

*Father, this morning, we just want to thank You. Thank You, Lord. The very fact all of us are here in Your house, alive and well, it's only because of Your faithfulness; because of Your goodness, Your lovingkindness, Your mercy which endures forever with Your children. It's only because of that we stand here, Lord. We just thank You, Father. Now, we come to the ministry of Your Word, we just want to thank You for Your Son, the Living Word and for speaking to us all these days, weeks and months, Lord. Help us to revere Your Word because Your Word says You dwell with the one who is contrite and who trembles at Your Word. For Your Word says, "I have exalted and magnified My Word above all My Name." And this morning, once again, help us to magnify Your Word, O Lord, because Your Word is Spirit and life. It has the power to work in those who believe, O God. So, I pray today, we will have hearing ears, a believing heart and continuously empowered to obey Your will. Thank You, Father. Thank You, Lord. Speak to us. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*

An old joke, I think. I forgot it until I remembered it. So, you also could have forgotten it. There was a little boy who disliked going to Church. It was Sunday morning and his mother was after his life and he refused. The mother was chasing him around the house. Finally, he ran out, climbed to the nearest tree and sat in the branch, refusing to come down. The mother tried; the neighbours tried; everybody tried everything. The boy refused. So, finally, she called the priest. The local priest. They are a Catholic family, of course. So, the priest came; he went down to the tree. He looked at the boy and I was an ex-Catholic. So, if you know Catholics, he did that – (drawing the cross with the right hand) three times and the boy came down. So, they were all surprised. So, later, they asked the boy, "Why did you come down?" So, he said, "I thought the priest was saying 'if you don't come down, I will cut the tree'."

One more, right? Because this is the season people are shifting homes. There was a guy who went to the Pet Store and said, "I want to place an order for 30, 000 cockroaches." And the Pet Store owner was shocked and he said, "What? 30, 000 cockroaches? I've never had an order for cockroaches all my life when I ran this store; and never for 30, 000 in any way. What's the reason?" He said, "Because I have to vacate my house next week. The landlord said that I need to vacate and in the lease agreement, there is a clause which says – I have to leave the apartment in exactly the same condition I found it." Srikanth, you don't have such a condition, right?

Let's look to the Word now. We've got 5 Sundays left, including today. That means 47 Sundays are over and 48 Wednesdays are over. So, go back. Keep listening to the Word over and over again. We've been hearing and hearing but it only works when faith is generated like when we've been hearing without faith, it's almost impossible for God to do anything in our lives. But God looks for faith. He always looks for people who believe and faith can be seen; faith can be heard. God can even feel faith.

So, keeping all that in mind, let's go to the text today. *Luke 22:31-34*. This is Jesus at the end of His life. We are at the end of the year. He is talking to Peter.

### **Luke 22:31-34**

**<sup>31</sup> And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon!...**

He didn't say, "Peter, Peter." He said, "Simon, Simon." Remember when God calls Jacob, "Jacob, Jacob," and when He calls him, "Israel, Israel," the tone is different. The tone is different here.

***...Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." <sup>33</sup> But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." <sup>34</sup> Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."***

If you look over there, Jesus had a prayer for Peter. He said, "I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail." That's what happens to all of us – our faith fails. Jesus is not prophesying but He is predicting Peter's faith would actually fail, that he would fall; and he would actually fall away but also, that he would return. I don't think there is anyone who has not

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failed in these 11 months; maybe, till yesterday. But if our faith does not fail us, we will return to Him. Jesus' prayer is interesting – He is not praying, "I have prayed that you will not be tested. I'm not praying that you will not fall. I'm not praying that you will not deny Me. I am praying that your faith will not fail you and that you will return; and after you return, you would have learnt your lessons from your fall and that you would be able to strengthen other brothers who have fallen." Like they say and it is true – experience is the best teacher.

Peter, inevitably, one of the greatest Apostles of Christ, was a simple fisherman when he was chosen but he would have such an incredible influence on human history because he chose to follow Jesus. In *Mark 16:16-18*, Jesus actually predicts it.

### **Matthew 16:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter...*

Peter means stone.

***...and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.***

He is saying, "I see the potential in you, Peter. You are not Simon; you are Peter. You are a stone. You are a chip of that old block. I see you, Peter." When no one sees anything in us, God sees. Remember that. Right in the beginning in *John 1:42*,

### **John 1:42**

<sup>42</sup> *And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).*

God had seen. So, please remember – don't go by what the world says; go by what God says about you and me. And actually if you look among the first 12 Jesus picked, he was the outstanding one. He had that incredible confession. When nobody knew, he said, "You are the Christ." He is the only man known in human history to have walked on water. He was one of the three selected which Jesus took with Him everywhere. He was the one who had to fish for money. He experienced so many things the others didn't. He was one of the privileged few who saw Jesus in all His glory on that Mount of Transfiguration. Not all His glory but a part of the glory which could be seen with human eyes. Yet in spite of all of these, he failed like no one else and his failure is a lesson for all of us believers. When Peter has finished his restoration and his finish is also a source of hope for all of us. So, as we get into these final thirty-one days of 2019, let's learn from Peter. Especially, we look back, we don't feel good about the past eleven months. It was not what we expected when we began but thirty-one days can change your life. Remember what Jesus says in,

### **Luke 22:31**

***"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you,***

Never forget that, "Satan has asked for you." We have an enemy and he asked for us. The forces of hell are at work 24X7 and they want to have us and God allows them to sift us, he allows them to sift us. Please remember this, no one falls in a moment. We set ourselves through so many steps of failure. No one just rises up to success. There are steps to success in the world, spiritual or otherwise. If you look at Judas, he didn't fall in a day; he fell over many days. There were steps to that. Though God spoke to Gideon 'a mighty warrior', he didn't become a warrior in a day; there were many steps before he became that and in those portions which we dealt over the weeks, Peter, who himself fell so terribly later, will give us the steps and tell us in *1 Peter 1:8*, "*If these things are yours,*" Meaning, it's not just you practice; it becomes an integral part of yours. "*If these things are yours.*" He says, "You will not be barren; your life will not be barren; you will be a fertile ground for God and you will be incredibly fruitful in the knowledge of God and not only that in, *verse 10*,

