

Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
RUF Bible Study – The Gospel According to Peter  
Oct. 11, 2006  
The Dark Night of the Soul – Mark 14:66-72

*Mark 14:27-28 Jesus told them, "You're all going to feel that your world is falling apart and that it's my fault. There's a Scripture that says, I will strike the shepherd; The sheep will go helter-skelter. "But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you, leading the way to Galilee."*

*29 Peter blurted out, "Even if everyone else is ashamed of you when things fall to pieces, I won't be."*

*30 Jesus said, "Don't be so sure. Today, this very night in fact, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."*

*31 He blustered in protest, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you." All the others said the same thing.*

*32-34 They came to an area called Gethsemane. Jesus told his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James, and John with him. He plunged into a sinkhole of dreadful agony. He told them, "I feel bad enough right now to die. Stay here and keep vigil with me."*

*35-36 Going a little ahead, he fell to the ground and prayed for a way out: "Papa, Father, you can—can't you?—get me out of this. Take this cup away from me. But please, not what I want—what do you want?"*

*37-38 He came back and found them sound asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, you went to sleep on me? Can't you stick it out with me a single hour? Stay alert, be in prayer, so you don't enter the danger zone without even knowing it. Don't be naïve. Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God; but another part is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire."*

*39-40 He then went back and prayed the same prayer. Returning, he again found them sound asleep. They simply couldn't keep their eyes open, and they didn't have a plausible excuse.*

*41-42 He came back a third time and said, "Are you going to sleep all night? No—you've slept long enough. Time's up. The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up. Let's get going. My betrayer has arrived."*

*66-67 While all this was going on, Peter was down in the courtyard. One of the Chief Priest's servant girls came in and, seeing Peter warming himself there, looked hard at him and said, "You were with the Nazarene, Jesus."*

*68 He denied it: "I don't know what you're talking about." He went out on the porch. A rooster crowed.*

*69-70 The girl spotted him and began telling the people standing around, "He's one of them." He denied it again.*

*After a little while, the bystanders brought it up again. "You've got to be one of them. You've got 'Galilean' written all over you."*

*71-72 Now Peter got really nervous and swore, "I never laid eyes on this man you're talking about." Just then the rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered how Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows twice, you'll deny me three times." He collapsed in tears.*

I know you don't really want to go there, but think of your worst night. Can you have that night in mind?

What was it like, that dark night of your soul? What happened to make you feel lost, confused, abandoned, hurt and despairing? Was it the nth time of a night of lonely pornography? Was it finding yourself in a strip club? Was it waking up drunk in a strange place? Was it the loss of someone you loved? Did it involve betrayal?

Can you think of it? Can you feel it?

We're looking tonight at Peter's worst night. He's had some bad days previous to this. Some we don't know about because they involved his life before Jesus. But even since his friendship with the Son of God, he's been in some bad ways. Everyone left him in John 6. He sunk through the waves in Matthew 14. He has been told that when he talks a certain way (about Jesus not going to the cross) he is Satanic.

But this is way past that. So, because we're trying to be real and because we're trying to look at Peter's life, here we are at his worst night.

### **Peter**

Let's first step through the night with Peter. You'll remember that right before this he had shared a supper with Jesus. In this supper Jesus had taken the position of a slave to wash Peter's feet, something that was abhorrent to Peter, incomprehensible to him. But he had been served by Jesus in this way. In this exchange Jesus mentions that he will be

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For this series, I used commentaries all throughout the gospels. I also used as my base text Michael Card's book, *The Fragile Stone*. I consulted sermons by Rev. Tim Keller found out [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com) and RUF Campus Minister Les Newsom in many instances. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

betrayed and soon. Peter stands up and says, "No way, Jesus. That will never happen! I will defend you. *"Even if everyone else is ashamed of you when things fall to pieces, I won't be."*

That is a really nice statement of fidelity. It's almost a vow taken in front of others. A pledge of allegiance. Wouldn't Jesus be glad to hear that?

No. He responds this way: Peter, you're going to deny me tonight. This very night you'll be proved wrong.

Peter shoots back, *"Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you."* All the others said the same thing. They all protested together. Peter must have been stunned. Mad. Upset. Frustrated that he wasn't believed in, trusted in this way. And Jesus just drops it.

Then we read that they go up to the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He asks them to stay up and pray with him. They should be able to tell that their friend isn't doing well at all. Something is wrong with Jesus. We'll come back to this, but he leaves them to pray. And he comes back to find them sleeping. This happens a few times, and he seems frustrated with them about this topic.

