

54 And having arrested Him, they led Him away, and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. 55 And after they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. 56 And a certain servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight, and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." 58 And a little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them too!" But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" 59 And after about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

W. W. Walford's beautiful hymn Sweet Hour of Prayer has a stanza that has become obscure to the church and in some of the latest hymnals has become the victim of the hymn editing committee and it has been changed. In the third stanza in old hymnals it says;

*3 Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
May I thy consolation share,
Till from Mount Pisgah's lofty height
I view my home and take my flight:
This robe of flesh I'll drop, and rise
To seize the everlasting prize,
And shout, while passing through the air,
"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"*

One of my beautiful daughters has told me that these old songs are meaningless. Who has a clue what any of this old stuff means. Why sing old songs that are obscure to modern people. Just sing a bunch of words that don't mean anything to a modern generation?

I fear that that is more of an indictment of a generation than an argument. An

indictment of a generation that is disconnected from the saints who preceded them, who carried the faith to them somewhat intact. More so an indictment of the parents who were tasked to teach them.

Let's look at Mr. Walford's words for a moment and you'll see how this fits with our scripture this morning. He's looking forward to a time when prayer to a God unseen, which is our consolation now as we face trials, will be over in an instant.

Till from Mount Pisgah's lofty heights, I view my home and take my flight. Mount Pisgah was one of the highest places in Israel and he's looking forward to the day when he'll fly up higher than the highest mountain. It's also poignant to think about his line *I'll view my home and take my flight.* Walford was blind. He knows on that day, his eyes will work. His first view will be Home and Saviour.

This robe of flesh, I'll drop and rise. He's looking forward to that day when we will see Jesus, face to face, for the first time. *To seize the everlasting prize.* That prize is our Saviour and our Lord.

The main thing that brought my mind to this old hymn, written 175 years ago is the idea of leaving this flesh behind on that day. This flesh that wars against my soul and limits me. *This robe of flesh, I'll drop and rise.*

Paul says famously; Ro. 7:22 *For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*

Peter is getting his first lesson in the weakness of the flesh. His spirit and soul would gladly go to prison for his beloved Jesus, be murdered with his beloved Saviour, but his flesh, his old man takes a different natural save your skin path

This story of Peter's testing is actually a sub plot interwoven into the main

story which is the arrest and false trials of Jesus. That's the important thing that's happening. But it pleased the sovereignty of God to allow Peter to go through this testing, this trial, this parallel hopeful story that gives all of us comfort, that even while the wicked world is hammering nails into Jesus hands and feet, our God who has chosen us out of this world is only allowing Satan to go just so far, and then He restores us to Himself.

From Peter's point of view, massive fail. Heartbreaking wreckage. Love disproved. Damage done. But from God's point of view, allow Satan to rough Peter up a bit, teach him to rightly judge the power of our flesh to accomplish anything good, the pitiful weakness of our flesh against the wiles of Satan when we haven't prayed, and finally teach him that God's love is a restoring love. We stumble and fall and He continues to love us.

Let's look at the boastful pride that set Peter up for a fall. The scene in Matthews gospel, chapter 26, is the final hymn and they depart the upper room as they walk to the mount of Olives.

M26:30 And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.' 32 "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." 33 But Peter answered and said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."

Two prophetic voices agree that all will fall away on this night. Jesus the prophet quotes Zechariah the prophet. You'll all fall away because the prophet speaking the very words of God said you will all fall away. Dual prophecy. Both Jesus and Zecharia. But Peter knows better than God the Son and God the Word.

But Peter answered and said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."

Uh uh! These losers will fall away. I can see that happening. I wouldn't rule it out. Losers. But not me. You'll have to re-write the prophecy Lord, because it's not going to happen. Those guys; sure. Me! No way.

It's almost as if Proverbs 16:18 was a specific prophecy aimed at Peter this night. But it is a prophecy aimed at every son of Adam's fallen race, not just Peter. 18 *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

That warning isn't just for Peter, it's for all of us who have this fallen flesh. Our spirits soar in faith and we dream of all that we are going to accomplish for our God. But getting our flesh to cooperate . . . that's a limitation we all must deal with.

The old hymn writer is right there with us. This robe of flesh I'll drop and rise to seize the everlasting prize. Every christian who has understood the battle with this fallen flesh sings those lines and longs for that day.