### **2 Peter 1:10**

<sup>10</sup> *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;*

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The man who fell headlong, fell so badly, is now coming at the end of his life in his final letter and he is telling in his letter that he knows he is going to die because he says, "The Lord Himself has revealed it's time for me to put this tabernacle, this body away." He is giving us this incredible lesson at the end saying that you know you do these things, meaning, if Peter writes it, it means he had done these things and he never fell again. You will never stumble, you will never fail, you will never fall. Your faith would have risen to that level. You can walk with God without failing. So, take guard. Learn from him. Learn from Peter. First day of the twelfth month – be like this, what do you call like these sports grace. There are good players; there are great players. Today, we have no great players but good players because great players have character, not just skill and if you have noticed with the old great who retired from cricket and I retired along with him from cricket; he stopped playing; I stopped watching. That was Sachin. Every time he hit a hundred or two hundred, he would go back and ask the umpire to start all over again. He has forgotten his hundred. He is starting from one again. He wouldn't take his hundred for granted. We would be the other way, "A hundred! Now, I am going to swing." No, he is taking guard again, thinking, "I have forgotten my hundred. I am aiming for the next hundred." So, today is a good day to take guard again from Simon. "Simon, you be the umpire today. I'm going to start all over again and learn from you." And the Lord had said *"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you."* Let's look at Simon's or Peter's response

### **Luke 22:33**

<sup>33</sup> ***But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."***

That is in one Gospel. Let's us look at in another Gospel

### **Mark 14:27-31**

<sup>27</sup> ***Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night,***

Please remember, we will be made to stumble because of Him and the test is how strong is the Christ in you. It's not how strong you are. If Christ is all in all, we won't struggle. So, because of Him, we will be tested all the days of our life; because it has to be proven – the faith in me, the Christ in me is true.

Remember that incredible verse?

### **2 Corinthians 13:55**

***Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.***

And what's the answer? The Christ in you. It's not anything else. It's not your works, the Christ in you.

### **Mark 14:27-31**

***"All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.' "***<sup>28</sup> ***"But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."***<sup>29</sup> ***Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."***<sup>30</sup> ***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."***

The first lesson you learn from Simon is – he didn't take Jesus' warning seriously. Eleven months has been practically, over the years, every time you hear the Word from anybody, it's a series of warnings from God telling us the actual battle you and I will face. It's a series of warning. Simon has been forewarned and he didn't take it seriously. All our experiences, all our knowledge will never bring us to that point where we are not vulnerable to falling and to failure. What makes us vulnerable is pride and that is the first thing we see with poor Peter. What is that? *Even if all are made to stumble, yet I cannot be made to stumble.*" The incredible, other prophet has this warning.

### **1 Corinthians 10:12**

<sup>12</sup> ***Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.***

I know Pastor Vijay has repeated it many times; we all have repeated it many times; we keep on telling this about it – never get complacent about your spiritual walk. The most dangerous thing is to be satisfied with your prayer life, with your Word life, with hearing from God. All that is connected to your spirit, what we call is the spiritual part of you. Everything else, you

can be content but there is one thing you should never be content or complacent. It is this. It is a very dangerous place to be

***<sup>12</sup> Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.***

Be very, very careful about it. Faith should not and cannot stand alone. We need to keep adding. Remember those seven things to faith? Virtue, knowledge? See, it's interesting. God's order is interesting. He said, "Add to faith," what? Not knowledge. If you add knowledge before virtue, you will be proud. Knowledge puffs up. That's why God said first virtue, the very character of God which is primarily humility; and then, to it add, knowledge. Otherwise if you put knowledge without virtue, you will go down, okay? Virtue, knowledge, self-control, patient, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity all these and that's what he says - give due diligence to these things. Keep on adding. Never stop. Never think you are virtuous enough. Never think, "I know everything I need to know about God." Don't ever think, "I am one guy who has self-control. I am the most patient man on earth," which will lead to failing. Don't be casual about warnings. Never ever be casual about these warnings. Even the advice you get, don't take it for granted. There are certain things in life, like I said, success is not random. You can have random success by playing for India one season and be out the next season and if want to be like Dhoni who is eyeing for the next world cup IPL. I am talking about cricket because then, the boy's ears will go up. Pastor Vijay will say Rafael Nadal but nobody understands tennis except him, me and a couple of people but everybody understands cricket. Let me tell you children. Why I have to tell you is, sometimes truth hurts, it's like a knife, it cuts.

There are four things you have heard which is fundamental to life – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening doesn't mean just listening. It means attention, focus, understanding, perception and everything. Pastor Vijay and I talk; we talk about you. Our discussion is always about our sheep. One of the questions we have and one of the answer I give is this: How many young people of the Church you see eternally successful? I say, "Almost none" Then he asks me the question, "Why?" I said, "Because we are one of the Churches with hundreds of books lying around, nobody reads and you find me one person in the human history who was successful without reading. You will not find any." Either you have to listen because when there weren't books they followed listening to great men. So, listening took the place of reading or you read. When you don't have both, you are going nowhere. It's impossible. God's own Son, the most successful person ever to live on planet Earth listened for thirty years before He spoke a message. It's impossible. It's as simple as that; it's a fact of life. We are not talking about success. We are talking about success which is eternal. Even the most common rough fisherman called Peter, when he stood before incredibly learned men who had read and studied, when they listened to him they had an answer, 'this guy has been listening to Jesus for three and a half years so his speech has changed, This guy hasn't read like us but he has listened to a great master whom they haven't listened to.' That made the whole difference. So please remember, I am telling you children and young people, if you want to change your life you will have to change the way you deal with life. If you ever find a great attached in human history, go back and check your life, you will see that they had incredible teachers or they were incredibly voracious readers. That's how they became great. So, you have to either listen or you have to read otherwise you will be normally, generally successful in life. But we are not talking about that. We are talking about eternity and there are steps to success and that cannot be circumvented.

