

Mark 14:66-72 “The Importance of Remembering a Night You’d Rather Forget”\*\*

Main Idea: Two things led to regret for Peter in Mark 14:66-72. If we want to learn how to deal with our regrets we need to pay special attention to what happened to Peter.

I. Peter failed a test (66-71).

A. He denied being with Jesus (66-68).

B. He denied being a follower of Jesus (69-70a).

1. Jesus was willing to die for us.
2. Are we willing to live unashamedly for Him?

C. He denied even knowing Jesus (70b-71).

1. The problem isn’t Peter’s mouth, but his heart.
2. There are idols in Peter’s heart, as in ours.
  - a. Acceptance: I want people to like me.
  - b. Safety: I want to be safe and comfortable.
  - c. Control: I want to be in control of what happens to me.

Think about it: We fear man too much because we fear God too little.

II. Peter remembered too late (72).

A. The Lord’s Word came true.

1. We are prone to forget God’s Word.
2. We need to take steps to remember God’s Word.

B. The Lord didn’t give up on Peter.

Preventative Maintenance: What can I do so I won’t have regrets?

1. We need to remember that we are just like Peter.
2. We need to deal with potential regrets now.

Jonathan Edwards’ Resolve (at age 19): “I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age.”

3. We need to remember that Christ is sufficient for our regrets.

In 1904 William Borden, heir to the Borden Dairy Estate, graduated from a Chicago high school a millionaire. His parents gave him a trip around the world. Traveling through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe gave Borden a burden for the world's hurting people. Writing home, he said, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field." When he made this decision, he wrote in the back of his Bible two words: **No Reserves**. Turning down high paying

job offers after graduation from Yale University, he entered two more words in his Bible: **No Retreats**. Completing studies at Princeton Seminary, Borden sailed for China to work with Muslims, stopping first at Egypt for some preparation. While there he was stricken with cerebral meningitis and died within a month. A waste, you say! Not in God's plan. In his Bible underneath the words No Reserves and No Retreats, he had written the words **No Regrets**.<sup>11</sup>

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it presents people as they really were,warts and all, because what makes people great is not some inherent quality but *the grace of God*. So Paul, a former blasphemer and killer of Christians, would write, "By the grace of God I am what I am (1 Cor. 15:10)." William Borden could die in the prime of his life and confess "No Regrets" for the same reason, *the grace of God*.

Is it really possible to come to the end of your life and say, "No Regrets"? Yes, by the grace of God, it is. But how? I believe we can find the answer by looking at the true account of a man who *did something very regrettable*, something he no doubt wished to forget yet couldn't, for in fact God saw fit to record his deed in the Scriptures.

You've heard the saying, "It was a night to remember."? Well, this was a night to *forget*. At least, it was a night you would rather forget if you were in Peter's shoes. Two things led to regret for Peter in Mark 14:66-72. If we want to learn how to deal with our regrets we need to pay special attention to what happened to Peter.

*The Context:* We have come to the final leg in our journey through the Gospel of Mark, a series I've entitled *Straight Talk about Jesus*. This is message number 47 in a series we began almost three years ago in April 2004. We have come to the climax of the life of Jesus. The theme verse in the book is Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In just a few short hours Jesus will do just that, He will give His life as a ransom payment for many on a cruel Roman cross.

The Lord willing, we have seven messages to go. We will finish our series by examining the account of Jesus' glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday and then consider His post-resurrection appearances and ascension back to heaven the week after Easter. In the weeks leading up to Easter we will be pondering our Lord's trial before Pilate, crucifixion, and burial. Let there be no misunderstanding. *We are walking on holy ground*.

The focus of today's text is on Peter. Jesus chose Peter to be one of His twelve apostles, and privileged Peter to spend three years with Him in training. There are three background items we need to mention in order to appreciate the drama to follow. We find them in Mark 14:27-31:

1. Jesus predicted He was going to die and that all His followers would abandon Him (verse 27).
2. Peter promised Jesus he would *not* do so (29). "I will not!" he said.
3. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him, not once but three times, stating in Mark 14:30, "I tell you the truth, today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

Those words were spoken just hours prior to the account we're about to consider. Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray, was arrested by a mob, forsaken by all, subjected to a mock trial by the Sanhedrin, and condemned as worthy of death. Since the Jews lacked authority to execute the death penalty, they began to abuse Jesus while waiting for morning when they would take Him to Pilate insisting he do the dirty work.

Then came Peter's regrettable moment. It came in two phases. Notice the first...

