

The Lord's Look

Introduction

The Text

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54–62)

Our Sense of Self

- A. This is a pretty famous text. We're going to come at it maybe from a fresh angle. We're going to consider this morning the way we see ourselves—our "sense of self" you could say—and the way that it gets distorted a bit, out of accord with reality.
 - 1. Sometimes we have this inflated view of ourselves, where we think we're more capable and awesome than we really are.
 - 2. And other times we have a deflated view of ourselves, where we think we're more hopeless and worthless than we really are.
 - a. But, as we'll come to see, neither are true as we understand ourselves in the light of the gospel.
- B. In our text Peter's going to swing, it seems to me, from one distorted extreme to the other. We're going to find him on both sides of the pendulum here—an inflated view of self . . . a deflated view of self . . .
 - 1. But then Jesus, through grace, by way of the gospel, is going to bring things back into balance. Jesus is going to help Peter come to see himself as he really is, and God as He really is in Christ.
- C. So we're going to go on quite the journey this morning. I've got three headings for us this morning: (1) The False Self; (2) The Breakdown; and (3) The Lord's Look.

(1) The False Self

Why Is Peter So Surprised?

- A. To make this first point we actually need to drop in at the end of our text for just a moment and then we'll circle back on the idea.
- B. Here's what I mean. Jesus, you recall, back in [Luke 22:34](#) had already told Peter what would happen later that night: "Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.'" Jesus had already laid out the prophecy for him. It was jarring news, no doubt, but there it was, and he had to face it.
 - 1. But the clear sense we get from things in our text now is that Peter didn't come to grips with this. He didn't face it. He wouldn't receive it.
 - a. Hence, when it actually happens, instead of saying, "Ah, it's as the Lord said it would be," well, he acts quite surprised and bewildered and overwhelmed. So we're told in [v. 62](#) there that "he went out and wept bitterly." He couldn't believe it!
- C. Now, I'm not saying he should be celebrating these denials, of course not. But I am wondering: Why is he so surprised and thrown off by them?
 - 1. The time to be surprised and devastated, it seems to me, was back with the original prophecy. That was the time to deal with the dark reality of it.
 - 2. But instead it seems he didn't. It seems he must have pushed the thoughts of who he really is and what he's really capable of away.
 - a. He'd constructed this sense of himself that even Jesus' own words couldn't penetrate. "This is not who I am." As he says there: "[Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death](#)" ([v. 33](#)). "Prophecy what you will Jesus. That isn't happening. Not with me."
- D. There's something going on here. And it's what I'm calling the "false self".
 - 1. We all have this propensity to tell ourselves stories, to construct a certain image of ourselves that doesn't actually accord with reality, that ends up really blinding us from seeing ourselves as we truly are. We build this scaffolded, patchworked structure around us, and it's a way hiding away what we don't want to see or deal with in ourselves and projecting what we maybe wish we could be.
 - a. And over time, we lose track of what's true about us and what's not.
 - i. I wonder if you have any of that? I wonder if you even see it?
- E. I've used the illustration before (h/t Matt Chandler), but you know Megan and I watch [American Idol](#), and especially in the audition rounds you really see this quite a lot. You get those people that come in and you know straightaway this is going to be a disaster. They think they're rock stars, but they can't sing, they can't dance, it's awkward and embarrassing.

1. And you're thinking, how is this happening? I get it if you want to pretend in front of your mirror or singing in the shower or whatever. But how do you get so out of touch with reality that you actually think you're ready to come in and do this before a national audience, for all of America to see?

- a. What has happened with your sense of self, that who you think you are is so jarringly disconnected from who you truly are?

F. Again, it's this idea of the "false self". But how does such a thing happen? With Peter and with us?

Five Strategies towards a False Self

A. For this I wanted to actually go back through the gospel narratives and put ourselves in Peter's place and imagine what is happening there—what he's thinking, how he's interpreting things . . . how he could come to think he's so strong and righteous and good with God, when truly he's broken and in need of a lot of help.