Jesus didn't call twelve disciples, lay His hands upon them and say, "Now go, you are ready." Instead He said, "Walk with Me. Live with Me. Listen to Me and He kept on teaching them for three and a half years and then empowered them and sent them out." So please remember there are steps and this is a false self-confidence and that is what came into him. That comes out of pride. The first lesson today from Simon. Simon, what can you teach me? He will say, "Don't be proud. Never put your trust in flesh." It doesn't matter. If God has said something be watchful about it. *Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls.*

Second lesson from Peter, *Mark 14:32* onwards, we will read. This is all happening around the same time. He said this and He goes to the mount of olive and something is happening.

**Mark 14:32-42**

***<sup>32</sup> Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." <sup>33</sup> And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.***

It's unbelievable when you read stuff like this. Who is it writing about? What does it say about the state of mind of Jesus? Troubled and deeply distressed. That's Jesus.

***<sup>34</sup> Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch." <sup>35</sup> He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. <sup>36</sup> And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."***  
***<sup>37</sup> Then He came and found them sleeping, (Whom did He say first?) and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? <sup>38</sup> Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." <sup>39</sup> Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. <sup>40</sup> And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. (Meaning He woke them up again)***  
***<sup>41</sup> Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup> Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."***

Did you see the difference? Jesus needed to pray, lest He fail not. They needed to pray, lest they fail not. Peter had been forewarned. All had been forewarned but Peter said, "Everybody fails. I will not" He said, "You will deny me three times tonight" He had already been forewarned. Then Jesus comes and says, "Peter, I am telling you. Nobody is going to deny me the way you are. Therefore, I am telling you. Sit up and pray but he didn't see the need to pray. How many times did Jesus come back? Three times. Look at verse 37 and 38, Jesus said specifically to Peter, "*Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*"

Second lesson from Peter: Don't take your prayer life for granted. One of the scourges of Christendom is prayerlessness. There are so many things connected to spiritual victory and one of them is prayer. The other is the study of Word of God, so you're thinking changes. Third thing is devoted to fellowship. These are all fundamental to standing strong. There are four Sundays in a usual month. One of the Sundays I preach in another Church. I don't preach in another Church because I want to preach in another Church. I do it because it is in another language and because there are different nations from where people and Pastors of that language wait for that one Sunday's message. But other than that, every month I get invitations to preach in other Churches. Every time I turn it down. I say, "No, I will not preach on a Sunday." So they ask, "Are you preaching every Sunday?" I say, "No!" "So, you can't spare another Sunday?" "No!" You know why? Because I need to come to Church as much as any one of you. I need to hear as much as any one of you. I need to be rooted to one Church and need that fellowship as much as any one of you. Otherwise, I can fix my calendar, preach here two Sundays and two Sundays in another Church. Or I can preach in another three Churches but you know what I am doing? I am going against the Word and I am putting trust in myself that I can handle it. There are so many people who are very careless about spiritual things. We have been forewarned and we see Jesus comes back three times and in the second time He pin points Simon and says, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?" Could you not pray for an hour? Turn with me to the book of *Hebrews 10:25*, let me read it for you.

### **Hebrews 10:25**

***<sup>25</sup> (let us) not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.***

Did you see that? So, even in the first century Church, people were stopping from going to Church saying, "We can handle it." That is when persecution is at the highest, they thought they could handle it. The writer of Hebrews if it's Paul says, "You can't. You cannot handle what is coming your way because Satan has asked for you." If you are prayer less, wordless, worship less and fellowship less, he says, "You are gone" and the problem is that you won't even know that you are gone. Complacencies about spiritual things, neglecting your prayer closet, neglecting the Word, neglecting the body of Christ. That is why Jesus doesn't call the Church as a building, He calls it as His body. Think about your hand being cut off. How long will your hand survive? Physically you know it's gone. It will dry up and it's gone. How do you think any one of us will survive outside the body of Christ? Unless circumstances are such like Richard who was arrested and kept in isolation for years in prison, you will survive because God will be there with you. He will be beside you because He knows you are there because you took the right decision. The Word has been taken away from you but the word is working in you. Fellowship has been taken away from you but in the next cell through code you have created and you have fellowship across the wall through sounds alone. So be very careful. This is the second lesson we learn from Peter. First the pride comes in, out of that comes a self-confidence. Second, we start neglecting the important things of life.

## Simon Speaks!

When young people come to me and when I talk to you I keep telling you an old example of a prof in a bible college told his students. He took a glass of water, a glass of sand and a glass with three stones in it and he took a fourth glass and said, "Can you put all three in one glass?" Everybody said, "No, it's not possible." Because they were looking at it. He said, "It is possible" What did he do? He took the empty glass and first put the three stones in it then he put the sand in and shook it nicely. Then he poured the water in. Everything fit in. He looked at everyone and asked if they got the lesson. They said, "No" He said, "the lesson is this: the stones represent the priorities. If you put God first, the things of God first, you will always have time for the others and if you don't all your life you will be timeless. You will never finish what you started because life is based on priorities" That is what Jesus said, "Seek me first, My Kingdom, My righteousness first." and how do we do that practically? Never neglect your prayer closet, never neglect your Word and never stop listening to the Word. Never! In this generation with all gadgets possible you can, for those of you who were not there on Wednesday, if I were to ask you, "Did you listen to the Wednesday message?" which I don't want to ask because I don't want to embarrass you in the house of God and if I were to ask you, "all those who were present last Sunday if you listened to the Sunday's message twice" when I could probably pick hundreds of our people from underground Churches who have already heard at least five times. It's not that we don't have time. We don't have inclination. But unless we learn how to put our priorities right, with all the promises we have, 2020 will be like 2019. It's not that God will fail us, we failed Him. That is what is happening over there. "Could you not watch for one hour?" is what He is asking. Remember this is the Peter. Beautiful part about it is, this is the Peter who will rise up and become that great man. You look at the great men in the bible, if you look at Abraham from the time he moved into Canaan all the days of his life. From Canaan to Bethel to Moriah, his life is always identified with altars. He always had an altar. If you look at the carnal successful over there, Lot, do you ever see an altar in his life? No! But if you look at Abraham who finished his race. What defined his life? An altar. What is the defining thing about Isaac? He is always digging wells. Have you noticed? Where ever he digs, he finds water. These are all kept to us as symbols. One man's life is defined by prayer and worship. Another man is forever digging for more of God. These are the incredible people in the bible and you will see that God does not change the order for anybody. Neither for me as I am the Pastor nor for you because you are believers. The order is always the same and you have to make it.

