The Unimaginable

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. You can be seated.

It's one of my favorite songs that we sing, such a great anthem of praise for us. I was thinking a moment ago, so, Marce, I've been married for 28 and a half years.
And so, in those 20 and a half years, I mean, just nearly every single Sunday that I've had the chance to preach the Word, she has been there and she has heard me preach more than anyone should have to.
Everything I write, whether it's in a book or a couple of places I write articles for, she reads and edits every single word I ever write.
We sometimes agree on edits. We sometimes disagree on edits. But it's part of the fun. For my dissertation eight years ago, she read and edited every word of 250 pages over and over and over again.
[1:16] And somebody asked me a couple of weeks ago, just kind of knowing it was a busy time with lots of different ministry going on, and somebody said to me, how are you able to do all those things?

And I can just tell you, if anything good, if anything worthwhile has come from my life, from my ministry, it is first and foremost, because of God's grace, humanly speaking, the answer for the reason of why I'm able to do anything I do, and this is no exaggeration, is completely, humanly speaking, because of Marcy.
Because of her support, because of her friendship, because of her partnership in ministry, I say all the time to people, I love my life, I love what I get to do, I would not want to be married to me, for a number of reasons.
But the schedule, some of the time demands, and Marcy has just been there from day one, right by my side.
And so, if you wonder why, if you guys follow me on Facebook, you've seen this, if you wonder why, like why is Michael so excited about his wife's birthday?
[2:34] Okay. The answer is, because I know better than anybody else, what she means for me, and what she does for me. And, when I look at the things the Lord has allowed me to be a part of, I don't deserve any of it, he has been good and gracious, but nothing, nothing I get to be a part of, nothing I get to do, could equal the blessing of going through life, married for me, to the perfect person for me.

She's not perfect. Our life isn't perfect. But it's the perfect one for me. And I'm so, so thankful. Without her, I literally could not do much of what I do.
Without God's grace, I couldn't do any of what I do. So, I'm thankful. I'm thankful. Mark chapter 14. We put ourselves back into what we have been spending so much time walking through verse by verse through the gospel of Mark.
We've come to verses 66 to 72. It says, Peter was below in the courtyard. One of the servant girls of the high priest came and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, you also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.
But he denied it saying, I neither know nor understand what you mean. And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, this man is one of them.
[4:19] But again, he denied it. And after a little while, the bystanders again said to Peter, certainly you are one of them for you are a Galilean. But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know this man of whom you speak.

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And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.
And he broke down and wept. I want to look briefly this morning at these three denials of Peter and then consider why this kind of thing happens and what we can learn from it.
First, let's notice the first denial. We'll call it a denial of confusion. A denial of confusion. Verses 66 to 68.
One of the servant girls says, you were with him. You were with the Nazarene Jesus. Now the high priest would have had many servants. So this one lady glanced at Peter and stares at him and she concludes that he is one of the followers.
[5:45] But he denied it. And notice what he says here. Verse 68. I neither know nor understand what you mean. Now Peter's not truly confused.

That's just, that's what he's hiding behind. He's, he's pretending here to be confused. I don't even know what you're talking. I don't even understand what you're talking about. Well, what do you mean?
I don't understand the accusation. What, what, why are you including me with this? He tried to just play it off by being confused. And if you remember the context of where we've been these last number of weeks, things have changed so fast.
Chronologically, it was just a couple of hours ago in the Garden of Gethsemane, that this same man Peter, who now pretends to be confused and denies that he even knows who Jesus is, just a couple of hours ago, he was holding a sword and swinging for necks.
Just a couple of hours ago, he was ready to fight to the death to defend Jesus. Jesus. He has fallen so quickly.
[7:13] He now pretends to not even understand the conversation, which reminds us that our sin can creep up on us quickly.