Peter just can't stay awake. He's exhausted. He's worn out. He needs to rest. I think about how interesting it is that on Jesus' last night, his friend is just too tired to pray. Being with Jesus isn't all awesome all the time. Sometimes it was just plain boring.

Jesus wakes them up and says, Okay boys – it's go time. The Son of Man will be offered up starting now. Judas arrives, kisses Jesus as the sign that he is the man, and another text tells us that Peter goes crazy. He cuts off the ear of Malchus, an assistant of the high priest. He's ready to defend his Savior King Friend to the death, just like he said. They'll never take you, Jesus!!!

Imagine his surprise when Jesus puts Peter's sword down, and even heals the ear of the man. He goes willingly to his captors. And they take him away.

We skip ahead. Mark 14 begins to tell of Jesus' trial, which is told as a travesty of justice. Nothing in this scenario is done according to Roman or Jewish law. It's all totally illegal. But Jesus doesn't say anything about this. It's like he wants to die or something.

In the midst of this courage, strength and baffling death march, we cut back to Peter. Left at the Garden, he's now found his way to near where Jesus' trial is happening. People start to recognize him. You were with him. You're one of him. I know you. Aren't you his friend?

All three times, he denies it. I never knew the man. Jesus? Ugh, I haven't even heard of that guy. Who is he? I've got to go.

And then... then he hears the cock crow. It's late at night. It shouldn't be crowing and yet it is. Peter remembers that Jesus had said this would happen. He has just betrayed his friend. He has just denied the Son of God. He has just repudiated the last three years of his life.

Let's analyze this for a minute and then come back so we can feel it.

Really what we see here is the issue of abandonment. Infidelity. Jesus puts it out there up front, saying, "You will all fall away."

Why did they fall away? Well, they were a collection of failures. They're always messing up. They rarely get it right, and even when they do it feels a little shallow since immediately afterwards they tend to undo what they'd just done.

Pride is involved. Certainly for Peter. Jesus tells Peter he will deny him three times, and Peter says he's wrong. You've got the wrong guy. He's self righteous, thinking he is a good person. He is religious, thinking he is a good person who understand and is friends with Jesus. He is proud, thinking that he will never fail.

The disciples are also prayerlessness – can you not pray with me? They prefer sleep. They are oblivious to the situation. Prayerlessness is a failure to realize what is going on around you. The world seems so important and they are so tired that they don't see the real need of the hour.

And Peter especially impetuous – he wants to stage a mini revolution to show Jesus what he can do. He wants to be William Wallace and call Jesus: "Brandish your power! Calm the sea! Rebuke demons!"

I'll mention one more about the other disciples – they are strangely silent. Peter gets the brunt of the action because he's always talking. But what about the others? They lurk in the sidelines, perhaps because of their personalities, perhaps because of their fear. But they are also silently confused, silently hating what's going on, silently working things out in their heads to likewise wrong conclusions. Including Judas. We only ever hear him interact with Jesus once. After that, he kept his mouth shut. Being a quiet thinker can be good, and it can be really bad.

Jesus spoke to Peter about his overconfidence. He says to his friend, You are so filled with self-absorption and you don't even know it and before the rooster crows you will find out what a selfish coward you are.

And Peter does this three times. Three is the number of completeness in the Bible. Peter's thrice denial of Jesus indicates that he is a complete failure. He crumbled in every possible way. Peter doesn't understand the basic way Christians are supposed to operate.

## **You**

What about you? Can you relate to Peter at all here? Can you see yourself as Peter in this story? What about your worst night?

Can you see the ways that you are filled with pride? One way you can see it is to ask yourself, why am I so defensive? What makes you flare up in anger? Think about those things.

What about your prayerlessness? Do you go to God in prayer? When you pray do you only ask God to have small things go well for you? What about the souls of your friends? What about the secret sins of your heart? Do you pray and grieve over these things?

Have you considered impetuosity in your life? Many students, many people, get all excited about some cause or thing and run out to conquer the world in that area. There really is something to patience, to slowness sometimes. Making rash decisions about dating or not dating, about breaking up or staying together in the heat of the moment is most often impetuous. Peter does something he thinks Jesus wants him to do. But Jesus heals the man, and tells Peter to put his sword away. He undoes Peter's actions, which were wrongheaded. He says, The Scriptures must be revealed. Ignorant zeal is no virtue. We get all excited about something and brandish our swords. Have you cut off any ears lately?