#### I. Peter failed a test (66-71).

Verse 66 gives the setting, "While Peter was below in the courtyard." Remember, Jesus is upstairs in Caiaphas's house being beaten. Peter is down below, outside and next to the house. With the spotlight on Peter, Mark tells us what happened next in verses 66-67, "...One of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself [Note the contrast. Jesus is being beaten. Peter is warming himself by the fire], she looked closely at

him.” Apparently, the flickering light from the fire enabled her to get a good look at Peter’s face. She *peered at* him, a strong verb indicating he fixed her eyes upon Peter and studied his face. ““You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said.”

At that point the conversation around the fire quieted and Peter’s heart nearly pounded out of his chest. Here was his opportunity to do what he promised the Lord he would do. Yet...

**A. He denied being with Jesus (66-68).** Verse 68—“But he denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said, and went out into the entryway.” “Deny” in verse 68 is the Greek *arneomai*, which means “to deny, disown, repudiate, not consent to.” Jesus used it in Luke 9:23 when He said, “If anyone would come after me, he must *deny* himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Typically, Peter is bold and confident, but now he is intimidated by a slave girl. He denies association with Jesus, moves away from the fire, and heads for the doorway. Apparently, the young lady followed Peter.

Verse 69—“When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, ‘This fellow is one of them.’” Peter could feel the steely eyes fixed on him. Here was his chance to take a stand. “Yes! She’s right! I was with Jesus. You’re making a mistake about Him!” Instead...

**B. He denied being a follower of Jesus (69-70a).** Verse 70—“Again he denied it.”

This story is about Peter, but it’s also about us. I am so much like Peter. I get tongue-tied when I’m around skeptics. I clam up when the opportunity presents itself to talk about my Savior. I have neighbors I have never talked with about Jesus. I have family members who are heading for eternal destruction and I have yet to share with them about the One who is their only hope. It is unthinkable, yet true...

1. *Jesus was willing to die for us.* He who knew no sin became sin for us, 2 Corinthians 5:21 declares. He died for us, Romans 5:8 announces. He died *for our sins*, 1 Corinthians 15:3 proclaims. That’s what Jesus did for us, beloved. The question is...

2. *Are we willing to live unashamedly for Him?* May I remind you that Jesus Himself spoke these sobering words in Matthew 10:32-33, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”

For Peter it was crunch time. Verse 70 records, “After a little while [Luke’s account says, “about an hour later”], those standing near said to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’” How did they know he was from up north in Galilee? The same reason a New Englander enters our presence and the moment he speaks we say, “You’re not from around here, are you?” The parallel account of Matthew 26:73 adds, “Your accent gives you away.”

John’s account of the story indicates that one of Peter’s accusers was a relative of the man whose ear Peter cut off at the arrest. In fact, John says he challenged Peter, “Didn’t I see you with him in the olive grove? (John 18:26).”

In the first two denials Peter said he wasn’t associated with Jesus. In the third he goes even further...

**C. He denied even knowing Jesus (70b-71).** Verse 71—“He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know this man you’re talking about.’” The word ‘curse’ means “to declare oneself liable to the severest divine penalties.”<sup>[2]</sup> To ‘swear’ means “to make an oath,” “to affirm, promise, or threaten with an oath.”<sup>[3]</sup> Peter used both to distance himself from Jesus, as we read in the New Living Translation, “I swear by God, I don’t know this man you are talking about.” In fact, Peter’s verb choice is in the perfect tense (which refers to activity that began in the past and continues into the present); the Young’s Literal Translation captures the sense, “I have not known this man of whom ye speak.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Oh, how wicked the human heart is! The man who earlier professed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” is now swearing, “I don’t know the Man!”

You say, “Where did those words come from?” Please realize...

1. *The problem isn't Peter's mouth, but his heart.* How do I know that? Because of what Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, *false testimony*, slander.” Peter may be an apostle but he still has a heart problem. What kind of heart problem does he have? This...

2. *There are idols in Peter's heart, as in ours.* That's right. There's a battle raging in Peter's heart. Yes, He worships the Lord in his heart. But in this moment he is bowing down before other gods, false gods, *idols*.

Ken Sande observes, “An idol is not simply a statue of wood, stone, or metal; it is anything we love and pursue in place of God, and can also be referred to as a ‘false god’ or a ‘functional god.’ In biblical terms, an idol is something other than God that we set our hearts on...”<sup>[5]</sup> That's what is in Peter's heart, a *functional god*. Any time a sinful word comes out of our mouths we trace its origin back to a functional god that is receiving our affection in our hearts.

