

# Lifeline Severed?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, so the title of last week's sermon was Lifeline, because we were looking at prayer and how prayer is such a significant and important lifeline too, is like, you know, that iPhone is useless if it's not being plugged in and being plugged into the source.

It's just, as Thomas was saying on Wednesday, it's just something that's come out from the ground really, and it's useless without the power. Well today the title of the sermon is Lifeline Severed, because we're looking really at the consequences of Peter and the disciples, but primarily Peter's lack of prayer at that very important time, where Jesus, remember the difference between the two was that Jesus, the Son of God, the perfect Son of God who was going towards the cross, at this point in his life needed strength.

He needed strength, and where did he go for his strength? Jesus, the Son of God, where did he go for his strength? He went to his Father in heaven, and he went to his friends.

That's where he went. He asked his friends to come with him and pray with him, because he was praying to his Father who was in heaven. His Father didn't let him down, his friends did. His friends fell asleep.

They didn't pray with him at that point, and so we see the difference even there, beginning to unpack. Jesus needed strength. So also Peter needed strength, Peter and the other disciples who were with him in the Garden of Gethsemane, just like we need strength as believers.

[ 1 : 29 ] Peter was in this point of a spiritual battle. He also needed strength. What did he do? He slept instead of praying, because his spirit was willing.

He wanted to follow Jesus. He wanted to do what Jesus wanted him to do, but his flesh was weak, his desire was weak in a sense, and he was tired and confused and weary and struggling, and so instead of praying, he slept.

We saw that last week. And we saw the reason for that was that previously he and the other disciples had stopped listening to Jesus and had therefore stopped talking to God.

So the two came together. They stopped listening to what Jesus was saying, the Word of God. We could take that as being the Bible for us. The Bible was closed. He'd stopped listening to what Jesus was saying. Jesus had predicted lots of things that were going to happen, and had taught them about the crucifixion.

So they'd stopped listening to Jesus, and as a result, they didn't feel the need to talk to God. And we looked at that for our own Christian walk and the danger of gradually slipping away from a walk of faith with Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 46 ] I know it's different. I know Jesus isn't in the room with us like it was for Peter, where Peter could feel him and touch him and see him. We know that. We know that. I'm assuming that we all recognize that the walk of faith is different.

But none that is different, but it's not so different in the sense that it's a spiritual relationship we have with Jesus. We can't see Him physically. He's in heaven physically, but we still know that He is the living God, the Son.

And we are in relationship with Him by faith, okay? So Peter and the disciples' faith was weakened because they were unplugged from God. Okay?

They were unplugged from God. They stopped listening, and they stopped praying. They stopped learning, and they stopped asking. And they started depending on their own wisdom and their own insight, rather than depending on Jesus and on the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Now when that happened for them, when that happened, I'm specifically going to speak about Peter, when that happened to Peter, it led to a distorted view of himself and a distorted view of God and a distorted view of other believers.

[ 4 : 01 ] He didn't understand Jesus properly. He certainly didn't understand His own heart properly, and He didn't really understand the needs of the other disciples either. So the lack of communion with God, the lack of prayer, and the lack of listening led to Him being distorted in His understanding of spiritual things.

And I'm wanting this morning to follow through with the experience of Peter and Jesus, because I believe it's still really vital for our lives today, because if we are Christians, we also have a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith.

And it's one we need to guard and look after in our own hearts. These are vital truths that we'll be looking at today, and it really is again another connection towards the significance and the importance of our prayer lives, private and corporate together.

So in other words, if you're not praying as a Christian, if you don't pray, if you've struggled and stopped praying, if prayer is a distant memory to you, then you will also experience the same basic distortions in your life, in your life of faith.

You will have distorted views. We have distorted views when we stop praying. We don't understand God properly. We don't understand ourselves, and we probably don't understand other Christians in the church, in the church context, in the family of God.

[ 5 : 27 ] And the truth, the Bible has given to us, and this passage has given to us, and these experiences are given to us to help us, to warn us, to encourage us so that we don't make the same mistakes.

And if we do make the same mistakes, then it's okay, because there's a way back for us, and that's hugely important. So can we look first of all briefly at Peter and the disciple Peter, who is so significant and so important in the Bible and the New Testament.

And there's a couple of things I want to say about Peter and his relationship with Jesus. There was a bruised love, and there was also a... that led to a broken love.

And I think that again is important for us in our relationship as Christians. There's a bruised love in verse 58. This is... these are really brilliant words, right through this part.

The little... the little vignette word sentences are very significant. We kind of read over them and maybe don't think about them, but they actually tell us so much.

