

## Darkest Before Dawn

Mar 14:27-52, Mar 14:66-72

To The Village Church, March 26, 2006

Main Idea: Sin abounds so that the grace of Jesus Christ may much more abound, so be patient with yourself and one another, having faith for change.

Meditation:

*Roosters* (excerpt)  
by Elizabeth Bishop

...  
Old holy sculpture  
could set it all together  
in one small scene, past and future:

Christ stands amazed,  
Peter, two fingers raised  
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.

But in between  
a little cock is seen  
carved on a dim column in the travertine,

explained by *gallis canit*;  
*flet Petrus* underneath it.  
There is inescapable hope,

yes, and there are Peter's tears  
run down our chancicleer's  
sides and gem his spurs.

Tear-encrusted thick  
as a medieval relic  
he waits. Poor Peter, heart-sick,

still cannot guess  
those cock-a-doodles yet might bless,  
his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness,

...

Post-Sermon Song Theme: Oh the wonder of His grace.

Benediction:

May the overwhelming grace of Jesus Christ swallow up your sin and the sin of those around you.

Charge:

Go forth into your city, with hope for self and one another, looking for the dawn that His grace brings in the darkness of sin.

## Darkest Before Dawn

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## I. The Darkest Denial

### A. Descending into Darkness of the Day before Christ's Death

1. With all due respect to the Church Calendar, Palm Sunday-Good Friday-Easter doesn't get us a lot of the story. We can, this year, in more detail. Over the next three weeks, we'll looking at the events leading up to Jesus' death.
2. This is great but also depressing. The story is dark. This latter half of chapter 14 describes the climax of a number of themes in the Passion narrative:
  - the betrayal by Judas,
  - The final success of the Sanhedrin in arresting Jesus by stealth,
  - Also, it is the climax of the disciples' moral failure.
3. Especially Simon Peter, has reached the lowest point in the revelation of his character. He failed the Christ in private by falling asleep and he failed him in public. It was very dark.
4. But looking at them can be medicine to our souls. See mediation, an excerpt from a poem by Elizabeth Bishop, called *Roosters*, about the events of this passage, the denial of Peter and the rooster crows. Elizabeth Bishop is currently the most widely taught American woman poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I've included this passage, her description of how a medieval carving would capture it, not just for her power of memorable expression, but for her insight into this story:
  - "he waits. Poor peter, heart-sick, still cannot guess, those cock-a-doodles yet might bless..."

### B. Simon Peter's Denial

1. Jesus was having a fake trial inside at which He was called to be silent and He was. Meanwhile Peter was under a real trial outside at which he was called to speak and he would not.
2. Three chances, in vv66-72, at the end, he has a chance to be brave. He couldn't stop the trial. But all that was required of him was to speak the truth. "Yes, I am one of Jesus Christ's." Three times he is questioned. Three times he denies it. There is no way to explain that as, "Well, in the heat of the moment, I lied."
3. What moment? This was taking place over a whole night! The cock crowing marked the time passing.<sup>1</sup> He was failing Jesus for hours, from about 10pm to maybe about 3am, probably the time of the denials.
4. And the detail of v71 is related through the source of this gospel, Peter Himself. He wants us to know that it wasn't an ordinary denial. He calls down curses on

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<sup>1</sup> Some say the chapter is structured by 4 Roman night watches: 14:17 –In the Evening; 14:41 –Around midnight, Betrayal; 14:72 –Cock crow, denial of Peter; 15:1 –Early Morning, brought to Pilate.

Himself: “May God strike me dead if I have anything to do with this Jesus of Nazareth.”