Richard Keyes comments, “An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as God... Idolatry may not involve explicit denials of God's existence or character. It may well come in the form of an over-attachment to something that is, in itself, perfectly good.”<sup>[6]</sup> At this moment, Peter still believes in God, but something else is inflated to function as God in his life.

I can't see Peter's heart, so I don't know which idol he is bowing before. I do know which idols entice me and far too often receive my worship. So allow me to suggest three possible idols, the presence of which would account for Peter's actions.

a. Acceptance: I want people to like me.

“These people will think poorly of me if they think I'm a friend of Jesus. I don't want that. I want their approval. I want them to think I'm a good guy.”

Is it wrong to want people to like us? Granted, there is no virtue in causing people to *dislike* us. It's nice to be approved by men. But the issue is this. *Must* I be approved by men? Is that what drives me? Am I willing to sin to obtain that approval?

b. Safety: I want to be safe and comfortable.

“If these folks know that I know Jesus, they might do to me what they're doing to Jesus right now. I don't want to be beaten and killed. I want to be *safe* and *comfortable*.”

Is safety and comfort wrong? No. What's wrong is to *worship* it, to insist you must have it, to give your affection and energy to it. Maybe that's the idol that Peter bowed before. Or maybe it was this...

c. Control: I want to be in control of what happens to me.

“If these folks know I am a disciple of Jesus, who knows what they will do to me, probably some pretty bad things! I don't want that. I refuse that. I must do whatever I can to maintain control of my life!”

We have a term for that. We call such people “control freaks.” Such a person doesn't trust God or others and refuses to put himself in a situation where he might be embarrassed or worse yet, look foolish, or even worse, get hurt.

Proverbs 29:25 says it well, “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.” Peter was afraid of men and consequently denied his Lord.

Think of the woman to whom God has given a beautiful voice yet who refuses to minister to the church in song. Think of the man who doesn't pray in public. Think of the young person who doesn't come to Sunday School because they're uncomfortable in small groups. In each case, what is ruling the person's heart? The fear of man. The fear of man is irrational. It ensnares us. Why then do we do it?

*Think about it: We fear man too much because we fear God too little.*

So maybe for Peter it was acceptance. Maybe safety. Maybe control. Maybe it was yet another idol. But know this. Peter did what he did because of what he was *wanting*. The problem wasn't merely his mouth, but his *heart*.

Beloved, that's why we need a Savior. Our problem isn't simply that we do bad things. It's that we have a heart that wants bad things and a heart that wants legitimate things too much. We, like Peter, need a Savior that can cleanse our wicked hearts and give us new hearts. And that's what Jesus did on the cross. As the hymn writer put it:

*He breaks the power of canceled sin,*

*He sets the prisoner free.*

*His blood can make the foulest clean,*

*His blood availed for me.<sup>[7]</sup>*

I mentioned that Peter's regrettable moment came in two phases. In the first phase Peter failed a test, a three question test to which he responded wrongly all three times. Now we come to phase two...

## II. Peter remembered too late (72).

Verse 72—"Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown<sup>[8]</sup> me three times.' And he broke down and wept."

Luke adds an important timing detail, stating in Luke 22:60-61, "Just as he [Peter] was speaking, the rooster crowed. *The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter*. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him..." Perhaps Jesus was by a window between beatings and at that very moment His sovereign eyes met Peter's eyes even as the ugly words dropped from his lips, "I don't know the man!" *Then* Peter remembered, Luke says. Once Peter saw Jesus, and once Peter saw that Jesus saw him, it all came back. Jesus' prediction started ringing in his ears, "You will disown me three times."

### **A. The Lord's Word came true.** It happened just as Jesus said it would.

Immediately, Peter responded in two ways. First, the NIV says, "And he broke down." The Greek word *epiballo* actually means 'to throw on, to put on.' It's used elsewhere of throwing cloaks over the colt that carried Jesus into Jerusalem (Mark 11:7). Here it carries the idea of 'putting one's mind on something,' 'to think about seriously.'

In other words, using computer terminology, Peter processed the data—the sound of his own voice denying the Lord, the recorded sound of His Master predicting this denial, and the sound of the rooster crowing—he processed that data and *he broke down*.

Then he *wept*. The Greek verb *klaio* means 'to cry, wail, mourn, weep bitterly.' It's used of mourning for the dead in Mark 5:38. It's what Jesus did when He *wept* over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41. Here Mark uses the imperfect tense verb which carries the sense, "And Peter *was weeping*." In other words, he wept and wept and wept as if he would he would never stop weeping.