[ 6 : 33 ] So there's a great little phrase here, it says, in verse 58, and Peter was following him at a distance. That's really great, and it's really helpful.

In other words, there was a distance. I know it's physical, ultimately here, he followed at a distance, but it says more than that. It says more than that. Peter was... his love was bruised, and he was following just a distance here from Jesus.

Because he had a distorted view of Jesus by this point. It seemed to me that Jesus... it seemed to him that Jesus... was it that Jesus was weak at this point?

He's following at a distance, Jesus goes into the Sanhedrin where he's questioned by the council and all these different people, and he... he didn't stand up to the false claims.

He was just silent. Well, Jesus, what's the hell about? Peter's following at a distance and he says, gee, why are you doing that, Jesus? Why are you not standing up for who you are, you're the Son of God?

[ 7 : 38 ] Stand up for... He's silent, and it seems that Jesus is weak, and he's vastly outnumbered. There's Jesus and nobody else on his side.

Nobody representing him, nobody speaking on his behalf, surrounded by like wild animals baying for his blood. And Peter is at a distance.

Jesus seemed weak to him, and Jesus was making unrealistic or crazy claims in verse 64. They come up with this claim that Jesus had said he would build a temple, rebuild the temple, destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days.

And he said, what was he talking about? How could he do that? He didn't understand that Jesus was using a picture about his own death and resurrection in the third day. He seemed... he was speaking in riddles.

Now, Jesus quite often spoke in riddles or in parables, and here Peter's saying, well, it's unrealistic, why he's... why you're not explaining these things just now, Jesus? And of course, then he claims to be equal with God when Jesus said, you know, he's claimed to be the Christ, and he says, you have said so, but I tell you from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power, coming in the clouds of heaven.

[ 8 : 56 ] The high priest tears his robes, blasts for me. You know, because he was effectively claiming to be divine, to be equal with God. And so he's making these huge claims, and yet at the same time, he seems to be weak and unable to defend himself and silent at the wrong moment.

And so there's a distance between Peter and Jesus. Peter's confused and afraid. His faith is stretched to the limit here as he is a distance from Jesus.

His body's trembling and his mind is fogged. His mind is fogged by what's happening. He doesn't understand what's going on. He loved Jesus. He loved the Messiah, but this was not how it was meant to be.

Do you recognize that as a Christian? Distance from Jesus. It's not how it was meant to be. This is not how I expected it to be.

He was in emotional turmoil. Is any of this real? Is any of it significant? The lights were going out all around him, and he was all alone, even his friends at this point.

[ 10 : 03 ] They had abandoned him, whatever. They all abandoned each other. And so his love is there. It's bruised because he can't understand what's going on, and he feels that it's all slipping away from him.

Now you might be able to sympathize with that this morning. I hope, well, when I say I hope you do, I don't. I hope you're not, but if you are, I'm glad you're here.

I'm glad you're here. Because we need to stop the pretense of everything being great in our lives when it's not spiritually. And we need to recognize it's okay for that to be the case.

Because sometimes we just come with slapstick smiles on, and everything's okay in our public demeanor in church.

But there's maybe deep-seated battles and struggles. You feel that you're a distance from Jesus Christ as a believer. And that distance, it led to denial.

[ 11 : 02 ] And maybe there's things in this that you will recognize as well. And I certainly recognize also. We saw that Jesus predicted that, didn't we?

Last week, I didn't actually read that bit, but Jesus said to me, you know, Peter says, I'll never fall away, verse 34. Jesus said truly, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.

Three times. You will deny Jesus. And the word there for deny, the word that we have there for deny is a really strong word. It's an intense verb, a very strong, powerful turning away, absolutely deliberately from Jesus.

It wasn't thoughtless. It wasn't just random. It wasn't careless. It's a very deliberate decision that he made at that point as he was slightly away from Jesus Christ to deny him.

Now, Peter the Rock, the rock on which Jesus said he would build his church, spent three intense years in fellowship and in friendship and in companionship and in traveling with Jesus.

[ 12 : 11 ] Peter who said, to whom will I go? You've got the words of eternal life when everyone else was turning away from the hard sayings of Jesus. Peter who just briefly, a few hours before it said, I'll never let you down.

Even if everyone else here does, I'll not. I'll never let you down. Peter the preacher, the teacher, the leader, the deep friend, the one who had seen the miracles, who drank up the teaching of Jesus had stopped listening and had stopped praying.

And a great distance began to come between him and Jesus and a huge fear, deep-seated fear in this really powerful section from verse 69 of Peter was outside warming himself, sleeping at a distance.

The girl came up to him and said, yeah, you're, I recognize you. You're a, no I wasn't. Someone else comes out. He moves, someone else comes out. You're with plenty of opportunities.