Let us look at the third lesson we learn from our dear forefather, Peter. Come back to *Mark 14:46-47*,

### **Mark 14:46-47**

<sup>46</sup> ***The men seized Jesus and arrested him.*** (This is all happening at the same time. They came, they took Jesus and arrested Him) <sup>47</sup> ***Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.***

What happened? The high priest, his name is Malchus, his ear was cut off. Let's go to John chapter 18 to find out who was that one.

### **John 18:10**

<sup>10</sup> ***Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear.*** (The servant's name was Malchus.)

So, we see one servant cutting the ear and one disciple, it's identified its Peter. Now let's go to Mathew because we have to read all the gospels when an incident is repeated. So, we understand what is happening. If you read only one gospel you won't get what God to show. Always people ask me, last time it was someone from another country who asked me this question, "Why is this different in these two gospels?" I said, "So that you will search. If it is only one gospel and everything is put in order, we are such lazy people. We want that." That is why India is a country where guides are sold the most and textbooks are rarely bought. But God did not give us a guide; He gave us a textbook; and four Gospels and not in order. He says, "You read all the four. It will all fall into place." We will struggle. "So, you will ask for My Spirit and He will start putting things into place." So, you have *Matthew 26:53*, Jesus responds, which is not there in both. He says,

### **Matthew 26:53**

<sup>53</sup> ***Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?***

He had earlier told them, "Carry the swords. Any one of you got swords?" They said, "Two." He said, "Enough." Now, that was not to fight; that was for protection. You getting the Word? This Word is my defense. This is not to cut your head off. That's when spiritual husbands and wives fight, they use the Word to cut each other. They cut each other with the Word.

## Simon Speaks!

He had told them, "Carry the sword." But it was not meant to cut anybody's ear off. Jesus says, "Put your sword away. You walked with Me for 3 and a half years. You know Me. You know who My Father is. You think if I asked My Father, I wouldn't get 12 legions of angels? Dad! That's it." You know, when Peter took the sword, he was trying to help Jesus but he was doing exactly the opposite of God's will.

### **John 18:11**

<sup>11</sup> ***So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"***

That is the difference between two men who came to the same garden; they are facing the same situation but they reacted differently because one prayed and heard; the other was sleeping. Why was there difference in their response? Because one has heard; the other has not. One was praying; the other was sleeping. One was playing with spiritual things while the other was serious about spiritual things. And because he did not hear, he acted, what we say in English, presumptuously. Presumption is a very dangerous thing in the Christian walk. Don't pursue. Be very sure. "I think this is the girl I should marry." You think or are you sure? Did you hear? You can't presume. He had told them, "Watch and pray." But we didn't believe. We slept when we should have prayed. Therefore, we can't blame God. So, we presume God needs our help. That's what happened to Abraham. Abraham and Sarah thought God needed some help. That's how Ishmael was born – Abraham trying to help God. Rebekah presumed that God needed some help to see Esau didn't steal the blessing. That's why her son wandered for 20 years and served 5 masters. 4 wives and a father-in-law. For 20 years. Why? Because the mother presumed. We lean on the arm of flesh. We presume. Don't presume. We are learning lessons from Peter. Don't ever think you can stand alone. Don't assume. None of us can. None can. That's why we saw the narrative last Sunday with Paul, starting with, "I am the least of the Apostles," of many years older, coming to, "I am the least of the saints." And then, finishing his race with the acknowledgement – chief of sinners. First, with the company of Apostles; then, including him in the company of believers; and then, putting him in the entire world. Why? He is realizing, "I cannot run on my own. All my knowledge, all my experiences, all these ministry stuff is not going to enable me to stand. I need Him every moment." That's the key. As you grow older in the Lord (I'm not talking about age), are we presumptuous? Do we take things for granted? Do we? Because there are so many things that will come – pride will come in; prayerlessness will come in; presumption will come in but we may also not be aware but it's a good time to do a check. Is it increasing, my dependence upon God, on the Word, my prayer life? Or am I taking it for granted?

Let's go to the fourth one, the result of it. Jesus is arrested; He is taken.

### **Mark 14:53-54**

<sup>53</sup> ***And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes.***

Let me go to the text. Jesus has been arrested and He is being taken. What happens next?

<sup>54</sup> ***But Peter followed Him at a distance...***

KJV will say 'afar off'. Do you see the fourth step of Peter? The person who had this incredible revelation of who Jesus was, the one who actually said in the sea, "Lord, if it is You, bid me come." The only man who walked on water. The one among the three who saw Him transform in His glory. The one who said, "Even if everybody denies You, I will not. I am willing to go to the prison and die for You." Where is he now? Following, but how? Far off. Look at your passion in the beginning of the year, Watchnight Service. Look at your passion now. Where is our passion for God? Or maybe you had no passion at all. If you didn't have, it's a good time to go to God and say, "Light some fire in me, Lord." See, one of the things I keep saying about missions, when I go on missions to the same place, I have different circuit. Sometimes, I'm like an Old Testament preacher. I am circuit preacher. The thing is that – you go back to those same states, same countries and same Churches or same conventions. If you have gone there 3 years in a row, honestly, I'm telling you – it is difficult to find 5 people who have been consistent in their passion all three years. Very rare. One convention, you will see one sitting in the front, all gungho for the Lord, listening, crying, praying, taking notes all the five days. Next year you go, the person is sitting at the back; doesn't even come to the front. Third time, you don't even see him. You ask the Pastor, "Oh no. We disciplined him and sent him out of the Church." It's a common story. And I can look back into my own life, the ones who began with me. Many of them were my mentors. They are mentoring nobody now. Ease. Very dangerous thing. Following Christ from far. Worldly