Don't miss the little four letter word *then*. *Then* Peter remembered the word. When was then? After Peter denied the Lord and after the rooster crowed, *then* he remembered the word of Jesus.

Now Peter's regret is compounding. It's not just his sinful denial. It's the fact that he remembered *too late*! If only he would have taken the Lord's word to heart, if only he had remembered sooner, he could have stood and passed the test. If only!

There's a lesson in this for us, beloved. Like Peter...

1. *We are prone to forget God's Word.* The word 'remember' in the Greek is *anamimneskomai*, meaning "to cause to remember, to call to mind, to remind, to remember and weigh well and consider."<sup>91</sup> That's what Peter failed to do until too late with Jesus' words. We find the same root word in the noun form in the familiar instruction in Luke 22:19, "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'"

That's when we get into trouble, when we fail to give priority attention to the person and words of Jesus. This is why you need church, fellow Christian, to be reminded of Jesus' words. If you don't place yourself under the consistent ministry of the Word, you like Peter are in great danger.

2. *We need to take steps to remember God's Word.* Allow me to be specific. What should happen when you get up on Sunday morning and feel too tired to go to church? Remember Peter! Remember what happens when we neglect God's Word. God is so good. In His grace He has given gifted servants to His church in order to feed the people of God so they will be strong and able to stand during temptation. But the teaching of the Word doesn't help us if we don't place ourselves under its sound.

I don't think we realize how vulnerable we are when we neglect God's Word. Without the Word of God we are *weak* because we don't have inherent power. The power for living comes from the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and He gives us that power through His Word ministered to us through His people (Col. 3:16).

You need to be under the Word. I need to be under the Word.—that's one of the reasons I don't teach a regular Sunday School class, so I can be under the Word.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Yes, I can see that I need to have the Word ministered to me. But what should happen if I'm scheduled to serve in the nursery, or in children's church, or as a servant of the day on a Sunday, and can't be under the Word?" Great question! I'm glad you are serving, for God's Word commands us to serve. And I'm glad you are concerned about missing the teaching of God's Word, for we're dead on the vine without it. One very helpful option God has given us is to get the CD or tape and listen to the sermon Sunday afternoon. That way you'll be aware of what the rest of your church family heard that morning and can interact with them about it.

I'm so convinced about the necessity of being under the Word that I would say this. If you are not able to place yourself under the Word, then don't serve, not because service isn't important but because in the long run you will be a liability to the Lord's reputation in the church.

What would happen to a construction worker if he didn't eat? Before becoming a pastor I worked construction a couple of summers. I didn't skip too many meals, and you know why. If you're going to be healthy and strong, you need a consistent intake of nutritious food.

The Word of God is our food. If I neglect the ministry of the Word and yet continue to serve, serve, serve, I'm going to burn out and eventually quit serving, or worse, I'll keep serving (so people will think well of me—there's a heart idol again) but do so in my own strength. And just ask Peter where that'll take me.

Dear friends, let's encourage one another to value the corporate ministry of the Word. Another practical suggestion. If you come to church on Sunday and you see a brother you haven't seen in awhile, I hope you'll rejoice and want to spend some time encouraging each other. One option would be to sit in the foyer and chat while the precious Word is being fed to the congregation. A much better option would be to say, "It's great to see you, brother! I want to hear what God's been up to in your life! Let's do lunch together *after* we go in and feast on God's Word."

But being under the Word on Sunday isn't enough. We need to be in it daily as individuals and regularly as families. We need continual *reminders* of what the Lord has said. Peter remembered *too late*. Thankfully...

**B. The Lord didn't give up on Peter.** Do you remember the words of the angel to the women on resurrection morning? Mark 16:6-7— "Don't be alarmed," he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.

He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples **and Peter**, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee . There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

Do you hear grace ringing in those words? And Jesus did meet Peter in Galilee . According to John 21 the resurrected Christ met Peter by the shores of the Sea of Galilee .

“Do you love me?” He asked Peter three times.

“Feed my sheep!” He commanded Peter three times.

Why did Jesus repeat those questions and commands three times? He wanted Peter to remember the night he denied his Lord three times. But He’s not reminding Peter to punish him—the punishment for Peter’s sin and the sins of all who believe in Christ were absorbed in full by Jesus at the cross. No, Jesus is taking Peter *back* so he can move *ahead*. “I’m not done with you, Peter!” the Lord is saying. “I have a work for you to accomplish in the care of my people.”

And the Lord did restore Peter and for the next thirty-plus years Peter lived boldly for Christ and even died boldly for Christ, crucified by the Romans. Hudson Taylor once said, “God chose me because I was weak enough. He trains somebody to be quiet enough, and little enough, and then uses Him.”<sup>[10]</sup> That was true with Peter, too.