1. We're going to see here, then, what I'd call five strategies towards a false self. We'll see how such a disconnect happens and how we do the same sorts of things ourselves.

Strategy #1: Run from Authentic Awareness

A. Do you remember back the near the beginning of Luke's gospel, when Jesus is just getting started with His public ministry and things. He does this miracle with the fish and the bursting nets.

1. And Peter was there, a fisherman himself. And he knows that something is going on here. He feels as if he's in the presence of God.

- a. And, as with the encounters of old, one of the first thing a person notices when God is in the room, as it were, is how holy and righteous God is and how contrastingly sinful and filthy we all are. It's like we're used to walking about in dimly lit rooms and we everything looks decent enough. But then someone throws open the blinds and the brightness of the noonday sun streams in, and we realize there's dirt everywhere!

- i. And so Peter falls down at Jesus' feet, saying: "[Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.](#)" (Luke 5:8).

B. But now here's what I want you to see (and I can't say I've ever thought of it like this before): Peter, upon catching this vision of Christ and then of himself as a great sinner, begs Jesus to leave.

1. He doesn't say, as perhaps we might expect: "Have mercy on me, for I am a sinful man."
2. No! He says: "[Depart from me . . .](#)" And that's significant.

- a. That's why I say this first strategy is to run from authentic awareness of who you really are. "I don't want to know. I can't bear the thought. It's devastating. I don't know what to do with it. I don't want to think of myself in this way, on these terms.

All was good until you showed me that. I don't want to see it. I don't want to deal with it."

- i. Peter's not compelled by Jesus' beauty to press forward and follow. No! He's devastated by what's revealed of himself here. "Go away!"
- C. Now, of course, Jesus will extend mercy to Peter and invite him to follow. And, to his credit, Peter does, but still there is something to this— there's a tendency hinted at here that seems to run along there under the surface throughout Peter's whole journey with Jesus.
 - 1. He pushes back from authentic awareness of who he really is in his brokenness and his sin. He doesn't want to know how deep it goes, how bad it really is.
- D. And, of course, we can do the very same thing.
 - 1. We may be good Christians and talk on surface about our sins and what not, but we'll only go so far with it. There are still ways we keep Jesus at a distance and others as well.
 - a. We have certain subjects where, if you bring that up with us, all you're going to get is bristles. You don't get honesty. You get a look, that says in not so many words: "That's off limits. Don't you dare go there. You're trespassing. You're knocking on a door with five deadbolts running down the side. And I swallowed the key years ago. I'm not about to open it up now."
 - i. Do you have any of that? Stuff Jesus or others would want to talk about with you but you just shut it down?

Strategy #2: Take Credit for Your Knowledge of God

- A. So Peter's following behind Jesus. And there's this time where Jesus turns and asks His disciples really the most important question of all: namely, "Who do you say that I am?"
 - 1. And, wouldn't you know it, Peter speaks up first, and he gets it right: ["The Christ of God" \(Luke 9:20\)](#).
 - a. That had to feel nice. No doubt, Peter began to congratulate himself. Maybe he's not so bad after all, you see. Look at what he knows. He's smart. He's wise. He's all good.
- B. But it seems as if Jesus sees this sort of thing starting to happen and He gently pushes back. In Matthew's account, here's how our Lord responds: ["Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" \(Matt. 16:17\)](#). "Peter, it's wonderful what you know. But don't let that go to your head. It didn't come from you. It came from My Father. It's grace."
 - 1. But, you see, I don't think Peter fully let that lesson in. He seems to have taken credit for what he knew of God. He used it to prop up this false sense of self that didn't need so much grace—he's already doing good. He's got it together. Look at what he knows!

