That look Jesus gave, full of love, offered hope to the broken disciple. After the resurrection, fully forgiven, Peter again was given three opportunities to prove his love for Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'tend My lambs.' <sup>16</sup>He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'shepherd My sheep.' <sup>17</sup>He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'tend My sheep'" (John 21:15-17).

Jesus had promised Peter's failure would not be permanent "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). So, Peter learned from this test, and his failure, and passed along that wisdom to others.

"<sup>6</sup>In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7).

"<sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, <sup>18</sup>but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity" (2 Peter 3:17-18).

### **Takeaways**

In this narrative of Peter's worst moment, three lessons come to mind. First is the great danger of overconfidence. There is no sin we are too sanctified to commit. Each of us may fall at any moment. When we believe ourselves to be immune to sin, that is when we are most likely to fail.

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

"Pride goes before destruction,  
And a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Proverbs 16:18).

Second, let us be mindful of the progression. First, Peter was overly confident. "<sup>31</sup>Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; <sup>32</sup>but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." <sup>33</sup>But he said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!'" (Luke 22:31-33). Then, Peter was lazy toward prayer. "<sup>40</sup>When He arrived at the place, He [Jesus] said to them, 'pray that you may not enter into temptation.' . . . <sup>45</sup>When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, <sup>46</sup>and said to them, 'why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation'" (Luke 22:40, 45-46). Then Peter was indecisive - he fought, then ran, then followed. He had lost his spiritual bearings. He was uncertain. He doubted. Finally he fell to the outside pressures of the crowd. Without firmness of faith, he was doomed.

Finally, fortunately, sorrow is the key to true repentance. After being confronted by God, Job saw the truth. He saw the error of his ways and said merely "I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Peter, too, wept bitterly. He did not try to excuse. He did not try to mitigate. The love of Jesus, looking across the room in compassion, eventually resulted in Peter's restoration. We serve a God Who forgives.