cares, entertainments. You don't realize how it comes. Vacations. I always tell – once you come to the Lord and walk a little while, you don't realize – every decision is spiritual. My mum went yesterday. My brother had come from Japan for a business meeting. He came and met her at the airport and took her. We, as a family, meet, maybe, once in 5 years or 6 years because we are like North Poles, South Pole. One is in Scotland, Glasgow; the other is in Tokyo; and the other one is in the middle in the desert in Abu Daubi. It's very difficult. So, after, again, many years, everybody is meeting at the end of the year, except me. They are meeting in Kochin. Still asking yesterday. Still calling, "Are you not going to be there?" I said, "No." Priorities are very clear. End of the year is fasting; end of the year is with Church. It's not my vacation time. One – I don't have vacations. Even when the children come, I tell the mother, "You go, have and come back." No vacations. There's no time because if you know your spiritual reality, you will realize – every decision you make will have consequences; because at the end of the day, all that you and I have is time on our hands. And what I see is people unbelievably wasting time. I like technology. I like all these things when they work because it saves time. Because if I say, "Let us go to *Mark 14:3*," I have to wait until everybody is there but here, in a second, it's up. It saves time. A fridge is good; washing machine is fantastic; vacuum cleaner is good – all these things and all these new gadgets, how the things spin around and all these things are good but what is the purpose behind all these things? Have you ever asked? To save time. And do you save time? We are one generation, when we stand before God who will be told, "You have been given every device which was never possible 6000 years; you could have maximized your time for My Kingdom sake and you didn't. Your forefathers had no electricity. They rode horses and donkeys. They used implements which we don't even know by name today. You had everything. You had time on your hands. And what did you do?" We wasted it. It's not money we are wasting; it's time that we are wasting.

The world creeps in without us even knowing. And we have all these gadgets. It's all good. All these are good because whatever you do, you can still listen. Like I keep telling – most of the chores we do in life are mechanical after a time and we can keep listening. I wish God gave me the authority to pick everybody's phone, confiscate it for the next 30 days and it would cause you to spend time with God, we would have revival. This is the time-killer for most of you. The amount of time. These phones are interesting. My phone speaks to me by saying that I spent very little time with it this week and I thought, "Thank you. Good." Trying to tempt me, "Use me more." I said, "I don't need you." The amount of time. And that's when it happens – the man who was the most vehement in his commitment to following Jesus, is now following Jesus from far off. "Are you following Jesus?" "Yes." "Can you see His face?" "No." "Can you hear His voice?" "No." "In your eyes, He is the One who is being led away but in reality, you are the one who is being led away. He is fulfilling the will of God; you have been taken captive by the enemy. You think you are free. No, you are bound. You think He is bound. No, He is free. He is not being taken away; He is fulfilling the will of God in His life, what about you, Peter?"

Let's go the fifth step of our dear brother Peter, not this Peter (in the congregation) but the original Peter.

#### **Mark 14:54**

***<sup>54</sup> But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.***

It goes to one step further, Peter is now warming himself at the fire. The wrong fire, the wrong crowd. He is not sitting with the friends of the Lord, he is actually sitting with the enemies of the Lord. Apostle James had a very strong name for this behaviour in *James 4:4*, he says,

#### **James 4:4**

***<sup>4</sup> Adulterers and adulteresses! (the wrong crowd, the wrong fire) Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.***

Apostle John had also strong words in *1 John 2:15*,

#### **1 John 2:15**

***<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.***

And is there warming here, the fire of the world with the company of the world, keep asking this question: who are your friends? that's the fire you warm. Jesus had very strong words in,

**Matthew 6:24**

***<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.***

You can either warm yourself here and then, go and receive the fire of the Holy Spirit. It's not possible. You cannot warm 6 days in fire of the world and then, come and expect the fire of the Holy Spirit to fall upon you. It's not possible. They are two different fires. You can't run with the hares and hunt with the hounds at the same time, it's an English saying, go back and check once check what it means. Hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. You can't, you try it, people try it, people in the world don't do it, people in the Church try to do it. God has only one remedy, you and I must choose whom we will serve. You cannot God says, it is not you may not, it is not you will not, it says you cannot

**2 Corinthians 6:17-18**

***<sup>17</sup> Therefore "Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." (come out he says) <sup>18</sup> "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."***

You look at the condition and the promise. "You will experience Me," he says, "You will know Me as your Father and I will receive you." Do you see, how Peter is going spiraling down? First was pride; second was presumption. Do we see all these things in our own lives? Following from far and warming ourselves with the wrong fires. Doesn't stop there, please remember, he doesn't stop there, it goes further down because this is the company you keep. if you go into that company, you will go further and further and further down,

**Mark 14:66-68**

***<sup>66</sup> Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. <sup>67</sup> And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth." <sup>68</sup> But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed.***

It is interesting what he says, "Jesus of Nazareth - what you said? who is that? All over the world you see Christians, they live as if they never knew or understood Jesus at all. They deny any association with Jesus. Scripture says, "a rooster crowed." Jesus is giving a warning, how many times did you deny? first time he denied, the rooster crowed, and he should have known - Oh! I denied him. Does warnings matter?

You know on Wednesday sermon, Pastor Vijay was talking about Jehoshaphat - "two kings & one prophets", let's look at that portion

**2 Chronicles 18:1**

***<sup>1</sup> Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance (all God gave and then he went and married Ahab's daughter, probably); and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab***

Go and listen to that message, so you will know, what are your alliances and what your alliances will create, who you marry, who your best friend is, they have a term for this - bestie, modern day language. Bestie will become a beastie one day. Who is your best friend? - Allied himself with Ahab, you know who Ahab is, Jehoshaphat, the righteous king, allied himself with Ahab and what happens next,

**2 Chronicles 18:2-3**

***<sup>2</sup> After some years he went down to visit Ahab in Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him (I don't know, how much one man can eat!) and the people who were with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth Gilead. <sup>3</sup> So Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me against Ramoth Gilead?" And he answered him, "I am as you are, and my people as your people; we will be with you in the war."***

Is that how you tell your friends? - the righteous man, he dies, who? Ahab dies, you know, his son – 2 Kings 6:7 the righteous man is still kept alive, the wicked fellow died, his son is king,

### 2 Kings 6:7

***<sup>7</sup>Then he went and sent to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?" And he said, "I will go up; I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."***

Did he learn his lessons? From the rooster crowing first time, did he learn anything? seeing how Ahab had died, how four hundred prophets fall, how one prophet was true, the warning God gave him, the deception of Ahab, he saw it all, he had a warning, did he learn? no.