No, never. I absolutely not. Strong denial. And third, cursing and swearing. No, absolutely not.

Completely not the case. And increasingly vehement dissociation with his friend Jesus, cursing and swearing his denial and his disloyalty.

[ 13 : 29 ] So there was this bruised love. And then I think it is descended the right word, descended into a broken love.

And that broken love, and what I mean by broken love, I mean that in his heart he was broken. I don't mean the love between Jesus and him was broken, but I meant that broken hearted love might be a better phrase to use.

And it's triggered by a look. It's not recorded in Matthew, it's recorded in Luke. I think we've got it on the screen. No, okay, we don't have it on the screen.

Sorry. There are some verses for the screen, but I'll just look up because it's so powerful. Luke chapter 22 and verse 61. This is the same account, but all the Gospels have it slightly differently or add different points.

So, but Peter said, man, I don't know who you're talking about. This is the third time. Oh, there we go. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered, yep, the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the saying of the Lord.

[14:42] It doesn't record it in Matthew, but records it in Luke. So Jesus, in the midst of his trial, an earlier trial, just turned around and looks at Peter, who's at a distance.

And that triggers, it sparks the memory of Jesus' words that he had obviously heard, but had not taken on board.

The prophetic words had registered, but had been rejected by Jesus, by Peter. And he remembered them here. And as the cock crew three times, it was a powerful reminder of what Jesus had said.

And it led to bitter repentance and sadness, brokenhearted love for his Redeemer. But interestingly, can I say just a sidebar here, if you notice at the end of chapter 26 where we read to, the beginning of chapter 27 where Jesus delivered to Pilate, it goes on to speak about Judas.

Now that's not insignificant that Peter and Judas are laid side by side in the Scripture there, because Peter's sorrow was different from Judas'.

[15:52] Judas' was remorse for being found out. For whatever reason, it was a disastrous failure on his part, and he didn't want to return to the disciples of Jesus.

He took his own life in hugely tragic circumstances. But Peter didn't. He had a brokenhearted relationship with Jesus Christ.

Is it the end for him? He's failed as a disciple. There's no way back. Do you feel like that today? If you felt like that in your Christian life, there's no way back.

I've fallen from such a height spiritually. I've stopped doing all the things that you used to do. I'm hanging on. A best, a bruised love, certainly brokenhearted in many different ways.

And I just feel constantly I've let Jesus down, and it's too difficult to carry on. It's too difficult to be, I'd rather not be in that place. Well, the next mention of Peter is not in Matthew or in the rest of the chapters here.

[16:57] It's not in Luke. It's not in Mark. But it's actually in John. In John's Gospel, he's next mentioned when the women who were at the tomb go back to the disciples and speak to him.

And I think it's the next... Yeah, there's another verse which... I will come back to that one.

Yeah, there's another verse. Okay. But could you put that one back up then? That's a good one. Yeah. Sorry. I may be not. Okay.

That's fine. Yeah. So, in John's Gospel, on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples and Peter was at this point. For fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you.

So, we're not even at that level. It's not the end for Peter. Okay? And we see... I'm going to look now at Peter and Jesus' response to him, because it's very significant for us in our life of faith, particularly if we're struggling or battling or want to give up in our Christian life.

[18:04] So Peter and Jesus, first of all, we know that Jesus has been speaking into Peter's life, even when Peter wasn't listening. And that's very important for us, not just through the three years of his public ministry, but right just at the end, the bits that we've looked at.

He's already spoken to him and said, Look, you're going to deny me three times. He speaks to... he warns him because he loves him and he warns him. And he says, You're going to deny me.

And then when Peter doesn't listen to that, when they go into the Gethsemane, he says, Look, disciples, watch and pray. Watch and pray. He speaks to them there and he encourages him to pray. He knows what he needs.

These are warnings that he gives in love. And these are the living words of a friend for you if you're a Christian today and you're at that point. And maybe you're not at that point and maybe none of us are at that point, but all of us need to hear Jesus saying, Watch and pray.

It's great advice. Three words. That's what he says to us, Watch and pray. If we watch and pray, we'll not go far wrong in our Christian walk. If we watch and pray, if we keep that relationship with Jesus Christ open as we listen and as we pray.

[ 19 : 08 ] So he speaks into Peter's weakness to try and draw him back from the cliff edge of denial. But he also convicts him after he has failed and betrayed his Savior.

He convicts him simply with his presence and with that look. Luke 22.61 again speaks about that. He just, Jesus looked at him. That's all it took.

