

**International Sunday School Lesson**  
**Study Notes**  
**March 20, 2016**

**Lesson Text: Mark 14:26-31, 66-72**  
**Lesson Title: Struggling Faith**

**Introduction**

You can walk into almost any Christian book store or do a world wide web search and find material designed to help you when you struggle with faith. Some of the direction and counsel is biblical, some is not. Most will tell you to search your life to find the root cause of your doubts and struggles. Others will caution you to evaluate your expectations. Maybe you were expecting too much from the Lord. Of course prayer is always recommended and if your faith does not recover in a limited amount of time you may need to confess some sin in your life.

It is safe to say Peter is one of the most colorful and identifiable of all our Lord's disciples. Most of us see a reflection of ourselves in Peter's actions and words. Peter could say the most profound things at times and then utter something absolutely ridiculous in the same breath. He is the one disciple who truly shows us what it means to have faith. Sometimes his faith is strong and sometimes his faith struggles. The same is true of every true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew Peter's faith would be tested. Job's faith was tested. On one day he lost all he had, all ten of his children. David had a day when instead of being in battle with his men, he was on the rooftop of his palace and saw Bathsheba. David's faith was tested but he failed. Joseph found himself in the hands of Potiphar's wife. Joseph's faith was tested yet he passed the test.

There are days of testing when testing comes in waves, not just by one, but two's and three's. This is a realistic assessment of what discipleship means, because although we have been brought into union and communion with Jesus Christ, made heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, the sin still resides within; so the good we would, we do not, and the evil we would not do, that we find we do; that the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary, one to the other.

Through his struggling faith, Peter is learning something about who he really is. He is learning about the nature of the way in which we make promises to God based upon a reliance upon ourselves rather than an utter dependence on God.

**Peter's Faith (Mark 14:26-31)**

## Verse 26

“And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

The first part of our lesson text in Mark 14:26 takes place as the disciples leave the upper room and go “into the mount of Olives.” Immediately after the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Upper Room, the disciples “sung an hymn” and left. The “hymn” was most likely the hymns of praise recorded in Psalm 115-118. The singing itself was more in the nature of a chant, for this is the way the Jews sang in their worship of God.

After singing a hymn, Jesus and His disciples move outside toward the “mount of Olives.” The “mount of Olives” is part of a small range of mountains running north to south through central and southern Palestine. As the disciples arrived on the western slope of the mount they were able to overlook Jerusalem, where the most important events in history were about to take place. It was indeed a time when faith was needed.

## Verse 27

“And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”

Once the singing had ended, Jesus told His disciples, “All ye shall be offended because of me this night...” The Greek word for “offended” is *skandalizo* {skan-dal-id-zo} which means “to entrap, trip up.” It is our English word “scandalize.”

Almost every time this word is used in the New Testament, it relates to something that happens to negatively affect the believer’s walk with Christ. To be “offended” meant Peter and “all” the disciples would disassociate themselves with Jesus because they were afraid His lot would become their lot.

“For it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered” is a quotation from Zechariah 13:7. Zechariah’s prophesy would be fulfilled as Jesus was smitten and His disciples were “offended” and “scattered.” The word “scattered” means “to dissipate or separate.” Jesus saw their scattering as a stumbling, a struggle, and failure of faith.

*Note: Human beings are weak; they fail. Their intentions may be noble and their desires may be admirable. But they are still only sinners saved by grace.*

## Verse 28

“But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.”

Before Peter and the others failed, Jesus in love and mercy encouraged them to return to Him after His resurrection. Jesus' words were blunt and to the point. They would fail. But now He is just as blunt. He would "go before you into Galilee." "Go before you" means Jesus would be leading the way for His disciples.

Sometimes we forget our Lord's words of hope and assurance when our faith is struggling. Our failures dominate our thinking and living. The good news is no matter how terrible the failure, we can repent and know Christ will be there to lead us on in His will.

### Verse 29

"But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I."

Peter takes issue with Jesus' statement and says, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." That is a big statement! Peter meant he would die for Jesus no matter what others did. Peter's pride blinded him from realizing Jesus' statement was true. Peter has an unrealistic assessment of His weakness and the power of indwelling sin that lies within each one of our hearts. That is something all of us need to realize (Proverbs 28:16; 1 Corinthians 10:12).

*Question: What might have been Peter's response to the Lord if he had thought about the Scripture in Zechariah instead of looking at himself as a man who would not fail? Faith always struggles when Scripture is overlooked!*

### Verse 30

"And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."

Jesus' responded to Peter's assertion he would never be "offended" by basically saying, "You are right Peter. You will not deny me once; you will deny me three times." As we will see in the following verses, that is exactly what Peter did. He denied the Lord three times.

"Deny" means "to disown." Peter would "disown" the Lord, not once, twice, but three times "before the cock crowed twice." Before sunrise Peter would publicly disown the Lord, three times. There is no trivial happening here. It is serious to "disown" Jesus. It is a severe test of Peter's faith. The Lord had told Peter, "*Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat*" (Luke 22:31).