### Preventative Maintenance: What can I do so I won’t have regrets?

I would suggest three steps of preventative maintenance.

#### *1. We need to remember that we are just like Peter.*

This same Peter later wrote about the lessons he learned and shared the following insights in 1 Peter 5:8, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Peter fell prey to the lion that night.

But the context of that warning is key. In the first four verses of chapter five Peter exhorts the elders of the church to feed and lead the flock of God. On the heels of those words, Peter exhorts the young men and others in the church to submit themselves to the elders and to put on humility (verses 5-7). Right after that instruction comes the warning about the lion-like devil. What’s the connection between the exhortations to the elders and young men in verses 1-7 and the warning about the devil in verse 8? Peter commands the elders to lead and feed the flock because the tendency of elders is to NOT do that. The natural tendency is to think of yourself, not others, which for shepherds means they use the flock for self-gain. And Peter commands the young men to submit to the elders with humility because the tendency of young men is to NOT do that. The natural tendency of young men is to think you don’t need to be fed and led by the elders.

And when that happens, Peter says, when elders fail to feed and lead the flock, and when young men and the rest of the church fail to see their need to be fed and led, disaster is coming. Why? Because there’s a prowling lion who is waiting to strike proud little sheep who refuse to live in the safety of the fold as instructed by the Good Shepherd.

Peter learned the hard way that if we neglect the Lord’s Word we end up experiencing *regret*.

Remember something else. The Gospel writer Mark received much of his information for writing this Gospel *from Peter*. “That is what I did,” he must have told Mark. “I denied Jesus, yet He never stopped loving me.”<sup>[11]</sup>

Barclay tells the story about an evangelist called Brownlow North: “He was a man of God, but in his youth he had lived a wild life. One Sunday he was to preach in Aberdeen . Before he entered the pulpit a letter was handed to him. The writer recounted a shameful incident in Brownlow North’s life before he became a Christian and stated that if he dared to preach he would rise in the church and publicly proclaim what once he had done. Brownlow North took the

letter into the pulpit with him. He read it to the congregation. He told them that it was perfectly true. Then he told them how through Christ he had been forgiven, how he had been enabled to overcome himself and put the past behind him, how through Christ he was a new creature. He used his own shame as a magnet to draw men to Christ.”<sup>[12]</sup>

That’s what Peter did. And that’s what Peter experienced, *regret AND forgiveness*.

2. *We need to deal with potential regrets now.*

Jonathan Edwards was born in 1703. When he was 19 years old he wrote down 70 resolutions by which he, by God’s grace, sought to govern his life. They reveal what was important to Edwards and should be to any who has a passion to live for the glory of God and wants to finish without regrets. I want to focus on one of his resolves, resolve #52, which he wrote down on *July 8, 1723*.

**Jonathan Edwards’ Resolve (at age 19):** “I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age.”

What do people in old age often regret? Why do we often follow in their footsteps instead of learning from their confession? Are there things in your life that, if not changed, will result in regrets when it’s time for you to leave this world?

3. *We need to remember that Christ is sufficient for our regrets.*

Perhaps you’ve blown it and right now are overwhelmed with guilt. Look to Christ. Be assured that He loves you and will give you hope and a future if you’ll repent and trust Him. Just ask Peter.

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**\*\*Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>[1]</sup> *Daily Bread*, December 31, 1988.

<sup>[2]</sup> Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon

<sup>[3]</sup> It appears in Acts 23:12, “The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and *bound themselves with an oath* not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.”

<sup>[4]</sup> But didn’t Jesus say these words in Matthew 5:34, “Do not swear at all”? Yes, He did, and Peter heard Him.

<sup>[5]</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*

<sup>[6]</sup> Taken from message by C. J. Mahaney, *The Idol Factory*.

<sup>[7]</sup> Charles Wesley, *O For a Thousand Tongues*

<sup>[8]</sup> “Disown” in verse 72 is related to the word ‘deny’ but adds a prefix in the Greek, *aparneomai*, “to claim no knowledge or relationship to,” “to reject, disavow.” It appears in Mark 8:34, “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must *deny* himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

<sup>[9]</sup> Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon

<sup>[10]</sup> Taken from Kent Hughes, p. 184.

<sup>[11]</sup> The Gospel of Mark was written for believers who were suffering Roman persecution. This story spoke volumes to

them. If Peter could deny the Lord after spending three years with Him, they too must be on guard.

[\[12\]](#) Barclay, p. 353.