### **C. Darker still while proclaiming his loyalty**

1. But it gets darker still. It is one thing to do something terrible, like deny a friend, a mentor, a teacher, a Saviour. It is 10X worse to have proclaimed your loyalty a few hours before.
2. And it is darker still to have a false loyalty that is a complete betrayal of your Saviour’s mission.
3. **v47**-“One of those standing near drew his sword...” Who took up the sword?
  - From John we learn that it was Peter who swung the sword.
  - Unusual, in this gospel, to not record his failure. Could it be Mark’s decision? No.
  - I speculate the omission comes from a long time preaching this story. He told the story over and over in Rome and watched the young men’s eyes narrow. He had to explain: It wasn’t courage! He didn’t name himself as the one swinging the sword to forestall any claim to bravery.
  - “Had I stayed awake, I would have understood what was going on. I might have served Him in His suffering.”
  - So, the story in written form, not being around to explain, the story becomes, “there was a small attempt at fighting among us which Jesus quickly stifled.”
4. Whether that is the explanation of the omission or not, this was one of the key moments of that night in the transformation of Peter’s view of himself. Of what he was and what he needed.

## II. The Dawn is Brought on by the Darkness

It was a dark night, especially because of Simon Peter.

### A. Darkest Before the Dawn

1. And I have to say that I'm afraid that this is how it happens. It is darkest before the dawn. People are often darkest right before they see the light.
  - Sometimes people's bad behaviour is what pushes them over some kind of edge into realizing that they need God.
  - Sometimes the Holy Spirit allows us to be at our very worst in order to spur us on to the meaning of holiness.
  - Sometimes it is being confronted in our flagrant faithlessness that wakes us up to run and found ourselves upon Christ.
  - Talking with some folks this week about how we must view ourselves in order to really benefit from Christ. They found it all so pessimistic. I appreciated their honesty, but was sorrowed because I realized that if they didn't see it, their lives might progress to some real darkness before they did.
2. I'm sorry. That is often the way it goes. If you understand what I am saying, you should feel a pain in your chest.
3. Indeed it is God's hand, often, that strikes the shepherd. That reveals to people what they must see in themselves.
  - **V27**-When Jesus says, "Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered," He is quoting **Zec 13:7**. If you go back and read, you'll see that it is by God's command that the shepherd is struck. So they commentators say, if they are irreverent, "Well, Jesus is quoting out of context," and if they are reverent, "Well, Jesus just is taking this as a general principle."
  - No. He was looking at Simon Peter this night with great eyes of love and knew what it was going to take to complete his transformation. So He realized, "God will have to strike the shepherd to show you yourself."
4. God will allow sin because it feeds grace. It magnifies grace. It awakens grace to rise. Sin is like an earthquake that pushes the tidal wave of grace.

### B. Made Naked in order to be Clothed

1. Let's say it another way: Sometimes we need to be made naked in order to be clothed.
2. It wasn't just the young man who fled naked, in vv51-52. Everyone there had their souls' covering removed. This one young man was a representative of all of them. Every one of Jesus' disciples had the naked shame of their faithlessness exposed. Those who saw the man fleeing naked must have said, that is just like what is happening to me.

3. And, especially Peter must have felt that, which is probably why this incident with the young man is remembered to us in his gospel.
4. It is how our hearts get exposed. Apply this, friends. Reading **v71**, how Peter, in the presence of hostile questioners, could swear and invoke a curse on himself, that he didn't know Jesus, should make you question how much of what you believe, how much of your loyalty to Christ, is because you're in an environment that supports it?
5. Sometimes God needs to remove our "environmental supports" to show us what the answer to that question is, who we really are. And it is like taking away our linen garments. What you are willing to confess when challenged at the water-cooler is more revealing of your heart than what you are willing to confess in church.
6. One of the advantages of this phase of the life of the Village Church, being small, is that there is less of a sense of a great crowd of witnesses being all around you. You go into a large auditorium, filled up, you feel, "There are so many people, this must be true!" I love big churches, but people in a smaller church like this, have less peer support to believe what they believe. It is not as comfortable, or in some ways, as fun, but, in many of our hearts, it may make for more truthfulness about what we believe.
7. But God needs to expose our naked shame to clothe us with His righteousness. And that is just what He did with Peter.