Are you proud of what you've done for Jesus? Are you proud of your morality? Your virginity? Your good Christianity? Your family values? Your political party? Are there things you think you would NEVER DO?

Peter was proud. He said he would never, ever, ever fall away.

But I'll bet you have. If you're honest. You've doubted Jesus. You've denied him. You've left him before.

That's a part of what happened in your dark night. If you haven't, then I bet you will. Sorry. I wish you wouldn't but you probably will.

David Wilcox sings of this sort of despair in his song "If It Wasn't For The Night":

*If it wasn't for the night*

*So cold this time of year*

*The stars would never shine so bright*

*So beautiful and clear*

*I have walked this road alone*

*My thin coat against the chill*

*When the light in me was gone*

*And my winter house was stilled*

*When I grieved for all I'd made*

*Out of all I had to give*

*On the eve of Christmas day*

*With no reason left to live*

Have you ever felt this way? Abandoned by someone? Or the guilt and shame of being the abandoner? Have you grieved for all you've made, your choices, your decisions, that one really bad one, that moment of passion that you oh so regret? What did you do in the moment? What will you do with that memory? How will you survive and not feel that there is no reason left to live?

## **Jesus**

Wow. That really stinks. It sounds like we have no hope, no hope at all. And if we just concentrated on Peter here, I'd say that there isn't much hope. But there is another actor in the story. Jesus has something to say about Peter's dark night, about your dark night.

And that's because it was his dark night too. This passage initiates the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Moses died an old man and was buried in a mysterious place. Buddha died when he was 80, around the same age as the great teacher Confucius. Mohammed died at the age of 72 in the arms of his wife. You can understand why these other religions did as well as they could.

And here we have something entirely different. The leader of Christianity died at the age of 33, alone, naked, ashamed, accused and on a cross as a criminal. What is going on with that? How can that be someone we follow? There must be something in there that is important and not merely just different. This is the start of that journey to the cross, the thing that Jesus has been talking about non-stop for all the gospels.

First, look at Jesus and his feelings. He went to the garden to pray. And we see the enormity of his pain. The text says that he was "greatly distressed and troubled." And then we read: "He fell on the ground and prayed." This is a place where we see Jesus in his full humanity. Deeply distressed. Troubled. The King James says Sore amazed. Knocked down by something. Jesus had prayed to God many times, but this one is different. Shocked. Amazed. The tiny capillaries in his forehead broke open and he sweat blood it's so intense.

See Jesus' prayer to God. "Let this cup pass from me." What is the cup he's talking about? It's God's cup of wrath. It is the full anger, the focused hatred of God toward sin poured out. And it's going to be poured out on Jesus in just a few hours. What would this have been like?

You have to see that this was Jesus' worst night, the dark night of his soul. Because what was about to happen was the worst thing Jesus could imagine. Jesus became the greatest sinner there ever was. He had always loved and been loved by the Father, Abba, Daddy. But now he was about to be utterly rejected and despised. He was to receive death with the sting. Death unmodified and unmitigated. He alone would face it, without a covering. He would be totally exposed to God's hatred of sin. He would be facing death without God, deprived of the love of the father who had always been there.

When he thought of that, he was terrified by what he knew and terrified by what he did not know. In his despair of what lay ahead, Jesus calls out to Daddy. He cowers as the father slides the cup of death across the table to him. Jesus shudders.

In Jesus we don't have a stoic. He doesn't bury his feelings. How does he keep it together? How does he control the fear? He took death lovingly because of the scriptures, because of God's plan of redemption. He says, "But let the Scriptures be fulfilled."

So Jesus wept. He faced the hardest thing not as a stoic, but man of sorrows. You can too. It's okay to cry, to be hurt, to wail at God. Don't just come at life with a stiff upper lip, trying to mask your emotion. You can be hurt.

But Jesus prayed as a priest too. He came with his hurt to God, and he submitted to God's authority, to God's sovereignty. Not my will, but thine, O Lord. In your hurt, you can realize that God is still in charge and that he wills even this instance for your good and his glory. Even this has a purpose and a plan.

Jesus spoke like a prophet. He looked Peter in the eye and told him hard things about his life. That is what prophets do. They speak the Scriptures whether the hearer likes them or not. Jesus did not give up his role as a prophet that night. He spoke.