You know, husband, do you know that look from your wife? Wife, do you know that look from your husband? Friend, do you know that look from a friend? It's just a look that says, It's all been wrong and that's all that's needed.

There's a conviction of failure on Peter's part of hurt, of letting his Savior down. But then he restored, Jesus restores him so personally, beautifully and very gently.

So, and I'm jumping a little bit to the different gospel accounts because I think that's legitimate. It's okay to do that. Mark 16.

[ 20 : 15 ] Okay, this is the same kind of place. This is after the resurrection. Okay, look at this. This is brilliant.

Jesus said to them, Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. He is not here to see Jesus speaking. See the place where he laid them.

But go tell his disciples and Peter that he's going before you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told. Go and tell the disciples.

And Peter, Peter specifically, Peter mentioned by name, because Peter was the one who needed to know the assurance that he was still a disciple of Jesus, even more than the others.

My old colleague and boss, Kenny McDonald, is now in glory. When he was a student, he was a student later in life in ETS, free church colleges, it was called then.

[ 21 : 13 ] He had one sermon that he preached as a student in his 40s, whatever he was. You would go around different congregations as a student before you were called to a place.

One sermon, he preached 30 or 40 times, and it was that text and Peter, two words, because it's such a powerful restoration from Jesus to tell the women to tell Jesus.

And then of course we have the resurrection breakfast in John's Gospel, we don't have time to look at that at all. But where Jesus speaks with Peter, and you know that many of you will know that story where he says to Peter three times, do you love me, Peter, feed my sheep?

Do you love me, Peter, feed my lambs? Do you love me, Peter? And the third time Peter, the Scripture says Peter was hurt by this, questioning his love.

But it's the threefold reminder of the three times that he denied him before the crucifixion. And that hurt for Peter is a reminder to him of what his relationship with Jesus is like and what it meant for Jesus.

[ 22 : 21 ] But he's reinstated there, and he's given a task, a leader of Christ's flock. He's going to have a cross to carry. He's going to have sacrificial work to do, is the apostolic rock in which the New Testament was built.

He lived by grace. So we see that restoration, and we see it working out in the ongoing New Testament so that in Acts chapter 4 verse 13, we have now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, when they perceived they'd been uneducated common men, and they were astonished. They recognized they'd been with Jesus. Isn't that great? Because he denied him, and he wasn't willing to be with Jesus. And yet he comes to this point where he's acknowledged as someone who is known to have been with Jesus, and he is courageous and bold and strong about that, and no longer ashamed and embarrassed to be associated with, to be part of the followers of Jesus. And of course, from that courage, he goes on to become a great teacher, and his epistles speak powerfully. And we see his wisdom and the experience he's had. So then 1 Peter 4, 7 and 8, Jesus, Peter says to the people he's writing to, the church, the end of all things, is at hand, therefore be self-controlled, sober-minded for the sake of your...

Above all, keep yourself, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. So be sober-minded, it's the same word as being alert that Jesus said earlier on.

[ 23 : 49 ] Be alert, keep praying. And now, this is Peter, having learned that harrowing lesson, he now passes it on to others. And also 1 Peter 5, where he says, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not on your combustible will, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly.

And it goes on to say, for love covers a multitude of sins. And he knew that absolutely from his own experience. So I'm going to close just by asking the question, what about Jesus and us?

Where do you fit into the story today? Or do I fit into the story? As it gives us the living word and the account of the living word in our lives. Well, remembering that we have much, much more privilege than Peter, because we have the story, the finished story, we've got the Bible completed, we've got all the epistles, we've got the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus, we've got the giving of the Holy Spirit, we've got far more than Peter had.

What is it, with all our privilege, what is Jesus saying to us in our ongoing relationship with Christ? And if you're not a Christian, what is Jesus saying to you? Well, for us as Christians, I think firstly saying, never stop listening to Jesus, you know, in the Bible, His living word.

That's what Peter stopped listening to Jesus. And we mustn't do that, we have all Scripture. And it's not a dull book, it's not a dead book, and it's not a far away book, because all Scripture is God breathed, it's living.

[ 25 : 19 ] And it teaches us, it speaks to us, it comes into our experience, and it's there to encourage and rebuke and bring us to that living faith in Jesus Christ, John's gospel.

See, I've written these things so that people might believe. They'll learn about His, when we stop listening to Him in His Word, then we get a distorted view of Jesus, and we get, just get a big Santa Claus in His place, just get some big figment of our own imagination.

It's not the God of the Bible who speaks and reveals Himself, it's just some big kind of big character that we've just won, that we make up. It's not like that. It's the living God who reveals Himself in His Word.