### **C. The Defining Moment of Peter's Life**

1. **V72** –Let's go back to Peter. The last words of this passage, "kai . evpibalw.n e;klaien" are so viscerally graphic, literally "and throwing down, he was weeping", that they don't make much sense.<sup>2</sup> Some Scribes, in copying this manuscript through time, change it to "kai . evpibalw.n e;klausen" "throwing down, he wept" or to "kai . h'rxato klai, ein", "and he began to/went to weep."
2. The scribes as the mss of Mark got recopied tried to make some sense out of that phrase, "throwing down, he was weeping." But you cannot make sense out of it. Nor can you make sense out of God's grace.
3. Some of you are grappling with the forgiveness that Christ offers. You say, "I want to feel this forgiveness, I want to understand. I just don't." This incident is what you must peer into. And peer into it deeply, until your eyes tear.
4. It was this moment when Simon Peter's life changed. Some might think, oh the turning point in Peter's life was when he confessed Jesus as the Christ and Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> BDAG: "Prob. Mk intends the reader to understand a wild gesture connected with lamentation."

said, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” No. That was not the turning point, the defining moment in Peter’s greatness. This was. **V72**.

5. Because it was at this moment that Simon Peter threw down his life. And said, “Enough. I cannot serve you Christ. I have nothing to bring. You must serve me. I cannot keep awake. I cannot keep my sword. I cannot keep my word. I cannot keep my faith.”
6. I am utterly dependent upon your grace. For, in me, dwells no good thing. He threw down his life. And he wept. Yes, he “was a-weeping.” He wept like he had never wept before.
7. Sin abounded. And grace was more than its match. This is what darkness turning into dawn looks like. In the world of God’s grace, the darkness *brings* the dawn.

#### **D. Amazing Grace available through Christ being struck**

1. “Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.” The judgment must fall on One close to God, says Zechariah in the same verse. Not a quote out of context.
2. Because the earthquake of our sin, judgment smashed upon Christ. Because He buckled, the tidal wave of grace can flow over the darkest of deeds in ourselves and those around us.
3. So this explains the way God allows our lives often to go.

#### **E. Illustration: The Bushy-tailed Coming to New York City**

1. I’m afraid, this is the way it works with many of you in coming to New York.
2. I get these letters, some times from parents. And they are letters of gratitude, by which I am very encouraged. “Thank you so much for being here. I so appreciate your presence in the city. Because my son is there. My daughter is there.”
3. And I can almost hear the concern in their words. They are scared of what is going to happen to you. And if a good church is there to try to help them engage the city, that may make the difference. And in many cases it does.
4. But, also, many times, it doesn’t. And the reason it doesn’t is because the young bushy tailed believer comes to big New York. And he is ill equipped because he was raised in a Christian home and has kept out of trouble.
  - And you say, “What? Isn’t that a good thing? Isn’t it a good thing to be raised in a Christian home?” Well, it might be. But it might not be.
  - It might not be if, deep down, you think of yourself as a good girl. You’re smart. You don’t fall for this debauchery stuff. You’re a good girl.
  - But you also have a cool streak. You’re here in the city because you know better than those provincial Heartland-ers. You have a knowingness.

5. If that is you, what happens when you come to the city. With all your good Christian background, you come here and promptly make a mess of your life. You fall flat on you face in some way.
6. And when do we see you at TVC? When you have come to the point of doing something you never thought you would do.
7. You saw it in a movie or you saw it in your older siblings who left home. And you said to yourself at some point, "I would never do that. Yeah, yeah, I'm a sinner, blah, blah, blah. But I don't do those things."
8. And then the day comes, that cold New York City day, when you do it. The next morn, you are looking at yourself in the mirror. You say "Who have I become?"
9. Then maybe you realize, "Its not who I have become, it is who I was all along." And if you do, then that is the dawn. Dawn, brought by darkness, has come.
10. And then we see you at the Village Church, really understanding how much of a sinner you are, and really ready, to receive the finished work of Jesus Christ on your behalf. You know your need for grace.
11. Many of our lives are the best illustration of this sermon.

