

# Peter, the Coward

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, there's a famous quote by boxer Mike Tyson. He says, Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.

! What we study, where we live, who we marry.

These kind of things, we like to plan and we like to look ahead and we like to have our life under control. All of us. But what do you do when life throws you a punch? When things don't go as planned?

When you lose your job, your dream job? When you fail your exams? When you get that cancer diagnosis that you never expected and you find in those moments that you're not as in control of your life as you thought you were.

What happens? What do you do? How do you react when you lose control of your life? Often it's in those moments that you find out who you really are.

[ 1 : 17 ] Don't you? Because you can be one person when everything is in control. You're nice to people and you're generous. But when things start falling apart, then very often a person becomes another person.

Another person comes out when things are falling apart in our lives. Well, that is exactly what happened with Jesus' disciple Peter at Easter. You see, Peter, I don't know how much you know about Peter, but he was always in the front line.

He was brave. He was a deeply devoted follower of Jesus. He was the leader of the other disciples and he would follow Jesus anywhere. He would be the first into the breach with Jesus.

And he promised Jesus. He made him a promise. We heard it earlier that he would never abandon him. Even if all the other disciples left Jesus, Peter said, I will always stick with you, Master.

And that was, of course, until Easter came. And everything started falling apart. And we saw the once brave disciple become a coward that no one expected, least of all him.

[ 2 : 27 ] And we're going to explore his story this morning and look at what actually caused his breaking point. But also, we're going to go further and we're going to see how that breaking point taught him a very important lesson.

Because it taught him that if he's ever really going to follow Jesus and actually find the life that Jesus came to bring, Peter had to learn to give up control of his own life.

And we're going to see in his story the same is true for each one of us. So we're going to look at his story in three defining moments this morning.

Three scenes that the Apostle John paints for us. I invite you to keep your Bibles open at John 18 where we're going to see most of these scenes, these moments.

But three defining moments in three different locations we're going to look at this morning. So firstly, we're going to see the fight in the garden. The fight in the garden. Now this is where Jesus is arrested.

[ 3 : 34 ] You'll probably know the story well in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas comes along. We're going to look at Judas' story next week. But Judas comes along and shows the Roman soldiers who Jesus is, betrays him with a kiss, and Jesus is arrested.

But as we were reading it earlier, I wonder what stood out for you. It wasn't any ordinary arrest. Did you notice something different about how the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in that scene?

The thing that stood out for me was just how in control Jesus was of everything that was happening. Even though he was the one being arrested, he was actually the one calling the shots and telling the soldiers what to do.

Did you notice that? He was instructing them. Okay, guys, you have to come now. You have to arrest me. And they were hesitant. And he's like, come on, arrest me. He was in control every

moment.

And even though there was this power in him that the soldiers recognized. Did you hear? Were you listening earlier? What happened when the soldiers came?

[ 4 : 36 ] These war-hardened veteran Roman soldiers approached this unarmed carpenter and they fell down on the ground.

You don't normally do that when you're arresting someone. You know, you don't see combat force or SRU armed response with all their Kevlar vests and their guns coming to some guy who's been accused of something.

And them all falling down on the street in front of him. You don't see that with armed guards. But these Roman soldiers did. Why did they do that? Because they sensed. Roman soldiers know how to detect who's got authority.

They're used to obeying authority. And they could sense this man has authority over them. They couldn't work out how, but they fell down. There was a power that the soldiers recognized.

And even then, Jesus gave himself up to their power. He voluntarily submitted himself to their power.

[ 5 : 41 ] The guys who were on the ground in front of him. Now, why would he do that? Why would Jesus let himself be taken like that? Even though he had this power that he was restraining.

Well, you see, the Gospels tell us. The Gospels, if you take time to read them, you can see why this moment happened.

Why Jesus voluntarily gave himself up. And you'll see as you read the Gospels, as you read the whole story of what happened, you'll see that his arrest and his coming execution on the cross were no surprise to him.