Very early in my first infant year as a christian I learned that I am body, soul, spirit. Going backwards in that list, my spirit is that part of me that was designed to be in relationship with God who created me and breathed life into me.

But my spirit was dead because of sin. Sin had separated me from my God and I was dead to Him until the day that He chose to quicken my spirit and make me alive again by His grace. He removed my sin. His Son took my sin upon Himself and paid it's penalty of death. And He gave to me in it's place His righteousness to call my own. That transaction made me alive to God and in theory, dead to sin's powers.

We separate positional truth and practical truths. Positionally because of what Jesus irreversibly did for me, I can appear before God with His righteousness, not my own. He accounted unto me His perfect life, and He took my sinful life and paid the penalty on the cross, with His blood. That's my permanent irreversible position. Take it to the bank.

But practically, I see current problems. Body, soul, spirit. My body didn't get the memo. It's the same old mess in Adam that it always was. It craves sin. It smells of death. It's advancing oh so quickly to that day when someone will have to bury it in the dirt.

That leaves my soul, which is connected to my spirit which is quickened to life with God. My soul has possibilities. Little by little as I spend time, walking in the Spirit, reading and contemplating and singing this book, my soul is changed. More and more, as the years tick by, my soul has the possibility of progress towards being a person who gives glory to the Creator.

That's the doctrine of sanctification. Little by little, if we spend time with God, quality time in His book, by His spirit, we are changed into the image of Christ.

Peter is right on that threshold. His soul and spirit are deeply moved with love for Jesus and he truly believes he would go to prison and die alongside of Jesus if that's what it takes to be near this person he loves the most.

He has overestimated his ability in his flesh to accomplish what his spirit says he can do. Not only overestimated, but he's quite proud of his estimate of himself. Vocally proud. Boasting that these others will fall away but it's literally impossible for that to happen to him. Prison first. Death before that.

Back to Matthew's account. 26:33 *But Peter answered and said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."* 34 *Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times."* 35 *Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You."* *All the disciples said the same thing too.*

All the disciples follow the natural leader, Peter. They all said the same thing too. In fact they're a bit miffed at Peter. Jerk. Saying you're going to be the only faithful one. Wrong. All will fall away, but not me. Every single disciple made the same boast against all of the others. Peter showed them how to boast and then they all made the same boast . . . against each other. These

losers will fall away, but not ME. They may all fail, I won't.

In Mark's account, chapter 14, he adds a couple of details not given by Matthew.

29 But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." 30 And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that you yourself this very night, before a cock crows twice, shall three times deny Me." 31 But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"

Before a cock crows . . . twice. And in Mark's account which is largely Peter's account because Mark got his gospel directly from Peter, he was the amanuenses for Peter. Mark says Peter was getting a bit testy with Jesus. He's arguing with Jesus. This isn't a one time statement. Mark says Peter kept saying insistently. Jesus, you're wrong and I'm right! More than a single time. Over and over multiple times Peter is arguing about this with Jesus. You're wrong about me. You'll see.

And Peter is a force of nature. He's a force to be reckoned with. He cuts off Malchus ear. But then something happens that he didn't see coming. Jesus picks up Malchus ear, puts it back on, miraculous healing, impossible for any person to do since the creation, He just puts Malchus ear back on and it's perfect. Like it never happened. And He looks at Peter and says; Knock it off! Cease and desist Peter. This isn't what we're doing.

And I think that sort of threw Peter for a loop. Peter only has one plan. He's going to be like Samson and defeat the whole philistine population with the jawbone of an ass. He can do that. He's confident that with Jesus help he can do that. Start hacking with Malchus and stop when they're all in a heap on the ground. With God's help. Like Samson of old. That's Peter.

But when Jesus tells him to knock that off. Put the sword away Peter, the wind sort of goes out of the balloon and Peter doesn't have a plan b. He doesn't quite know what to do. Jesus is cuffed up and led away. The disciples all flee. Jesus made it clear to everyone, it's me you want, leave these other

men alone, take Me. He did that when He asked the question and answered I AM He and they all fell down like dominoes.

When someone mows down an army of 600 men with two words, you might want to obey His wish. Leave these others alone, you can have Me, but these guys are off limits. And that's what happened. He shuts down Peter being Samson. He orders the army to leave the disciples alone. And I think Peter was sort of stunned. He didn't see it going down this way. He doesn't have a clue what to do next. Jesus shut him down. Peter's plan wasn't God's plan.