- C. And, again, we can do this as well. We can reassure ourselves that we are doing well with God just because we know something of Him, we have “good theology” or whatever.
 - 1. And others will likely reinforce this for us. They speak well of us because we know some things. “He’s smart. He’s eloquent. He’s a mature Christian.”
 - a. But we forget that maturity isn’t determined by what you know it’s determined by who you are because of what you know. Is your knowledge of God making you more like Him? Otherwise, you are actually trending in the wrong direction—towards hypocrisy, not maturity.
 - i. We’ve got the false self out there, but there’s something off in here.

Strategy #3: Take Confidence in Your Accomplishments for God

- A. With this, it’s not just what you know now, it’s what you do. And we take confidence in this: “I must be good, look at all I’m doing.”
- B. We see this with Peter back when Jesus is talking about how hard it is for a rich man to get into heaven, because their hearts get all attached to money and things.
 - 1. And, again, Peter speaks up, [Luke 18:28](#): “See, we have left our homes and followed you.”
 - a. In other words: Rather than feel the weight of what Jesus is saying and thinking about his heart’s lust for money and things, he immediately reassures himself with what he’s doing externally: “Make note, Jesus. I’m not like that. I don’t have the issues those rich men have. Look at what I’ve done. I’m all good.”
- C. And you know we do these sorts of things too. We like to busy ourselves with activity for God actually as a way of avoiding dealing with what’s off on the inside.
 - 1. We actually use God to run from God. We put all sorts of things in the schedule and use all our activity to reassure ourselves we’re good when really we’re using it to avoid the thing God really wants us to change and deal with if we ever slowed down and really let Him in. We’d rather clean up the surface and distract attention to that.
- D. And in all this we move from denial to false assurance and vain self-confidence. We lose track of the stuff we’re hiding from and we start to believe the lies we’re telling.

Strategy #4: Measure Yourself Favorably against Others

- A. This just kind of seals the deal, doesn’t it? We look around and think: “They don’t know as much as I do. They don’t do as much as I do. I’m good.”
- B. This is Peter there in [Luke 22](#) again, right? When Jesus is foretelling his denial. What does Peter say? “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death” (v. 33). “That’s not who I am!”

1. And Matthew's account of it brings in this comparison he makes as well: "[Peter answered him, 'Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away'](#)" (Matt. 26:33). "Of course these might let you down Jesus . . . but not me."
 - a. You see what's exposed here? Peter's been watching these other disciples. He's been comparing himself to them all along, quietly esteeming himself as better. And it's coming out now. He's been constructing this sense of self, that he's superior. But he's off!
- C. And you know, again, we do the same thing. We have this way maximizing the faults of others and minimizing their strengths while simultaneously doing precisely opposite with ourselves.
 1. We spin the story. If we sin it's justifiable. It's not as bad. If they sin, it's an outrage, it's unthinkable. When we do something good, it's an outflow of who we essentially are. When they do something good, well it's an anomaly, it's grace, it certainly wasn't them. And on it goes.
 - a. We measure ourselves favorably against others as a way of propping up this false self and avoiding dealing with who we really are and opening in those places where God wants to meet us and change us by grace.

Strategy #5: Erect an Echo Chamber

- A. Peter, it seems, keeps what He likes from what Jesus tells him, but conveniently forgets and rejects what he doesn't.
 1. So Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the Mount of Transfiguration and it's Peter who says: "[Let's stay here. I like the glory! I want this forever!](#)" (cf. Luke 9:33).
 2. But when Jesus tells him glory is going to come on the other side of the cross, it's Peter who has the audacity to rebuke Him: "[Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you](#)" (Matt. 16:22). He can't accept that. He won't. He doesn't like it.
 3. Or similarly, we imagine when Jesus says "[Your name will be the Rock](#)" (cf. Matt. 16:18; John 1:42), Peter says, "Yes, I like that."
 4. But then when Jesus says "You will deny Me three times." He says, "No, I don't accept it. That doesn't fit within my echo chamber. I'm the Rock. I will never deny you. I'm strong and stable." That's his false self-image. And He wouldn't let Jesus encroach on that.
- B. And, yet again here as well, we must admit that we do the same.
 1. We select the verses in Scripture that make us feel good about ourselves and we conveniently ignore the ones that don't. We don't let God's Word challenge and change our hearts. We use it to confirm what we already want going in.
 2. And when it comes to other people, we surround ourselves with those who tell us what we want to hear and we push out those who try to tell us what we don't—honest feedback, critique, but we don't want to look at it.