And they were not, as the disciples thought, a failure of his mission to bring God's kingdom. That's what the disciples thought.

Now he's getting arrested. It's all falling apart. He's not going to bring God's kingdom. But in fact, what we realize in the Gospels is that Jesus being arrested and going to the cross to die was his mission.

[ 6 : 47 ] Because the only way sinful humans can ever be part of the kingdom he's going to bring is if our sins that separate us from our God are first dealt with.

And only the death of God's Son, Jesus Christ, is able to deal with human sins. And that's why it was always the plan for Jesus to go to the cross and die.

And that's why when these soldiers arrive, he says, come, take me. He voluntarily lets himself get arrested because this is the plan. So you've got in the garden, you've got Jesus in control of the situation, letting himself be taken.

And contrast that now with Peter, our good friend Peter, and how he reacts in that situation. I'm going to read from chapter 18 from verse 10.

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Jesus commanded Peter, put your sword away.

[ 7 : 56 ] Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me? Okay, so now you can't blame Peter. We know Peter. He's impulsive. And he probably thought he was doing a good thing.

Right? He was standing up and defending his Lord when all the other disciples were cowering away. And he had a sword with him. He was primed for a fight. He went to the garden with the sword. Imagine taking a sword to a prayer meeting.

That's what Peter did. Jesus said, we're going to go to the garden and pray. Peter thought, let me just take my sword, just in case. You know, Peter, he's priming for a fight. You know who he reminds me of?

Ibn Etzebeth. Always ready for a fight, you know. There's Peter. But the Lord, his Lord, who he was defending, is the one who rebukes him.

And he basically says to Peter, Peter, stop it. Put your sword away. This is meant to happen. I told you. And Jesus had told them. Jesus had told his disciples multiple times what was going to happen.

[ 8 : 58 ] And they wouldn't listen. But he had told them, I'm going to be arrested. I'm going to be tried. I'm going to be crucified. Then I'm going to rise again. And they didn't hear it. And they weren't ready for that.

And yet he had told them. And here he's saying to Peter, put your sword away. Don't try to change what is inevitable. Don't try to change what is happening. This is meant to happen.

Don't try to control the situation, Peter. Because that's what he was trying to do, isn't it? He was worried. Things were falling apart. So what was his reaction?

He wanted to intervene. He wanted to control the situation. He wanted to change what was happening. That's the heart of why he reacted like he did. He refused to accept the path that was laid out.

He wanted to control the situation. And that's why he lashed out. But you know what? That is the reason a lot of people get angry.

[ 9 : 54 ] That is the reason a lot of people lash out. That's why we often in our lives get aggressive. It's actually because control often is slipping away. Our desire to control our lives and our situation often comes out in aggression.

That's often why people lash out when they're feeling threatened. In fact, psychologists tell us that's one of the core reasons for the phenomenon of road rage. I don't know if you've ever unfortunately come across someone who was raging on the road.

Maybe you yourself. But you know what they say. This phenomenon that people just have this irrational aggression that gets triggered on the roads.

In traffic or when someone cuts you off or something. And this irrational aggression that wouldn't normally come out in normal life. But in that situation it does.

And psychologists say one of the key factors of that is a loss of control. So when they say when you've got control over your vehicle and your space.

[ 11 : 02 ] And when that control is threatened by an outside force. Then what happens is this primal reaction kicks in of fight or flight. It's like in the lizard part of our brain. We don't even think about it.

But we just get aggressive. Fight or flight. You've heard that before? The primal reaction. Well we're seeing this here in Peter. In this case fight. To keep control of the situation.

Now we might interpret that as courage. It looks like courage. He's taking his sword. He's going in front. He's risking his life against these Roman soldiers. It looks like courage.

But it's the same reaction that can also turn from fight just as easily into flight.

Which is exactly what we see next in Peter's story. So the second defining moment. The second scene is the flight in the courtyard.

[ 12 : 01 ] So the next thing that happens. Jesus is taken away by these Roman soldiers. What does Peter do? Does he back off? Like Jesus told him to?