Didn't stop there, go to 2 Chronicles 20, now Jehoram was dead, his son Ahaziah is the king, Jehoshaphat is still alive

### 2 Chronicles 20:35

***<sup>35</sup>After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who acted very wickedly.***

So, he allied himself with the father, the son and the grand son, all three wicked. So how many warnings do you need? He is not a bad man, he is a good man, one of the few good men, Jehoshaphat.

### 2 Chronicles 20:36-37

***<sup>36</sup>And he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion Geber. <sup>37</sup>But Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has destroyed your works." Then the ships were wrecked, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish.***

You know how Jehoshaphat life record ends? With this – “Your works are destroyed, why? Because of the company you chose. Are you good? Yes, are you righteous? Yes, did I hear when you cried? Yes, but how will you end? Like this.” Why? “Because of the company you chose.” This is the company we choose because we want to look good in the world. That's our problem. I used to tell my students centuries ago when I taught. You do not want to ‘be’ smart; you want to ‘look’ smart. To ‘look’ smart is very easy- you only have to go to a library, pick two books and walk down the corridor; you would look smart. To ‘be’ smart, it has to be internalized. It is hard work. You do not want to be rich; it takes hard work and thrift and stewardship. You want to look rich. Buy some designer clothes and walk around as if you own the world when you have nothing with you and you do not have the substance to earn tomorrow. Why? It is because you did not do the work when you should have done -How to earn and acquire skills! That is our problem.

We are in fake world! The most fake world we have ever lived in is now. It is absolutely, totally fake! We want to be part of it and warm ourselves in that fire. When they ask us, “Are you not part of Jesus?” We say, “I do not even know what you are talking about. I don’t even understand this Jesus of Nazareth.” It did not happen in one step. It was a series of steps how you go down. We don’t want to look spiritual; we ‘truly’ want to be spiritual. 31 days, learn from Peter! He openly denied- I don’t know or understand what you are talking about. If you think that it is enough and that the devil will leave you. “You denied, Jesus. Okay, fine. I will leave you.” No. He is not going to leave you because Jesus said that *he comes to steal, kill and destroy*. He is not going to leave you there just because you denied. He is not satisfied with your compromise. He will try to lead you to a life of complete denial.

Jesus has said, you shall be my witness. I tell you a secret. All great leaders get acquitted finally in court. Do you know why? There is something called –‘when a witness turns hostile’. He is in court. The charge sheet is against him and he will be sentenced because (suppose) you three are the witnesses and three witnesses are the prosecutor’s evidences. But he has got influence so he either threatens your family or he buys you off. So the day you come to court, one witness would stand up and say, “I was never there. I don’t even know what you are talking about.” 2<sup>nd</sup> witness says, “actually I was in Guntur that day.” She has got some tickets and a picture also to show that she was in Guntur. Third witness says, “I don’t even know who this person is.” So what has happened? The witnesses have ‘turned hostile’ and the case is closed and the person is free. That is how some of the big people in power got away. You do not know what happened in cases in Gujarat where the cases were closed and people were said innocent because witnesses turned hostile. There is a judgment coming another day when no witness is needed because *He will not judge by what He hears or what He sees, but He will judge in righteousness*. All the criminals who escaped here will not escape there.

Coming back to the passage, there is actually a trial going on, in the high priest's court. This is an actual trial. There is a fake trial because it is against the Law.

**Mark 14:55-56**

***<sup>55</sup> Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. <sup>56</sup> For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.***

If you ever watched the impeachment hearings, it was like that. Their testimonies were not agreeing and that was without the counsel of the president witnessed. Most funny thing to happen! Each fellow was saying different thing but it was not agreeing. Here you are trying to impeach Jesus and you think that is going to work. Nobody's testimony agrees.

**Mark 14:57-62**

***<sup>57</sup> Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, <sup>58</sup> "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.' " <sup>59</sup> But not even then did their testimony agree. <sup>60</sup> And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" <sup>61</sup> But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" <sup>62</sup> Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."***

Where is this happening? Right there! Who is there in the courtyard? Peter! He should have stood up and said, "He truly is the Son of God. I have a revelation. I have a witness of my eyes." Did he stand up? The witness turned hostile. He did not stand up. Jesus said, "You shall be My witnesses in this world." The question is- what kind of witness am I? The advent season is here. The Christmas season is here but what kind of witness am I? Peter denied Jesus. "I don't know what you are talking about." It doesn't stop there. It gets worse.

**Mark 14:69-71**

***<sup>69</sup> And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is one of them." <sup>70</sup> But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it." <sup>71</sup> Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"***

Let's leave this Galilean part. That is history but there is spiritual truth over here. They looked at him and said, "your speech shows it." Does your speech show that you have been with Jesus? They identified him by his speech. Does your speech show you in the world that you belong to Jesus? That is the question being asked here. Your speech shows it if you have been with Christ and with the Church, listening to the Word, meditating upon the Word, digesting the Word. Your speech should be changing. That was the first evidence on Pentecost. Their speech changed. The first thing God did was that He took over their tongue. Their speech changed. There was a visible change in their conversation. The topics you talk about, the way you talk, the conversations you have, the topics you are interested in and the topics in which you show disinterest- everything is a testimony. I have nothing to say. Why? It is because I am not interested. Has your speech changed? Here is where he denied Him. Verse 71 is interesting.