#### **F. Illustration: Children Behaving Badly**

1. It often goes that way with our young children, does it not? Sometimes it takes them pressing the limit farther and farther until, whamo, they do something that even shocks themselves, against their brother or sister. And then, they know, the condition of their soul is serious.
2. Understand this and it will make you a good parent. Sometimes you see it in little cycles. Sometimes in a big cycle. Both of them should be calls to you to understand the grace of Jesus Christ.
3. It is my story too. When I saw how I treated my girlfriend, I realized I needed a Saviour. Somehow, this philosophy I was living by, "doesn't matter what you do so long as you don't hurt anybody," was hurting others tremendously. My treatment of her caused me to see myself as I was.

#### **G. Sin so grace may abound?**

1. So what do you want to ask? Some of you have been listening and all this has raised a question in your mind:
  - So should I sin some more so that grace may abound? Don't be an idiot.
2. Doing what God doesn't want you to do is death. God is so powerful that He can turn evil to good. But He won't be tempted.

### III. Doing Dawnbreaking

Now

#### A. How Jesus is calm in the Face of their Failures

1. This is good news, believe it or not. This “Darkest before the Dawn” insight. This is how to finally have patience with people.
2. A few weeks ago: God’s longsuffering—how the Landlord in the parable seemed soft—not bringing justice swiftly enough for our liking.
3. Well, look at Jesus in this passage. You’ll get the same feeling. Note Jesus in **vv27-28**.
  - He knows it all beforehand.
  - He doesn’t seem too bothered by it.
  - Astonishing: considering how it reflected on Him.
4. His discipling appears to be an utter failure. Some teacher. Some plan of preparation for this moment. Remember all these sermons about how He was preparing them for what was coming in Jerusalem? All this attention to get ready?
  - His program was a complete failure. In this passage, it all falls apart. It all unravels.
  - Betrayed, handed over, simply for money, by his treasurer. Gee, how much of an effect did the great Jesus’ teaching about money have on Judas? His own treasurer hands him over.
  - Utter failure: Deserted by His closest men. In the moment of truth, they all just run away.
  - And flatly and repeatedly denied by His chief lieutenant, His rock. His hope for the Kingdom on Earth. Peter, the rock. What rock?
  - “May God strike me dead if I have anything to do with this man, Jesus!”
5. Do you see what this makes Jesus out to be? An utter failure with the people He tried His hardest to train.
6. “Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.” Talk about scattering sheep, If this was an equivalent church situation, imagine the pastor in handcuffs and complete dissension and abandonment. People all around disillusioned and losing their faith in God.
7. So why is He not bothered about it? Oh, He is upset in the Garden, because He is suffering and He needs their help, and they fail Him there, but about the overall denial and desertion, look at how matter of fact He is. I am sure the He said **v28** with gravity but, it is essentially: “O.K. you, the sheep are going to scatter and fall away, but I’ll meet you in Galilee, after the show.” “See ya there.”

8. How come? Because Jesus Christ understood grace. How it feeds on sin. How sin makes it stronger. How the Darkness brings the Dawn.

## **B. Patience/Expectation with Self and One Another**

1. Understanding the grace of Jesus Christ. allows you to do Dawn-breaking yourself.
2. You get this, you can, at last, be patient with one another. No matter how hopeless the person is making the situation, you can be hopeful with one another. When you see those you love do wrong, what should you think?
3. The more sin you see, the more hope you can have. It could be the darkest darkness that is about to bring the dawn.
4. It allows you to bite your lip, hold off on your tirade, to love your friend, your husband, your wife, your child.
5. It allows you to calm down and have patience with your children, to understand the way Christ's grace can work in their lives. And be ready to talk about Christ's atonement for sin when the moment comes.
6. That is how to do Dawn-breaking.
7. It allows you to grasp forgiveness even for yourself. Understanding Jesus, here, with Peter, should allow you to receive God's forgiveness for those things that plague you, make you feel unforgivable. His grace is more than enough for those things you've done as well.
8. If God has allowed you to be stripped, like that young man, shown to be naked, if you are come, as Peter has, to the pint of throwing your life down, then come now and meet Him in Galilee. The One close to God has been struck, and so is waiting with forgiveness for you there.