No. Not Peter. No. He follows. He follows at a distance. He's not giving up. Why does he follow Peter? Why does he follow Jesus? To the court?

I don't know. Maybe he thought he could still intervene. Maybe he's still got his sword with him. Maybe he thought there's an opportunity for him to rescue Jesus still. And he's just looking for his moment.

But of course to do that. He needed to stay undercover. And so. The servant girl. Says to Peter. Aren't you one of this man's disciples too? He replied. I'm not. I'm not. No. It was cold. And the servants and the officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm.

[ 13 : 01 ] Peter was also standing with them. Warming himself. Himself. Okay. So you've got Peter here undercover. Staying low profile. Seeing if he can help Jesus.

And he has to lie to maintain his anonymity. Now. Come on. If we're honest. Probably any of us would have done the same in that situation.

I mean. Undercover policemen do it all the time. They lie for a greater good. And so what's really so bad about what Peter did here?

Just to say. No. No. No. No. I'm not him. He wants to stay undercover. Maybe he can still help Jesus. What's so bad about that? Why do we give him so much flack? Well.

What's bad is first of all. That this is the one thing. Peter explicitly promised Jesus he would never do. He said.

[ 13 : 57 ] I will never deny you. And he made that promise. I'm sure. Fully genuine. I'll never deny you. No matter what happens. I'll never deny you. It's interesting how you can make great promises.

And you keep them until it becomes very inconvenient to keep them. You know what I'm talking about? And that's what Peter did here. He made this great promise to Jesus.

Explicitly. I'll never deny you. Until it was convenient to deny him. Until he was in a situation where actually. Hmm. Maybe I shouldn't have made that promise. Because I didn't think about being in this situation.

And that's true. Hey. We make great promises to people. We have great intentions. Until it's inconvenient to keep those promises. And then we conveniently forget of the promises we made. Well that's what Peter did here. But. You know. That's not the only thing that makes what he did here bad. What makes it worse. Is. And the way John writes it in John 18.

[14:59] He. You've got. The way John paints the picture of the scene. You've got Peter in the courtyard. On the outside. And right through the wall. You've got Jesus on the inside. And John swaps.

Between these two scenes. To contrast them. And so when we contrast. What's going on outside in the courtyard. With Peter. And what's going on inside.

The court. With Jesus. Then we see why. What Peter is doing. Is actually so bad. So. I'll read. I'll read. Some of it. From verse 19. Meanwhile.

The high priest. Questioned Jesus. About his disciples. And his teaching. I've spoken. I've spoken openly. To the world. Jesus replied. I always taught.

In synagogues. Or at the temple. Where all the Jews. Come together. I said nothing. In secret. Why question me. Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.

[15:59] When Jesus said this. One of the officials nearby. Slapped him in the face. Is this the way. You answer the high priest. He demanded. It. So here you've got Jesus. In the court.

Completely open. Not having anything. In secret. And it's just as well. Jesus didn't forget. What he had pledged himself. To do. For us.

That's the only reason. He was in this court. That's the only reason. He let himself. Be arrested.

That's the only reason. He allowed himself. To be treated. Like a criminal. Slapped in the face.

And then to go on. To be bound. And to be put up on a cross. And to die. A criminal's death. To. As he said. Drink the cup. Of God's wrath. And he was doing it all.

For our sins. Because we were sinners. Not because he deserved it. But because we did. In other words. What he is doing there. In the court. Is he is choosing.

[16:57] To identify. With sinners. Like you and me. When just outside. Peter is unwilling. To identify. With Jesus. To save his own skin.

Do you see the contrast? Jesus. Giving himself. Identifying himself. With the worst sinners. You and me. And Peter. Ashamed. To even. Be associated.

With Jesus. To save his own skin. And yet. You know. We look at Peter. And yet. How often. Are Christians guilty. Of the same.

