

Overconfidence

John 13:36-38

Snowflakes. That's what we call people now who seem to have no coping mechanisms, people who seem to be entirely unable to handle any of the problems that the world might bring upon them. They are seen to be overly-emotional, easily offended, and unable to deal with opposing opinions. They have a hard time accepting anything outside of their comfort zone, and because they are overly sensitive and entirely self-absorbed, they are very fragile and easily distressed. Snowflakes.

And then there are people exactly opposite all of that, the strong and the tough, those who put up with anything and think they can endure anything—because they are so strong and mighty! And although they aren't fragile and needy people, they have another very dangerous and damaging characteristic. They are self-reliant to a fault, and they are in danger because they are so overconfident. They think themselves to be invincible. And while the snowflakes make no effort to hide or conceal any of their many insecurities, the ones who are overconfident deny the very existence of insecurity, making them vulnerable to other great dangers. Namely the danger of pride, the danger of a form of self-reliance that ultimately denies both the power and compassion of God. After all, if you really are self-reliant, you don't have need for God either!

Peter was one of those men. Overconfident. Self-reliant. Proud. And it is that overconfidence that we will focus on this morning. Indeed, I'm devoting a whole sermon to that single subject because it is so crucial and appropriate for us all even today. Overconfidence. Self-absorbed, proud, self-reliant overconfidence. And the poster child is, of course, Peter.

I will make no excuses for his behavior, especially along the lines of, "that's just his personality." As if we can excuse sin simply by referring an aberrant personality. This is Peter, this is how he behaves, consistently, and there is nothing praiseworthy about it. So our focus today, the example for our study, is a negative example. You should study this event, and study Peter's reactions and responses in order to identify his fault in the hope that you will not imitate him.

Though many, many do just that! They hide their fears and insecurities by pretending themselves to be strong. To those people, this passage possesses a sober warning, a warning with edifying benefit for all of us.

So what's Peter's problem? Maybe he's just OCD, to use a popular current label. Maybe he's just a type A personality, to use a popular psychological diagnosis. That's just the way he is, impulsive. But then we make excuses for him. We imply things like, "he's got a good heart." Or, "He just can't help himself." "That's just the way God made him," we say, in order to shift much of the blame to God himself!

And we appreciate some of the good fruit in his life. We acknowledge that he's a strong leader, an overachiever, a perfectionist. And we say all of that as if they are good things! Instead of pointing out the foolishness of Peter that Jesus points out so personally and so painfully.

So where does it start, this overconfidence? What keeps it going? What is the fuel that keeps this awful fire burning? Let me begin to answer that question by saying something you might not expect at this point, but is, I believe, deeply embedded in the words of this text. Namely,

I. OVERCONFIDENCE IS FUELED BY NOT LISTENING WELL.

Here is Peter, able to think to himself that he can handle anything and everything. He hears what Jesus has to say to him, but he doesn't listen very well.

Let's review just a little. Remember where we are in the story, near the end of Jesus' life. He's with his disciples, the day before his crucifixion. And Jesus has already predicted the sinful betrayal of Judas, and he has taught them the meaning of servanthood by washing their feet. He has given his disciples the new commandment to love one another, emphasizing all of the duties of the all of the commandments in that simple, focused duty of love. But in the process of teaching all of those things, Jesus said this to his disciples,

John 13:33 "Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you."

Jesus will be leaving his disciples soon, an obvious reference to his death. He tells them of the separation that will follow his death, "Where I am going, you cannot come." And Peter misses the whole point because he doesn't listen well to what Jesus is saying. He hears Jesus say, "I am leaving," but that's all he hears. He misses the main point of Jesus' words, which do not focus on his death but upon what will happen after that.

v.36 "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."

Peter can only focus on the first half of that declaration. It is,

A. A focus upon only the present reality.

He missed the point about "afterward." He focused on what was "now." He is not willing to wait until "afterward." He wants to

follow Jesus NOW.

v.37

He missed the point of hope and expectation. He missed the prophecy of life itself. "You shall follow Me afterward." That's the message of Jesus. You SHALL follow me. Even to heaven itself, to life everlasting. But Peter doesn't listen to that. He only hears the words about the struggles of the present reality of life.