There's a second denial. We'll call it a denial of cowardice. Verse 69, again, the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, this man is one of them.
Verse 70, but again, he denied it. The brazen and bold man known as Peter has now become childish and cowardly.
It's shocking. If you weren't so familiar with the story, if you didn't already know what takes place, if this was the first time you're hearing this, you would have to think that something's missing.
You would have to think that there is a long time between what we read earlier in chapter 14 and what we read here at the end of chapter 14.
[8:27] In verse 47, one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, aiming for his head.

That was verse 47. We're just 20 verses later, Peter, about two hours in time, and the same person now twice denies he even knows who Jesus is.
He doubles down on it and he says, I don't even, I don't even know him. Peter was close enough to see what was happening.
Since Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and they lead him away to begin the first phase of his trials, the three Jewish trials, we looked at those in great detail a few weeks ago, Peter has followed from a distance wanting to see what happens.
He was close enough to see what was happening with Jesus, but distant enough to try to not be connected to him. Metaphorically, this same thing happens all the time.
[9:54] Metaphorically, there are people who want enough of Jesus to escape hell and gain heaven when they die, but not so much of him that they would have to actually take up their cross and follow him.

There are people in churches all around the world today who want to be known as a Christian when it's good for them and good for business and good for networking, but aren't sure they want to be counted a follower of Jesus Christ when the world comes looking for them.
Close enough to see what's going on, far enough away to stay safe. What Peter is doing here is really beyond unimaginable.
This is the same one who has said repeatedly, even if everybody else falls away, I will not fall away. Even if everybody else leaves you, I will not desert you.
This is the same one who even looks at Jesus when Jesus has told him his plans and said, this will never happen. He was even bold enough, wrong, yes, but bold enough to try to correct Jesus on

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Jesus' own mission.
[11:30] And in the span of two hours, he goes from saying, I will swing my sword to kill those who come against you to now twice denying he even knows him.

The first time he tried to act confused. The second time is just a denial of cowardice.
He's just acting simply cowardly. The third denial in verses 70 to 72, we'll call it a denial of certainty.
It's interesting what's going on in his mind, and we can see what's going on in his mind by observing his words.
He starts by saying, I don't know what you mean. I'm confused. I don't really understand your accusation. I'm not sure what you're talking about. The second time, he just is afraid.
The third time, he tries to be more certain. Verse 70, But again, he denied it, and after a little while, the bystanders again said to Peter, Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.
[12:56] Now notice what Jesus is going to do now. Jesus is going through his trials, and we're going to see in just a moment that he's going to be aware of what's taking place.

And the issue for Peter now, as he's over here having these threats and charges against him, is he's trying now to just save himself.
And you just can't miss this, that at the very moment that Peter is denying Christ, at the very moment Jesus is over here preparing just hours from now to go to the cross to pay even for the very sin that Peter right now this moment commits.
Luke tells us about an hour has passed by between the second denial and the third. Matthew tells us that the way he talked gave him away.
John 18, 26 adds, One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, Did I not see you in the garden with him?
[14:15] One of the witnesses in the garden who saw Peter says, I know it was you. And how ironic that what the witness would have seen just a couple of hours ago was a man ready to fight.

Remember when Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, hundreds of people come to arrest him.
We've looked at that. They were carrying lanterns and torches and clubs and swords.
And up against this mob of hundreds of people, I mean, as far as Peter has fallen, it was just a couple of hours ago, Peter who was there, there's 11 disciples left, because Judas has left, it's Jesus.
So there's 12 of them and hundreds of people come against them with swords and clubs. And say what you will for Peter, but two hours ago, Peter said, It's hundreds against 12.
Give me my sword. I'm swinging. I'm fighting. I'm aiming for necks. And one of the men who saw him do that, just a couple of hours later says, Man, I know this was you.
[15:36] I saw you swing for the head of Malchus. I saw your sword ricochet off his helmet, missing his neck and cutting his ear off.