Hiding the truth. Of Jesus. Of what you believe. Of what you know. About Jesus. At work. And at the sports club. And stuff. Because of fear. Of what people. Might think of you.

And yet. Jesus was there. Identifying with you. And yet. We. So. So easily. Hesitate to identify. With him. Don't we? Well. Peter was the same.

[17:57] For fear. Because he wanted. To control the situation. He didn't want. The same thing. To happen to him. As happened to Jesus. And so he goes.

Along with it. Probably. As he's going. Justifying himself. Now. I need to do this. I need to stay. Undercover right now. And yet. He does it once. Then he does it again. And then he does it again. And then what happens. Just as Jesus says. The rooster crows. And he realizes. In that moment. What he's done. From verse 25.

Meanwhile. Simon Peter was still standing there. Warming himself. So they asked him. Aren't you one of his disciples too? He denied it. Saying. I'm not. One of the high priest's servants.

A relative. Of the man whose ear. Peter had cut off. Challenged him. Didn't I see you with him in the garden? Again. Peter denied it. And at that moment.

[18:53] A rooster began to cry. Matthew. The other gospel writer. Adds. This detail. Then Peter remembered the word.

Jesus had spoken. Before the rooster crows. You will disown me three times. And he went.

Outside. And wept. Bitterly. This was Peter's breaking point.

This was when it all came tumbling down. And he realizes that he's failed. Just as Jesus said he would. That all his.

His strength. And his bravery. And what he thought was courage. Was actually all just. A hollow facade. And he is not the person.

He thought he was. And he goes outside. And he breaks down. And the rest. You know. Leading up to Easter.

[ 19 : 57 ] The rest of the story. We don't hear from Peter again. He disappears from the scene. And that could have easily been the end of his story. He could have been. Peter the failure. Peter the coward.

His story could have. Ended there. But it didn't. It didn't. It turns out. Now this is amazing. This is the business that God is in.

He takes our most broken moments. And he turns them to something good. Because it turns out. That Peter's breaking point. Was the very thing Jesus used. To rebuild him. Now I want to take you to the third scene.

And this is a scene we haven't read yet. Because it actually happens after Easter. And we're going to read about the new beginning. On the beach. So. We fast forward now.

To weeks after the events of Easter. The disciples are back in Galilee. Jesus has been tried. He's been crucified.

[ 21 : 00 ] But. After three days. They discovered. That the tomb that he was laid in was empty. Investigations were done. But the body can't be found.

And then. On a number of occasions. The disciples of Jesus. See him. Alive. Again. And he talks to them.

And it's not an hallucination. There are other eyewitnesses. And it's. It's not a ghost. It's not a spirit. They touch him. They see him. And it is as unbelievable. To them.

As it sounds to us today. The resurrection bodily of Jesus Christ. And yet. There are multiple eyewitness accounts. Of this event happening in history. And.

Furthermore. It is the only thing that explains. The change. That happened to the disciples. And what they ended up doing. In the rest of their lives. I want to read.

[ 21 : 59 ] To you one of those eyewitness. Accounts. And I want to read it. In its entirety. From John 21. One. This is a very touching account.

Especially when we consider Peter's story. And his betrayal. And his. His denial of Jesus. And how he broke down. But that's not the end of the story.

No. Peter's story arc. Comes. Comes to a climax. Actually. Here on the beach. And so. I'm going to read to you. A large part of John 21. And I invite you just to listen.

And. Put yourself. You know. Enter into the scene. And picture it. Picture what's happening here. This is one of. The eyewitness accounts. So. John 21.

From verse 1. Afterward. Jesus appeared again to his disciples. By the sea of Galilee. It happened this way.

[ 22 : 57 ] Simon Peter. Thomas. Also known as Didymus. Nathanael. From Canaan. Galilee. The sons of Zebedee. And two other disciples were together. I'm going out to fish.

Simon Peter told them. And they said. We'll go with you. So they went out. And got into the boat. But that night. They caught nothing. Early in the morning.