How easy that is to do. And how understandable. But how wrong it is! How wrong it is to focus only upon the present struggles of life. How wrong it is to hear in Jesus' words only reference to the present, without reference to the glory of the future.

Jesus will go on in chapter 14 to explain himself further, but Peter should have understood his meaning here. Even so, we get this further explanation,

John 14:19 "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? 20 Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. 21 A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

Even more specifically,

John 14:31 "Do you now believe? 32 Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because

the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

There is hope. In this world, you will have trouble. Even unto death. But Jesus has overcome this world. That’s what Peter was unwilling to hear, unwilling to understand, when Jesus spoke to him in our text this morning. He was unwilling to hear anything about the hope of the future, because he was so entrapped by the struggles of the present. And that is a danger we all face, every day that we live on this earth in this age.

If we look ahead to Peter’s own letters, much later in life, we can see that Peter did, finally learn this lesson well. So much so that he could write these words,

1 Peter 4:12 “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”

Such faith requires a focus on something beyond this world’s fleeting troubles, a focus on something future, not simply the present reality. And as we read John 13, Peter did not yet have such faith. He did not listen well. Thus his declaration of faithfulness to Jesus was really nothing but vain overconfidence.

That overconfidence had a second focus as well, an even more insidious one. Not just a wrong focus only on the present reality, but for Peter, it was obviously,

B. A focus upon selfish ambition.

His declaration in verse 37 is not a triumphant proclamation of true faith. It was a disclosure of his own selfishness! “Lord, why

can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

Remember, this is the disciple who wanted the honor of sitting at Jesus’ right hand, the place of honor. This is the disciple who wanted to be known as the greatest, needing to be taught by Jesus’ own rebuke,

Mark 10:43 “...whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Peter wanted his own reputation to be exalted. He sought to advance his own ambition for greatness. And so the words Jesus spoke to him were ignored. He didn’t listen. He could only respond, selfishly, “Lord, why can I not follow You now?”

There was, of course, something else deeply embedded in Peter’s failure to listen well to Jesus. It is deeply embedded in our hearts as well. It is the great spiritual danger of pride. So Peter’s example is a useful warning to all of us. What we see in Peter we need to be able to see in ourselves.

II. OVERCONFIDENCE IS GROUNDED IN PRIDE.

Again, I am giving Peter no slack. No excuses. Because his pride is so abundantly evident. He doesn’t just fail to listen to what Jesus says in verse 36. He isn’t guilty simply of being careless by not listening well. There is a rejection of Jesus’ words here. A conscious, willful, deliberate rejection that brings out,

A. The blind foolishness of pride.

Just look at what Peter promises.

v.37 “I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

Actually, if you know the story, Peter would. He, too, would be

killed. Martyred for his faith. But here we see nothing but pride. An arrogance that produces blindness. A blind foolishness. “I will lay down my life for Your sake.” Clearly, Peter is not ready to live out such a commitment, as becomes obvious by his denial of Jesus. He is overconfident in his commitment, because he fails to count the cost. He fails to see the reality of what he promises. He fails to see his own weakness and his own foolishness. He fails to see himself with any sort of humility at all. He bursts out with nothing but self-reliant pride, “I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

Jesus’ words in Luke 14 are very appropriate in this context, a warning about the need to count the cost,

Luke 14:28 “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. 33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

That is the cost, dear friends. That is the cost of being a follower of Jesus. That is the cost of discipleship. You must forsake all that you have. You must deny yourself. You must take up your cross and die to yourself. You must put to death this awful, awful plague of pride. You must identify and reject the blind foolishness of that pride.

The gospel is offered to you as a free gift. You do nothing to earn that gift of eternal life. You do nothing yourself to earn or

merit the forgiveness of sins. It is a gift of grace, not of works, lest anyone should boast. I offer that gift to you freely, without condition. Just the invitation, and the command, to accept that gift, to receive and accept Jesus as your savior and Lord. This is the gospel,

Rom. 10:9 “...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...13 For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.””