- a. We erect our own echo chambers and go about with our fingers in our ears. We won't hear any other opinion on the matter. And it seems to work for us for a while . . .
- i. . . . until it all comes crashing down!

(2) The Breakdown

Returning to Reality

- A. I suppose, in a way we could say that Peter had been denying Jesus all along. It was a little bit more subtle, sure. But it was denial nonetheless.
 - 1. He denied Jesus entrance into his heart so that he could really have His way there. He didn't want to talk about the harder things, the broken stuff. He didn't want to think of himself as he truly is, needy, dependent on grace, and so forth. So he pushed all that away.
 - a. But then here it comes to a head and now he has no choice but to face the truth.
- B. "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" (Matt. 26:35). And yet here it is, three times, before the rooster's crow, just as Jesus said.
 - 1. V. 57: "Woman, I do not know him."
 - 2. V. 58: "Man, I am not [one of them]."
 - 3. V. 60: "Man, I do not know what you are talking about."
- C. All the gospels tell this same tragic story. Each one brings out something a little different.
 - 1. Luke, in his account, emphasizes the great duration of time within which these denials take place. He alone brings attention to the fact that the third denial happened "after an interval of about an hour" (v. 59).
 - a. The point here is to say this was not some quick, reactionary fudge on Peter's part. He had time to think about it. He had time to come to his senses. He had time to repent. But he doesn't. We could let the first one slide, but the second and the third?
 - i. This is more than just reaction. This is settled disposition. It's cool, it's calculated. This is what's in him and it's finally coming out.
 - 2. Matthew, in his account, accents the increasing intensity of these denials:
 - a. At first he simply "denied it" (Matt. 26:70). Then he "denied it with an oath" (v. 72). And at the last "he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear . . ." (v. 74).
 - 3. And it's Mark, in his account who brings particular attention to this breakdown: "And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said

to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.' And he broke down and wept" (Mark 14:72).

- a. Finally, he could see it. "I'm not what I thought I was. These projections, these constructs, these lies I've been telling myself, God, and others, it's all coming down." And he just starts weeping.
- D. And I wonder: Have you experienced anything like this? The fallout of the false self? Where you come to see the truth about you and it's not pretty. Like you play back the American Idol footage. What was I thinking? I can't sing. And you've got to face that. Maybe stuff is starting to crack and crumble right now.

1. What do you do? Where do you go?

(3) The Lord's Look

Anger or Love?

- A. Well now we come to one other detail that's only found in Luke's gospel: the Lord's look: "[And the Lord turned and looked at Peter](#)" (v. 61a).
1. The façade was gone. The inflated sense of self burst. And Peter was seen for who He really was. What a terrifying thing, we would think, right? We try so hard to hide that. And then it's out in the open. Memorialized in the pages of Scripture, all four gospel records, forever. And the Lord looks at Him.
- B. Now, here's the million dollar question, and the one on which everything here turns:
1. Was this look one of frustration and anger and "I told you so!" or something like this?
 2. Or was it a look of compassion, empathy, warm with tender-hearted love?
- C. I know what the look would be if it were me there. Man, I'd be frustrated, right. There'd be daggers in that glance.
1. And at first it might really seem like that was the case here. I mean, how does Peter respond? He runs off crying. You're thinking: "Jesus, that must have been some look. Good grief, go easy on the guy."
- D. But hold on. We know the Lord's look had nothing of hardness and spite. How? Well, all we have to do is look back and look forward.
1. Looking back, when Jesus predicts this denial, do you remember what He says? "I know you'll deny me and I'm furious about it. I'm going to hold a grudge. You aren't ever welcome back here." No! "I know you're going to deny me. But I'm praying for you. And you will turn again. My heart is soft to you. I love you."