Jesus. Stood on the shore. But the disciples did not realize. That it was Jesus. He called out to them. Friends. Haven't you any fish? Fish. No.

They answered. He said. Throw your net on the right side of the boat. And you will find some. When they did. They were unable to haul the net in.

Because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved. Said to Peter. It is the Lord. As soon as Simon Peter heard him say. It is the Lord.

[ 23 : 56 ] He wrapped his outer garment around him. For he had taken it off. And jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat. Towing the net full of fish. For they were not far from the shore.

About a hundred yards. When they landed. They saw a fire of burning coals. There with fish on it. And some bread. Jesus said to them. Bring some of the fish.

You have just caught. So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat. And dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish. 153. But even with so many.

The net was not torn. Jesus said to them. Come and have breakfast. None of the disciples dared ask him. Who are you? They knew.

It was the Lord. Jesus came. Took the bread. And gave it to them. And he did the same with the fish. This was now the third time. Jesus appeared to his disciples.

[ 24 : 53 ] After he was raised from the dead. When they had finished eating. Jesus said. To Simon Peter. Simon son of John.

Do you love me more than these? Yes Lord. He said. You know that I love you. Jesus said. Feed my lambs. Again Jesus said.

Simon son of John. Do you love me? He answered. Yes Lord. You know that I love you. Jesus said. Take care of my sheep. The third time.

He said to him. Simon son of John. Do you love me? Peter was hurt. Because Jesus asked him. The third time. Do you love me? He said. Lord. You know all things. You know that I love you. Jesus said. Feed my sheep. Very truly. I tell you. When you were younger. You dressed yourself. And went where you wanted. But when you are old.

[ 25 : 51 ] You will stretch out your hands. And someone else will dress you. And lead you where you do not want to go. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death.

By which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him. Follow me. Do you see here.

What Jesus is doing with Peter on the beach. It's very interesting. Peter met Jesus. For the first time on the beach. And here.

A climactic moment in his life. Is happening again. On the beach. But do you see what Jesus is doing with Peter. Why he asks him these questions. Why he asks him.

Three times. He is taking Peter back. To the moment he denied him. And Jesus has come to restore Peter.

[ 26 : 48 ] Now I don't know about you. But if someone denied me. And betrayed me. Once. Not even three times. I would probably want nothing to do with them.

You know. You know that's how we react. If someone has hurt us. And betrayed us. We normally write them off. As a toxic influence in my life. And we want nothing to do with him. No. Not Jesus. Jesus.

Jesus. Comes to the man who betrayed him. Who hurt him. And yet he. Comes deliberately. To restore Peter. Around the same kind of fire.

That Peter denied Jesus. Three times. Jesus. Now gives him. Three opportunities. To affirm. His love. For him. And in doing so. Jesus doesn't just forgive.

Peter. But he undoes. Each one of his failures. And he. You know what. Jesus can do that now. For Peter. He can undo.

[ 27 : 44 ] Each one of his failures. Because of what Jesus did. At Easter. By paying for Peter's. Sins. On the cross. He can undo. All of Peter's failure. And that's why he comes.

To this beach. But you know what. He can do the same. For you and me. All because of what he did. At Easter. He can undo.

Every single one. Of our failures. Because his blood. That he spilt. On the cross. The son of God. Paying for human sins. Is powerful.

To wash away. Every single one. Of your stains. And failures. In your life. That's what Jesus achieved. At Easter. So that each one of us. Like Peter.

Can have a new start. And be restored. To the God. Who we've denied. All our lives. And we can follow Jesus. Into new. Life.

[ 28 : 39 ] That doesn't end. At death. But will experience. The resurrection. Jesus earned for humans. And showed us. Is a real thing. If we follow him.

So that's the. That's the moment. Right. That's. That happens. That. That Peter is given. A new opportunity. To follow Jesus. But.

To follow Jesus. Peter needs to learn something. He needs to learn. To do something. Have you seen what it is. At the end there. I want to take you back. To the end of.