How ironic that the witness who saw this witnessed how brave, misguided, yes, but how brave Peter was, fighting against hundreds, and now, to the accusation of a servant girl, he runs in fear.
I do not know him. Verse 71 adds, He began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know this man of whom you speak.
Now, he's not acting confused. That's what he did the first time. He's not acting uncertain of the charge. Now, he's acting very certain.
It's not a matter of confusion. It's not a matter of trying to just say, I don't know what you're talking about. He affirms completely, I do not know this man.
[16:50] It's unimaginable. And as you try to put yourself in Peter's perspective, on the one hand, we understand the fear of watching Jesus being arrested.

These things Jesus has spoken of, Peter said, these things are never going to occur. We're not going to let you be arrested. We're not going to let you die. They've just witnessed, just a couple of hours ago, in the Garden of Gethsemane, this terrifying event, when all these men come, and they arrest Jesus, and they bind him, and they lead him off to trial, and it has shaken Peter.
We can understand that. That would be a terrifying thing to witness. But just in case Peter needed one more piece of evidence to prove to him Jesus is who he said he was, it was Peter himself swinging for the neck of Malchus, cutting off his ear.
He just saw Jesus restore the man's ear. He saw it. He witnessed it. He had already seen so many miracles.

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He had already, Matthew 14, walking on the water. He had witnessed all of these things. But if he needed one more piece of information, one more part of confirmation, for him to understand, Jesus really is who he says he is.
[18:19] It was just two hours ago, in the Garden, that Peter saw Jesus do what nobody else could do, and he restored the man's ear. He saw it with his own eyes.

And just a couple of hours later, he says, let me tell you how certain I am that I don't know him. He is calling down a curse on himself, something like saying, may God curse me if I'm lying.
May God kill me if I'm lying. May the authority of heaven rain down judgment on me if I'm lying. This third denial is beyond heartbreaking.
Verse 72, immediately the rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.
Luke 22 adds this, Peter said, man, I do not know what you're talking about. And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.
[19:47] Now, in Luke 22, verse 61, it adds this nuance. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.

Jesus going through his trials, Peter observing from a distance, and now, Peter, who is not once, not twice, but three times, has said, I don't even know him.
And just as he says that, here at about 3 a.m., the rooster crows, and Luke adds this piece to the story that Peter looks and his eyes meet the eyes of Jesus who has just heard the whole thing.
The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Luke 22. That strikes me as one of the saddest sentences in the entire Bible.
The question is, if you're Peter, what kind of look was this? Was this a look of anger?
[21:23] Was this a look of hatred? Was this a look of rejection? As a friend of mine summed up on this text, he says, he wrote writing, no, it was a look of pain and pardon.

This wasn't a look of Jesus rejecting him. Jesus understands it's 3 a.m. in 6 hours, he'll be hanging on a cross.
Paying the price for the very sin he in that moment is forgiving Peter of. We get a quick glimpse of just how much this was a look of pain and pardon, not hatred and rejection.
Turn to chapter 16 for just a moment. We'll be here in just a few weeks, but chapter 16, verses 1 to 8 is the account of the resurrection.
And notice, after Jesus has been resurrected, look at the words from heaven that have been given through the angels in verse 7. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee and there you will see him just as he told you.
[22:49] It's as if God in heaven tells the angels, whatever you do, make sure that the disciples get the word that Christ is risen and especially make sure Peter hears this.

Peter's not been left behind. He's not been kicked out. He's done the worst thing you can possibly do. And he did it three times.
Mark 16, 7 gives us some insight into what that look from Jesus was like that Luke 22 speaks of.
And at the end of Mark chapter 15 it says, he broke down and he wept.
Matthew and Luke add that he left and wept bitterly. All four gospels record this failure. It is a tragic event.
And we ask ourselves today by way of application, implication, why is it that people today deny the Lord? We've seen Peter's denial. Why do people in our day deny the Lord?
[24:01] Well, one reason people deny the Lord is because they just don't believe. They deny the gospel because they don't believe the gospel. Others deny the Lord because they want to be accepted by the world.