**Mark 14:71**

***<sup>71</sup> Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"***

Curse and swear! Let me ask the young ones sitting over here. To show not that you don't belong to Jesus but to show that you belong to the world, to be in crowd, is that the four-letter curse word you use regularly? Profanity laden! That is in culture today, in schools, colleges; in IT sector- everybody uses profanity. In news and movies! One of the reasons I watch black and white movies is because there is no profanity there. We have technology today and incredible movies are made but you cannot watch them unless you are watching it on silent mode. Technology is fantastic. That is what God is talking about. You are behind a curse and you swear. I have many people, even Pastors, say this- "If you push me further, my real nature will come out." That is your real nature! "You don't know who I am!" I thought you changed. I thought the Scripture says that *if any man in Christ Jesus is a new creation, the old things have passed away; all things have become new*. But you are still holding on to that old. It will come out. Profanity! We lower ourselves to the level of the world the way profanity is

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used. That is why I said you have to read these 4 Gospels scenes together to see the incredible screen shots given to us what is happening over there- the servant girl coming back and people saying and talking about his speech. Then in another Gospel, exactly what happens there is given.

### Luke 22:61 (NIV)

<sup>61</sup> ***The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.***

Everything is in eyesight. The trial is going on, Jesus is here, the crowd is there and Peter is there- everything can be seen and Jesus looks straight at Peter- “You don’t know Me? Your language is changed. Peter, you forgot what I had told you some time earlier- you are all clean because of the Word and now the words that are coming out of your tongue are unclean.”

***Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.”***

If the story ended there, we would all go from Church depressed and discouraged, right? It does not end there. It begins the steps back to restoration.

### Luke 22:62 (NIV)

<sup>62</sup> ***And he went outside and wept bitterly.***

First thing he did was that he left that company. Get out of your company, which makes you deny Jesus and swear. Get out of the company that makes you say that you do not know Him nor understand Him; it is not worth being with them and warming yourself in their fires. Maybe they have money and you do not have it. Maybe they will take you for a movie or buy you a drink or a coke; it is not worth warming yourself by their fire. Get out that company. That is what he did first. He got out and wept bitterly. Jesus had seen all these.

### 2 Timothy 2:13

<sup>13</sup> ***If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.***

Even when he was faithless, Jesus was faithful. What do we do when somebody denied us? We walk away. Jesus turned and looked at him. “You, don’t know Me?” *Even when we are unfaithful, He is still faithful because He cannot deny Himself.* See, the restoration begins. He gets out, he goes and he weeps. Three days later, we have different account of Jesus’ resurrection. Let’s look at one account. It is an angelic account in Mark 16.

### Mark 16:6-7

<sup>6</sup> ***But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”***

It is because He knows that Peter is hurting the most, not the others. Others did not deny Him like the way Peter did. That is the nature of our God. A special word for the one who failed Him the most. So if you are the one who feels that you failed Him the most these 11 months, God is telling, go tell him or her the Word for today- “I have risen and you will see Me. All is not lost; you will see Me, I have risen.” A special word!

There are different accounts in the Bible about Jesus’ resurrection. Sometimes we say how come it does not tally. Go and find it out yourself. It is all God’s revelation for people who are searching for Him; not to do mathematics with Scripture. It does not tally- this is not a tally. This is a revelation for people who are broken and crying and looking for God for restoration in their lives. He will speak through different portions of the same incident. There is something that is not even there in the four Gospels, a revelation of Jesus’ resurrection. It is given to us by a man who was never with Jesus; who encountered Jesus after He ascended years and years later. He writes in 1 Corinthians 15. Look at the revelation given to Paul, which is not there in 4 Gospels.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-5**

***<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.***

Jesus was first seen by Cephas. Peter got a private audience with Jesus that nobody knows. I am telling you, if your tears are genuine, so will your revelation be. He revealed Himself to Peter that nobody knew. He revealed to Paul that He first showed Himself to Cephas. Now we will leave Peter out or put him last on our visitation list. Not God! He puts him first on His list. He had known Peter, his weakness and his tears. That is why you have to know God. That is why Peter will say in his final letter, in final words of Peter to us- *grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord*. You need to know Him. "If you were in my position on that day, you would have thought all is lost. I did not even realized that it was a new beginning. I did not think that You would come and meet me first." But guard your heart always like Peter and Elijah from depression because spiritual depression for leadership is a terrible thing because of the pressure they face. Incredible pressure Elijah faced and he got depressed and he ran. The same thing with Peter! Even if God comes and tells you that you are forgiven, you don't remember it. You still do not forgive yourself. You have to learn to forgive yourself. God has forgiven you, but you have not forgiven yourself. A lot of people say, "I will never forgive myself." God says, "go ahead. I have forgiven you. Forgive yourself." If you don't forgive yourself, you will not be able to go ahead with God. That is what happens in final chapter in Gospel according to John.

**John 21:1-3**

***<sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself:***

He showed Himself and then He is telling of the account of what happened.

***<sup>2</sup>Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. <sup>3</sup>Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."***

That is what happens when pressure gets too much and you get too depressed and too discouraged, you go back to what you did earlier. That is what happened to me years ago. So depressed, so discouraged, so much pressure! "It's okay. I will do both. Ministry and secular work!" So I went and applied for one of engineering colleges for a professor in English vacancy. They looked at my resume and they called me first. We were all sitting there and all the others were ladies. They all looked at me and said, "Oh! We will not get the job; your resume is so good." I sat quietly because they did not know the battle that was going inside. I could hear God telling like Elijah- What are you doing here? Then they called me. The whole board was sitting over there and they started asking me questions. In the middle of answering I heard Him say- "Get up and leave." I got up in the middle of the interview and I said, "I am sorry, I apologize for wasting your time; please call the next one. I need to go." Chairman was asking, "Sir, please wait. What happened?" It was as if they did some mistake. I said, "No! You did not do anything, I did the mistake." Pressure can make you go back fishing. That is the first and last time I tried to do 2 things at the same time. Here, Peter went back fishing.

***They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.***

That is what the experience of believers. They caught nothing. All night they worked and they caught nothing.

**John 21:4**

***<sup>4</sup>But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.***

You all know the story, right? I am not reading the whole thing. Jesus asks them, "did you catch anything?" Please remember, what He asks you in the morning and what He asks you in the evening are not always the same thing. The morning of your life, He will ask you, how is it working? Are you catching anything? The end of your life, He will say - let's go to the other side. Get ready to cross over. Remember Mark 4! *When evening came, He told- let us go to the other side*. In the morning, He asked them- did you catch anything? How successful are you? Are you trying to do stuff without Me

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against what you know what I told you to do? Please remember these are all spiritual truths. The sun set on Jacob, on the road to his future father-in-law's house. 20 years later when he has encountered Peniel and he humbled himself and became Israel; the next day, the Scripture says, the son rose.