John. Where. You've got this moment. On the beach. And I want you to see. Did you notice what Jesus said.

To him at the end. When he said. Follow me. What did he say. Just before that. I'm going to read it to you again. When you were young.

[ 29 : 39 ] You dressed yourself. And went where you wanted. But when you are old. You will stretch out your hands. And someone else. Will dress you. And lead you. Where you do not want to go. Then he.

Then he. He was indicating. The kind of death. Jesus would die. And he said to him then. Follow me. And so. To follow. Jesus.

Into. New life. To. Follow Jesus. Into this new life. That Jesus. Earned on the cross. For Peter. Peter. Needed to first. Learn to let go.

Of his control. Of his future. He needed to let go. And he needed to be willing. To enter into a future. That he has no control. Over.

That is. The way. That Jesus. Could. That Peter. Could follow Jesus. Into. New life. Jesus was saying. To Peter. Following me. Means. Being willing.

[ 30 : 34 ] To live a life. That you won't be in control. Anymore. Now. Him saying that. What's going to happen to him. You would think. That would scare him off.

Right. It's not the best. Recruitment policy. For disciples. Telling them. How they're going to die. You think. That would. That would scare Peter off. But it does the opposite.

It transforms him. From being. A broken coward. To one of the most. Powerful apostles. That history has known. Who went on. To fearlessly proclaim. The truth about Jesus.

Even though. It got him arrested. And beaten. And when. The authorities. Ordered. Peter. In Acts. To stop. Teaching people. About this.

Jesus figure. And they. They. Threatened him. With serious. Threats. If he wouldn't stop. Do you know. What he told them. Well let me read it to you. From Acts 4. Verse 20.

[ 31 : 29 ] He said. As for us. We cannot. Help. Speaking about. What we have seen. And heard. What a transformation. From this man. Who. Who was hiding away.

Not wanting to be associated. With Jesus. To a man. Threatened. And beaten. And arrested. And saying. I can't stop. Talking about Jesus. And later. In his letters. In the New Testament.

He writes these words. So we've got a few of his letters. That he writes to the churches. Later on. And listen to the words. Peter writes. The one who was. Who once wanted to avoid. Suffering at all costs. Said this. But rejoice. In as much as you participate. In the sufferings of Christ. So that you may be. Overjoyed. When his glory is revealed. And.

The one who wanted to control. His own life. Writes this. Humble yourselves. Therefore under God's mighty hand. That he may lift you up. In due time. In other words.

[ 32 : 26 ] It's God. Who controls our lives. And our outcomes. Not us. You know. When he realized. God is now in control. Of his life. And his future. And he is not.

That was. The moment. That he underwent. A complete transformation. But for that to happen. He first had to come. To the breaking point. And the truth is.

If you're really going to follow Jesus. Into new life. So do you. You need to come. In your life. If you're really going to follow Jesus.

Anybody can call themselves. A Christian. And come to church. And say they follow Jesus. But if you are really going to follow him. In your life. To resurrected. Restored new life. That he is calling us to.

You need. Also. To come to the point. Where you finally stop. Trying to control your life. And you give it to the one who does. No matter where that takes you. Will you do that this Easter?

[ 33 : 24 ] As. You. Over the next few weeks. Are reminded of what Jesus. Did for your sins. Will you respond. By following him. As your king. Along a path. That.

Yes. You won't be able to control. But that will bring you. Into real life. And. Resurrected. Life. That will never end. Let's pray.

Oh Lord. We thank you for the. Story of Peter. That has been recorded for us. And how you took his breaking point.

And you transformed him. Into a new person. To experience. Forgiveness. In real life. We pray this Easter. Will you do the same for us. As we consider once more.

What Jesus. What you. Did on the cross. To identify with us. Sinners. Would you. Change. And transform us. To respond. By following you. No matter where that takes us.

[ 34 : 27 ] Lord help us. To give our futures. Into your hands. And to trust you. And follow you. Into real life. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.

Thank you.