And as we, if our Bible is closed, then we misunderstand His nature, we misunderstand our own hearts, and we misunderstand other Christians. Meditate on it, apply it, soak your life in the Bible. And that's one of the reasons that we've taken to the city groups on a Wednesday night being application of the sermon and the passage we've read on a Sunday, because we don't just want to keep feeding and do Bible studies if we're not taking time to meditate and think and apply and make them personal through prayer and through the Spirit of God.

[ 26 : 39 ] Never stop listening to Jesus. And I ask the question, do you sense a distance between yourself and Jesus today? You bruised, you feel brokenhearted, you feel God is far from you, He's not answering, or maybe you're just not praying, prayerless.

You've stopped watching and praying. All I can say is just to the Jesus to watch and pray, watch and pray. If I die tonight, I've left you with that, watch and pray.

That's the greatest advice I could give. And can I also ask you spiritually to sense His look? I just want to be a strange thing to say, to sense His look. Now, Jesus looked at Peter and it was what brought the conviction now.

I know we don't have Jesus looking at us physically today, but there's no doubt that He's part of our lives and He looks us in different ways.

Sometimes it's through a word in the Bible, sometimes it's through a sermon, sometimes it'll be through what someone says to us, sometimes it might be providence, something that happens in our lives.

[ 27 : 40 ] It's just like a look from Jesus which says, have you forgotten me? Have you denied me? And it's a redeeming look and it's to bring us back, to bring us back in repentance.

Yes, it'll maybe bring tears to us, but it's healing tears. And He said, get back to Him, get back to me and get back to my people because that's where safety is and that's where growth is and that's where protection is and encouragement and power.

So sense His look. And then remember, lastly, that His gentle restoration also has grit. Okay, can I say that?

That Jesus' gentle restoration in our lives also has grit as part of it. So Jesus will say to us as we come back, and all of us need to repent, all of us are needing to come back to Jesus to a greater or lesser degree in our day-to-day living.

He says to us, it's okay. I know and I love you and I want you back. But He will also, within that great grace, reflect some grit of love and say, move from this place because it's terrible for you and because it's damaging for you, for my name as a Christ as God and for others around you.

[ 29 : 10 ] Remember that, that He's pulling us back and might even have allowed us to go into that place in order to see what a dark and terrible place it is. But He says, look, just as He does with Peter at the breakfast, He says, look, I've chosen you, I've gifted you, I've got work for you to do, I love you.

Go shepherd others. Watch and pray. Carry my cross. Use your experience. No experience is wasted. It's not an excuse to drift and fall away, but He will use that as He draws us back into His light.

It's a dark place to be, to be away from Jesus. We want to be in the light. And so He's saying, live out, watch and pray. Just live out. You live out.

You live out in your week today. I got to live out in the study downstairs or whatever else I'm going to be. Live out watching and praying daily. Make it part of who you are and what you do.

The great thing is we're works in progress and He'll never let us go. And He excels in restoration work. That's what He does. He's great. And if you're not a Christian, you need restoration.

[ 30 : 19 ] And as Christians, we need to keep on being restored. He excels in that. That's what His great gift is. Watch and pray. Remember that as long as you live, because if you sleep spiritually, if you stop listening and stop praying, your heart will be bruised and broken.

And it needn't be like that for us as Christians. And if you're not a Christian, I'm just asking, who is Jesus to you?

What does He mean to you? All this is sounded a bit fairy-fairy and a bit weird. Well, who is Jesus? Are you going to challenge yourself to find out who Jesus is?

Just because we can't see Him, does that make Him not real? Or is He not important enough? But, you know, we read that in Catechism. He's coming back. He's died on the cross for our sins, to restore our relationship with Him, to give us life, to give us fullness, where we look for it in other places.

And He's coming back to take His children to be with Him. And you don't want to be on the outside. You don't want to be in darkness that day. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that You would help us to understand You better, to know that as we learn about You from Your Word and as we pray, that we understand You and we understand through Your Spirit, we understand ourselves and we understand one another.

[ 31 : 46 ] And as Peter went on to teach in his epistle that we forgive one another because love covers a multitude of sins, because we've been forgiven so much. I've been forgiven so much.

What right have I?

What right have I to stand in judgment on others and not give forgiveness where I have been given so much? May we see and know that and understand it. Help us to learn from Peter not to go down the same road of brokenness and distance and betrayal.

But help us to learn to stay close to Jesus and understand that with all our questions and difficulties and doubts, fears, confusion about the will and the mind of God, who wouldn't be, He's God and we are not. Help us to stick close and know His love and know His grace and know His goodness.

Lord, we pray for that and we ask that You would help us to live that in our lives today for Jesus' sake. Amen.