It's not the first time that's happened either. Remember, a few months earlier, in Matthew 16, Peter blurts out in answer to the question *but who do YOU say that I am*, Peter says; 16 ***“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***

Bam! Right answer. And Jesus launches into the whole keys of the kingdom of God thing, and Peter figures, if I've got the keys I'm going to use them a bit and steer this thing where I think it needs to go.

And then 5 verses later we have this incident;
21 *From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that 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. 22 And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” 23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”*

That's heart crushing, isn't it. You told me I had the keys. You said whatever we bound on earth would be bound in heaven. So I flex my binding muscles a little bit and try to steer you away from sure death, and I not only get shut down, you let me know it's Satan that I'm representing.

Yes, correct. When you're in God's plan doing God's will the kingdom goes forward. But when you get out of that lane, Satan's kingdom goes forward. Peter was gob smacked that day. And this day is a repeat. Jesus doesn't have

to say get behind me Satan a second time. He tells Peter to put the sword away and I believe Peter is sort of gob smacked again. He has no other plan.

The reason he has no other plan is because instead of praying he was what? Sleeping. Flesh need sleep. Flesh win. Peter sleep through all of the warnings and second and third warnings. Peter you need to pray. Disciples you need to pray. Satan has requested to sift you all like wheat. You really need to pray! Prayer is the answer to get you out of this mess. You need to pray.

But flesh needs to sleep. We are SO weak in this spiritual battle. Prayer is hard work. Continuing prayer is really hard work. The flesh is weary. It wants to sleep. Anybody here not have some personal confirmation having planned a big slug out of doing battle in prayer and after about 5 minutes being sound asleep.

Oh! How I long for the line in that song to be true. This robe of flesh, I'll drop and rise, to seize the everlasting prize! Sweet hours of prayer are rare with me. Very rare. I confess to you all my laziness. Prayer is hard work.

M26:40 *And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? 41 "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; **the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**"*

I used to have a Ray Stedman quote over my shipping / receiving desk when we had the Sears catalog store. The spirit is willing but the flesh is ready for the weekend. I never enjoyed that work. Mounting and balancing tires was about as good as it got for me there. I just wanted the weekend to come so I could perhaps steal a few hours of doing what I wanted to do. The flesh was definitely ready for the weekend.

Jesus forecast's Peters failure. Your spirit is willing to go to prison and even to follow me into death. Your flesh isn't going to do that though. You'll deny me 3 times.

Ultimately, being on a cross next to Jesus would have been the easy way out for Peter. God had other plans for him. Lots of other plans. Prison isn't in the cards for Peter. At least not at the beginning. Preaching is. Prison and execution will come. On God's timetable, not Peter's.

Let's look at our verses quickly and maybe bring in some of the other gospel writers for any available extra depth we can.

54 And having arrested Him, they led Him away, and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance.

It's some time after midnight. Early hours of the morning. The Jewish law restrains court to daylight hours. This pre-trial is illegal. From John ch. 18.

12 So the Roman cohort and the commander, and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, 13 and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. 14 Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

Caiaphas was a puppet. Annas was Caiaphas father-in-law. He was the matriarch running the temple business. Plenty of money for a big family to enjoy. Keep sons and sons in law on the high priest throne. Family business.

When Jesus drove the money changers and sellers out of the temple . . . two times . . . it's a direct slap in the face to Annas. He's like the godfather in this family of extortionists. Money money money. Jesus is a direct threat. Like a guy who goes up against the mob. They have wanted to erase Jesus since day one when He cleaned out His Father's house. This is the time. The hour of darkness has come, and Annas owns it.

Jn. 18:15 And 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, 16 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 in Peter.

The door keeper is a slave girl. She's a slave of the high priest. She initiates the problem for Peter. Jn. 18:17 *The slave-girl therefore who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."*

Luke says; 55 *And after they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. 56 And a certain servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight, and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too."*

The high priest family compound is a palace. There are residences for Annas and Caiaphas and perhaps other family members built around a common court yard. Peter has gained entrance because of John, he's the other disciple that was known to the high priest's family. We don't know what that connection was with John and the priestly family, but John could get Peter entrance into the court yard, and the slave girl puts 2+2 together. Peter's just got Galilean written all over him.

vs. 57 *But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him."* One down and counting.