You see this all the time. People who, when it's convenient for business or convenient for friendships or convenient for things you're doing in the public, when it's convenient to claim to be a Christian or claim to pray or claim to read the Bible, they'll cozy up to that.
But when they start to say, are you telling me you really believe Jesus is the only way to heaven? You really believe that the words of God are literally true? Then all of a sudden they want to back up and not be nearly exposed in that way.
some deny the Lord because they're just pretenders. Associated with Christ when it's advantageous, separate from Christ when it's costly.
Some deny the Lord because they're just afraid of the consequences of being associated with Him.
Maybe you've been in a place where you outwardly denied the Lord, perhaps, maybe more likely is

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you just stayed silent knowing what it might cost you to be honest.
[25:32] You can deny the Lord like Peter did or you can deny the Lord and never open your mouth. Just don't let anybody know where you stand.

I want to show you one thing as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper together. Turn with me to John 18. A friend of mine pointed this out.
I thought this was worth passing on. In John 18, verse 15, Simon Peter followed Jesus and did as so did another disciple.
Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood outside of the door. So the other disciple who was known to the high priest went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door and brought Peter in.
The servant girl at the door said to Peter, you also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not. This is John's account of what we just studied in Mark.
[27:08] Notice verse 18. Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold. seems like a incidental detail.

Fast forward in your text to John 21. This is after the resurrection. Verse 15, when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?
He said to them, yes Lord, you know that I love you and he said to him feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him, yes Lord, you know that I love you.
He said to him, tend my sheep. He said in the third time, Simon son of John, do you love me? And Peter was grieved because he said in the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything.
You know that I love you and Jesus said to him, feed my sheep. Three times Peter denied the Lord and now three times Peter affirms his love for the Lord.
[28:33] There's only two places where the New Testament mentions this phrase of a charcoal fire. One was John 18 when Peter denies the Lord.

The other is in this context of the conversation where Jesus now gives Peter a chance three times to affirm his love for the Lord. If you back up to verse nine, notice this detail that John gives us. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place with fish laid on it and bread. Jesus not only has given Peter a chance to affirm his love for him once for every time he denied him, even down to the detail of being warmed by fire.
Only twice has the New Testament mentioned this phrase. Once at the denial and once at the affirmation. It's as if Jesus has superintended this scene so much that he is helping Peter understand that while his sin was tragic, it has been paid for.
While it was costly, it's been atoned. The last time the Bible tells us Peter stood by a charcoal fire was the worst day of his life.
[30:14] And now warmed by the same fire, his heart and his soul is being warmed by the grace of the very one who has paid the price for his sin.

Peter's denied Christ. That's quite unimaginable. Jesus forgave Peter. That's more amazing still. And I want you to understand this morning that your sin is worse than you think it is. Your sins are more than you think them to be.
The dishonor to God is more severe than you can imagine. But his mercy is greater. His grace is greater.
And if you ever think to yourself, would God really forgive me? Look no further than our example today.
[31:29] Peter didn't just deny him. He denied him three times. He didn't just deny him three times.

He even called down curses from heaven upon himself to try to convince people he didn't know him. And this is one who shared the closest fellowship with Christ.
It's not that his sin wasn't that bad. It was. And it's not that his sin wasn't costly.
It was. It was that God's grace is even greater.
If you think to yourself that your works can save you, you've missed what grace is. And if you think your failures can take from you what Christ has promised you, you've misunderstood grace on that side.
[32:50] Don't ever think sin's not a big thing. It is. But you weren't saved by your works. You'd have no shot.

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And if you're one who has been saved by grace through faith and you belong to Jesus, he holds you in his hand, do you really think your work is more powerful than his promise?
none that the Father gave to me will I lose. You mean even if I've done this and even if I've said this and even if I've failed here, even if you've done what Peter did, the most unimaginable thing you can think of, the miracle of grace is that he holds his own and he will not lose them.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

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