Jesus also waited. This is remarkable. He wanted what was best for Peter and we have to say that that entailed Peter going through this night. In order to show Peter his pride, Jesus merely had to wait for Peter to undo himself. Surely Jesus could have prevented that. He could have given Peter some sort of anti-denial potion to drink. He could have given him a talisman to hang around his neck so he could squeeze it when he got in trouble. He could have given him a stern lecture, reminding him of all he had said and delivering an ultimatum in case he should fail. But he spoke, and then he waited.

In this dark night, Jesus also ruled. He is our prophet, priest and king. A big part of what you are seeing in Jesus' last night, through the trial and the cruel death is how the political parties are corrupt and conspiring against God, not for him. You are supposed to think, How we need a king! A good king wouldn't let this happen! And Jesus is our king. He takes it for us, the injustice.

There's one more thing Jesus did, but it's not in our text. We have to go to the same story of Peter's denial but in Luke 22. In verse 60-61, just after Peter's third denial, we read, "And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord."

Jesus saw. We're not exactly sure how this took place, but Luke makes a point to say that at the exact moment of Peter's betrayal and denial of Jesus, Jesus looked at him.

What was that look about? Do you think it is a mad look? Is Jesus upset? Is he frustrated? Is he exasperated? Is he furious at Peter's breaking his vow, his covenantal vow?

One thing we used to do at the dinner table was have our kids make faces to express different attitudes and moods. Anna was really the last to do this, and this is fun for two to three year olds. We'd run through mad, angry, sad, happy, thinking, surprised, etc. When she got a little older, we'd try to throw in ones like melancholy, morose, sanguine, but that didn't work too well. I can picture Anna's over-mad face. Her pounding the table with her face all scrunched up saying, "That makes me angry!"

What was Jesus' face when he looked at Peter? What do you think Jesus looked like when he saw you in your worst night?

I suspect most, if not all of us, think he was all these things – mad, upset, frustrated, exasperated, furious, disappointed.

But I don't think that can be true. Jesus had known this would happen. He hadn't issued an ultimatum. He had waited for Peter's pride to be unmasked and shown as a fraud.

I think Jesus looked at Peter in love, in forgiveness. All of Peter's thoughts about his life, his values, his priorities, his future, his share in the new upcoming kingdom – all of that had been utterly shattered. And he saw Jesus' look.

Becky Pippert writes: "Our modern culture says ignore your self doubts and think good thoughts about yourself. But you should pay attention to your self doubts, your nagging discontents. Those who want the last to be the best, must face the worst first. Only by giving up on yourself can you get past, beyond ourselves to find ourselves. That is Christianity."

We're going to talk about what happens to Peter from here. And many people will tell you that, if you look at this story, you'll find that the good news is that yes, God even uses people like Peter.

But I want to tell you something different.

It's not that God *even* uses people like Peter. God *only* uses people like Peter.

If you don't identify with Peter in this story, then I have to tell you that you may not be a Christian. If you don't know, connect with Peter here, then you aren't a Christian, and what you've thought was Christianity was only a ruse.

This is love you are after. Nothing will satisfy you like this. Nothing will help you trust him better than seeing this kind of love. Your search is over. Welcome to the meaning of your life. Go to him. Adore him. Don't be the same.

And let me make one other application – there will be sometime when someone you love betrays you. When your love, your friendship, your care, your trust will be broken, destroyed and trampled on. What face will you show to that person? It might be your husband or wife. That sort of trust is deep and that sort of hurt runs to the core. Will you write that person off? Will you reject the rejector? Will you deny the denier? Will you betray the betrayer?

Jesus looked at Peter and forgave him. If you identify with Peter, then you know what it's like to be forgiven. If you can relate to Peter, if you are a Christian, then forgive as you have been forgiven. It's not easy to be forgive. But this is a life of faith, after all. It is the strange thing called following Jesus.

The last part of David Wilcox's song talks of rebirth, new life, restoration – because of Jesus and the hope he alone brings. In the dark night of the soul, there is an answer. The answer is Jesus. Look at him. See him look at you.

*Even then somehow in the bitter wind and cold*

*Impossibly strong I know*

*Even then a bloom as tender as a rose*

*Was breaking through the snow*

*In the dark night of the soul*

*In the dark night of the soul*

*If it wasn't for the babe*

*Lying helpless on the straw*

*There would be no Christmas day*

*And the night would just go on*

*When it seem that death has won*

*Buried deep beneath the snow*

*Where the summer leaves have gone*

*The seed of hope will grow*