But with that invitation comes this warning against overconfident grounded in pride. You must count the cost, and give up your life if you would be a disciple of Jesus. So put to death that blind foolishness that so characterized Peter here. And with it, put to death,

B. The thoughtless impulsiveness of pride.

That is Peter’s flaw, his sin. His pride was revealed so clearly by the thoughtless commitment he makes, a commitment he is not about ready to fulfill. “I will lay down my life for Your sake.” Rather than count the cost, he is driven only by his impulsiveness. “I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

We know more of Peter’s response from Mark’s gospel, revealing more of this pride that is so easy to identify.

Mark 14:29 Peter said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.” 30 Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” 31 But he spoke more vehemently, “If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” And they all said likewise.”

Now, I hope you are willing to make such a commitment yourself, the willingness to take up your cross and die! The

commitment to lay down your life for Jesus. But I won't have you make that decision if you think that self-reliance is sufficient. I won't have you make that declaration if your commitment is nothing but a reckless impulsiveness. I won't have you make that declaration unless and until you first sit down and count the cost.

Will you lay down your life for Jesus? Will you take up your cross and follow him? These are Jesus' own words,

Mat. 16:24 "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

Christian, that is your calling. And that is your hope. To lose your life. To give up the goals and pursuits of your own life. To give up the pursuit of your own glory. And to seek after Jesus. To follow him in his death. So that you might then also follow him in his resurrection.

Beware of overconfidence, relying upon your own strength. Beware of overconfidence, fueled by your own sense of pride or importance. Just give up your life, and follow Jesus, no matter where that takes you. Even if it brings you suffering and harm in this present life.

This is how Paul put it, when he thought about all the things which were once a source of pride for himself,

Phil. 3:7 "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by

faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

One more point about Peter's overconfidence. It is an obvious one.

III. OVERCONFIDENCE IS EXPOSED BY GOD. v.38

This is a hard passage, because Jesus is being hard on Peter. But it is necessary. It was necessary for Peter to learn that he could not depend upon his own strength, and that when he did, he would fail! It is necessary for each one of us to learn that very same lesson.

So Jesus gives Peter,

A. A questioning rebuke to a thoughtless commitment.
v.38 "Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake?"

Will you really? In other words, "no you won't." You are not ready to fulfill such a commitment.

Now, I want to be a little bit careful here, because too many people today are too hesitant to make any commitment of any kind, because of this fear of failure. Some people, perhaps we can go back to that snowflake label, some people are simply unwilling to express any sort of commitment because they recognize their own weakness.

And that's not the solution that Jesus offers! The solution is

not to avoid any commitment, for surely Scripture often calls us to commitment. We are often called to make a resolution to obey the Lord, to walk in his ways. Indeed, you are called to lay down your life and be a disciple of Jesus.

But not thoughtlessly, in a way that trivializes the invitation of the gospel. So this question might readily be addressed to every one of you, “Will you lay down your life for My sake?” Will you? I urge you to give careful consideration to that question, even in the context of your life here this morning. “Will you lay down your life for Jesus’ sake?”

Surely, I call you to do so. I urge you to do so. Even as I proclaim to you the cost. It will cost you everything. Will you give up everything, and I mean everything, in order to follow Jesus?

And if you hear that challenge, and respond quickly in self-reliant pride that you are able to do so, then let this warn given to Peter be a warning to you as well, in order to humble your pride. It is,

B. A humbling prediction of utter failure.

v.38 “Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.”

Sometimes, it is your failure that rightly drives you to Christ. Sometimes, that failure is needed to do away with your pride. Sometimes, that failure is used by God to make you more careful, more attentive, more diligent. And certainly, more humble.

God hates the proud, and God hates pride.

Prov. 16:18 “Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.”

And that is the lesson for us this morning. It is the lesson of, 1 Cor. 10:12 “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

This isn’t meant to be discouraging. Anything but...Just humbling. And a warning against the self-reliance of human pride. And in that context, here is the encouragement of the gospel.

James 4:7 “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

1 Peter 5:5 “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”