Satan is in the business of attempting to disrupt genuine faith. The Lord is allowing Satan to "sift" Peter during these difficult days so Peter will be a stronger disciple and be able to strengthen the brethren. It is only when we

realize we are no match for the enemy and totally trust the Lord to help us that we are then able to help others. If you are struggling with your faith rest assured the Lord has the strength you need to recover and be a blessing to others.

### Verse 31

“But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.”

You would think Peter and the other disciples would have humbled themselves when they heard the Lord’s repeated warning about their impending failure. However, Peter “spake the more vehemently.” It means he strongly protested and challenged the Lord’s words with powerful words and gestures. The other disciples got caught up in Peter’s fiery rejection of Jesus’ prediction. They “all” said they would never deny the Lord even if they had to die with Christ.

The Lord said not more. Sadly, the cocks crowing would prove Him to be right. God’s Word is always right.

### **Peter’s Failure (Mark 14:66-72)**

#### Verse 66-70

“And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.”

The fulfillment of the Lord’s predictions concerning Peter’s denial began with a young girl outside of Caiaphas’ hall who said, “Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.” The young girl “looked” upon Peter and had no doubt she had seen him with Jesus. “Looked” means “to inspect intently.” She knew he had been with Jesus.

Peter’s faith fails at the voice of a young girl. She has seen him in the company of the disciples. She has seen him somewhere in Jerusalem, perhaps during this week when the disciples have been making day trips into the temple area. She has definitely seen him with the disciples, and says so. However, Peter denies it. He denies understanding anything she is talking about.

Peter lied when he says, “I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.” He also feigns ignorance. Attempting to escape further scrutiny, Peter leaves the immediate area and goes to the “porch.” It never helps when we distance ourselves from Jesus. It only makes matters worse.

The “cock” crows the first time reminding Peter of the Lord’s words but it did not keep him from denying the Lord the second time. Another “maid” sees Peter and says, “This is one of them.” This second accusation is essentially the same as the first. It implies Peter must answer for his association with Jesus.

Perhaps these young women see Peter’s face in the glow of the fire as Peter is warming himself. The text indicates Peter is identified as being with Jesus through his Galilean dialect. A group of people hearing the accusations from the maids and listening to Peter are persistent, “Surely thou art one of them.” He is caught again. Can you imagine the thoughts going through Peter’s mind? It is hard to struggle in faith and not be noticed.

#### Verse 71

“But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.”

Peter is caught. He responds by “cursing and swearing.” “Cursing” and “swearing” does not mean Peter is using four letter words or profanity. He is calling down curses on his accusers. Peter is talking like a fisherman again, not a follower of Christ. Surely his “cursing” and “swearing” would prove he was not a follower of Christ. He lied again, “I know not this man of whom ye speak.”

#### Verse 72

“And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.”

When Peter hears the “cock crow” the second time, he “called to mind the word that Jesus saith unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.” The Lord’s warning came back to his mind, and he stands guilty and ashamed of a struggling and failing faith.

“And when he thought thereon, he wept” has within it thoughts of remorse and thoughts of hope. As he thinks about what he has done he has remembered too late to turn back the denials. All he can do now is “weep.” In his “weeping” there is hope. Perhaps he went back to the Garden of Gethsemane and wept. Luke tells us, “*And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord...And Peter went out, and wept bitterly*” (Luke

22:61-62). Jesus looked eyes on Peter. Their eyes met and failure turned to repentance and repentance turned to hope.

What is the difference between Peter and Judas? The difference is Peter repents. Peter breaks down with tears of repentance and seeks forgiveness from his Savior. The beautiful thing about this story is that Jesus wrapped His arms around Peter, forgave him his sin, sent him forth again. This is the Peter who, on the Day of Pentecost six weeks from now, will be preaching an astonishing sermon in boldness in the very city in which he denied the Lord. This is the man who ultimately will die for Jesus outside the city of Rome.

## **Conclusion**

Spiritual growth comes in *faith* and *failures*. For most of us our failures will never be as public as Peter's. But you and I know they are just as real. Had Peter lived in our day, the preachers would have marked him off the list. He would have been removed from his Sunday school class and never asked to lead in silent prayer. In the vestibule of the synagogue people would have been saying, "Did you hear what Peter did Thursday night?" He would have been blocked from most Christian's Facebook page.

Lest we judge Peter too quickly, be thankful his story is in the Bible and not ours. There are times when our faith struggles and we deny rather than confess we are followers of Christ. Times of crisis should be the showcase for our faith. After all, that is what Christ has called us to do. That is why He called Peter and why He called you.

Peter survived his struggling faith because of Christ's purpose, patience, and plan. The same Christ who saved and called Peter will help you survive when your faith struggles.

Amen.