Back to John. 18 *Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. 19 The high priest therefore questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. 20 Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues, and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. 21 "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; behold, these know what I said." 22 And when He had said this, one of the officers standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike*

Me?" 24 Annas therefore sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Jesus is winning. Peter is losing. Jesus is triumphant through all of this phony trial by the jews. He never falters. Peter is getting deeper into failure as the hours proceed. Luke makes it sound like this all happened in one conversation in 30 seconds. No, hours are going by.

Jn. 18:25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said therefore to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not."

Matthew has it like this; *26:69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a certain servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." 70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." 71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 And **again** he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."*

These pesky servant girls. Trouble makers. I get tickled remembering a speaker years ago at some camp when we were kids, teaching us about the different paths temptation comes at our flesh. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. 3 avenues.

And he was using Peter as an example teaching this. What was Peter's problem here. Did Peter say; That servant girl is looking intently at me. Hmmmmm. And she's not a bad looking servant girl either. Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes. Was that Peter's downfall here? No. Boastful pride of life. Yep, got him.

It's the inclusion exclusion thing. That's pride based. And fear of man enters into it too. These are not sympathetic people that Peter is in company with.

58 And a little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them too!" But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

That's two.

59 And after about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too."

John gives us a nugget about this third accuser of Peter being with Jesus;

J18:26 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?"

This guy is a relative, probably a cousin, of Malchus. The man that Peter attacked with his machaira. Aren't you the guy with the sword that cut off my cousin's ear? Didn't I see you back in the garden?

This calls for a little more drama on Peter's part to remain believable. We go to Mark's account now. Mark, the amanuenses of Peter;

And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too." 71 But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" 72 And immediately a cock crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a cock crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep.

Luke's version; *60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed.*

For the second time according to Mark. Jesus had said twice. The cock crowed twice. Exactly as the Master had said.

And then Luke adds the most devastating detail of all. This is heartbreak stuff.

61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.

Can you imagine the knife going into your heart as Jesus turns from all that's going on, they're screaming at Him, beating him about the face and shoulders, and Jesus takes a moment out of that scenario and looks at Peter, just as the cock crows for the second time.

Maybe Jesus doesn't know that I've denied Him these three times. Maybe I can get away with my sin. And then He turns and looks at you with those eyes of sorrow and dis-appointment and love. Even though you've denied Him, He looks at you in that moment as the cock crows. I can't imagine. But I can.

Thank goodness the first time I'll see those eyes it's going to be a victory lap. His victory. But I get to come. But for now, I can only imagine those eyes looking at me with dis-appointment. I've given you everything you need to succeed, but you just keep on failing. That look. I've purchased your victory, why do you keep failing. Over and over again. Those eyes.

What's the difference between Judas and Peter. Both men failed. Miserably failed. Why do we name our kids Peter, but we don't name them Judas?

And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

Judas didn't repent. Judas quit believing and bailed out with whatever little golden parachute he could get. Judas out.

Peter remembered and Peter repented with a broken heart. He went out and wept bitterly. This deal with our flesh, the weakness and the failures, it's a heartbreaking thing.

We love the Lord, and we want to please Him, and we fail. And then we repent and pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off and come back. Christians always come back.

Very quickly now. The story doesn't end there. This sub plot has a wonderful

and hopeful ending to those of us who know so well what it's like to be a Simon Peter and fail.

It's a beach scene in Galilee. Peter has gone fishing. It's what he's sort of successful at. He's not much good at cutting people's heads off or keeping vows of faithfulness. But he can fish.

Prologue: John's gospel chapter 21;

1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out, and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus therefore said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find a catch." They cast therefore, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." And so when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. 9 And so when they got out upon the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid, and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread, and gave them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

15 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." 16 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." 17 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.

Three times. Do you love me. Once for each denial. Nevermind the fish Peter, we're going into the sheep business.

Remember what Jesus said to Peter. Satan has requested to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith won't fail.

What's the difference between Peter and Judas. Indestructible faith. Indestructable faith.

We'll close with Peter's own words, his opening statement of his final epistle.

*1 Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ,
to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours,
by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:*

Peter the slave and the apostle, writing to anyone who has what?? How do people get indestructible faith? **Received** a faith, like ours. Indestructable.

Peter went through the wringer. He failed miserably. But he found out the faith he was given, it's indestructible. We fail and the Lord receives us back again to Himself. He writes to people who have . . . **THAT** faith.