2. And then looking forward, what happens after this? Peter goes off running. And, you know what, Jesus goes running off after him! In fact, the gospel writers tell us, after Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter's the first one Jesus specifically seeks out, before all the others.
 - a. And it's not to scold him or give him a talking to. It's to restore him. It's to let him know: "Yes Peter, I see you, the real you, warts and all, the sin and the brokenness, the guilt the shame, the past regrets and the ongoing struggles, the insecurities and the fears . . . I see it all, I see YOU . . . and I still love you. You may have been surprised by your sin, but I'm not. I've died for you. Put your hands in these holes. The curse you called down on yourself before those folks by the fire, it landed on Me instead. There's no condemnation here. Only grace. I'm not done with you. I still have good plans for you."
- E. This is why in John's gospel there's that whole restoration scene, where Jesus is essentially recommissioning Peter, asking him three times do you love Me and then issuing the call three times in response, feed my sheep. One time for every denial.
 1. And you may wonder, why three times, why do that? Is Jesus just rubbing it in Peter's face? No, I don't think so.
 - a. I think it's dealing with unspoken guilt and shame that was keeping Peter back. He gave him a chance to face those things in the light of His love, so that he could be truly restored and free!

Our Look Catching up to His

- A. You see it takes a while for our look to catch up with His, if you know what I mean.
 1. He may look at us in the breakdown and love us right there, but we struggle to accept that. We look at ourselves and feel shame and guilt and embarrassment and like God could never love us and all of this. We want to run and hide.
- B. This is why I said at the beginning we see Peter swing here from an inflated view of self to a deflated one, neither is right.
 1. On the one hand he wanted to say he was so much better than he was.
 2. But then when that proved false he thought he was more hopeless and worthless and condemned than he was.
- C. You see, both extremes are brought to balance in the gaze of Jesus.
 1. He sees, we're not all that. We can hide from people and even ourselves maybe but not from Him.
 2. But even though He sees us, that we are far worse than we ever let on, we are also more loved than we ever dared to hope.
 - a. Only Jesus can bring this together. That's what the cross means. That's what the gospel does.

- i. I can be honest and real and authentic, talking about my sin and struggles and the actual stuff I'm dealing with, and I don't have to be afraid of being rejected or kicked out. I'm loved right there.

D. Jesus brings us to center our identity on Him and grace.

1. This is what sets Peter on new ground and gives him strength to go off and boldly stand for the Lord. And it's what can change us as well.

Getting Practical

A. So let me close here with just a few practical things we can and should do in light of this.

1. Get alone with God. Get quiet before Him. Truly open up to Him. Invite Him in. Let Him shine light on things. Let Him look at you. Let Him root you in the gospel and His grace. Don't be afraid. It's a look of love.
2. Get together with other Christians. With American Idol, that's what we wonder, right? Where were the friends? They see what sometimes we don't. The same is true spiritually. Your brothers and sisters in Christ and going to see those blind spots and places you're lying to yourself. Seek that out. Let that in. Get in a Home Group, start a DNA Group with one or two others to talk about life. If you need help with this please talk to me.
3. Finally, get out on mission in our city. People are doing this false self thing not just in the church, but everywhere. Running from awareness of themselves and God. And God's going to want to use you to speak truth, lovingly walk alongside them, be there for them when it breaks down, and lead them to grace. That's Paul's conversion story. That's my conversion story. We think we're something. We've got people telling us truth, loving us well, and when all we thought we were falls apart, they lead us to Jesus we're transformed.