### **John 21:7-8**

***<sup>7</sup>Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. <sup>8</sup>But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.***

It is interesting, right? Do you want to see the contrast? Go to Mark 14 - Some 30 or 40 days earlier, when Jesus was arrested.

### **Mark 14:51-52**

***<sup>51</sup>Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, <sup>52</sup>and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.***

This was one of the disciples; I think this was John. When they abandoned Him and denied Him, they left their clothes, one man especially and they ran. Now they are practically naked and John says, *it is the Lord*. He covered himself and jumped into the water towards Him. Transformation is taking place. When they abandoned Him, they were naked. Now as He is restoring them, they are being clothes in their minds. That is how restoration takes place. You can get back with God.

Jesus asked only one question in 3 different ways. All those who messed up through these 11 months or many times in these 11 months and who wants to be restored, the answer to this one question that really matters whether we can be restored or not.

### **John 21: 15a**

***<sup>15</sup>So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"***

Don't go to the second and third question. There He only asks- do you love Me? The first question is important. *Do you love Me more than all these?* If the answer is 'yes', then you can be restored. If the answer is 'no', you cannot be restored. It is because whatever you love more will pull you back. It is not possible. It has not been possible with any man in human history. So the question God asks you on the first Sunday of this 12<sup>th</sup> month is- do you love Me more than everything? Everything, everybody, even yourself! Do you love Me more than all these? He will tell you ultimately. For restoration to take place, only that question matters. The power to obey, the power to follow Jesus, the provision to do your work, all these God will supply. That is not the question. The question is this- *Simon, son of Jonah! Do you love Me more than all these?*

Let me ask you this question. Personalize it. Do you love Me more than all these? That is a simple question. For a mother, He will ask- do you love Me more than your son? Everybody who has family- father, mother, brother or sister or son or whatever it is, this is the simple question. If you are a widow with an only child, it is a very difficult question. Do you love Me more than your son? Yesterday a mother wrote to me- my daughter is in ICU. If she dies, I don't know what I will do; what do I have to live for. I said, after all these years of hearing the messages, you are saying that your daughter is the reason for your life? I don't mollycoddle senior believers. Go back and read what David said when his son died. *He will not come back to me but I will go to him*. He got up, worshipped and strengthened himself to continue to serve the Lord. *Do you love Me more than all these?* That is the question. You have to personalize it. You don't know when you will have the answer. As I keep telling, the answers are not made on that day. The answers are made this day. When that day comes, you already know the answer. It is because you already decided the answer long time back. It is not on that day that Abraham decided to take Isaac. He had already decided in his heart that he loved God. He did not decide to offer sacrifice, he did not even know that such a question would arise but he had already decided that God came first. So when God said, take your son, your only son, he did not need to call a prior meeting. No fasting, no prayer, just the next day he got up and he left. That is how it happens. God may repeat this question many times in our lives, not because He is not sure but to see that we are sure. In verse 17, the Scripture says.

**John 21:17a**

***<sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?”***

Don't be grieved because only God knows how many times we have denied Him this year. Don't be grieved. He is not coming to condemn us, He is not coming to blame us; He is coming to restore us. He always comes to restore. Everything about God is restorative with His children. He asks the most important question. *Do you love Me more than these?*

Now we are coming to the elements, the communion, to the bread. We have to ask this question. Why did Jesus say, “*Do this in remembrance of Me until I come*”? This is just a reminder. When you see this, you know it is a reminder. He loved me more than all that; I love Him more than all these. It is because He left heaven, we have to leave earth. He loved me more than all that and we love Him more than all these. It's a commitment we are making every time. It is restoration. It is a table of restoration. As we go to the table, remember, even as He looks at you, straight at you, He is not mad at you. He may look straight into your eyes, but He is not mad at you. He doesn't come to condemn; He comes to restore.

As we go to the Lord's table, it's the Lord's table, a table instituted by Him. It's a table that brings restoration and healing and fellowship back with God and with man. And as we go to the table, we will ask the Lord to show, to cleanse, to sanctify. Only He can do it all. When the elements come, we shall keep it in our hands, partake of it together.

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

***<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” <sup>25</sup> In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.***

Shall we pray?

**Communion Prayer:**

*Father, this morning, we just come to You. We just come to You, Lord. We just want to thank You. We just want to praise You. We just want to worship You, Lord. Who are we, O Lord, that You are mindful of us? What is man, Lord? Like grass in the field, here today and gone tomorrow. Yet, You have looked straight at us. You didn't avoid our eyes. You didn't pass us by. You looked straight at us. Even when we failed You, even when we denied You the umpteenth time and we swore in the language of the world, You still looked straight at us because You love us; because You want to restore us. Today, I pray, Father; today, especially, this first Sunday of this 12<sup>th</sup> month, all those who partake at the table will be partaking at the table of restoration, that You will touch them, You will restore them, You will gladden their hearts and they will go from this place healed and restored, O Lord; because for this purpose You came – to seek and to save the lost. Yes, Lord. Satan sought for us and He sifted us but Your Word says, “For this purpose, the Son of Man came, that He might destroy the works of the devil,” and as we partake of this, we will experience more of Your strength and power in our lives that the works of the devils are continuously destroyed in us, Lord. Thank You, Father. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*

**Communion Song: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus**

Even as we come to the final moments of the Word, like I said, ultimately, the only question that matters, the question we need to ask ourselves: do we love Him? And if we love Him, how do we love Him? That's the question God asked Peter first, “Do you love Me more than all these?” In *1 John 4:18*, John, who was right there, listening to these questions and wrote it down for us later, will say the reason.

**1 John 4:18**

***<sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...***

## Simon Speaks!

It was fear that caused him to deny Jesus. It is fear that makes many of us do many things, especially deny Jesus. And the same Peter, history says, will die on the Cross, like his Master. And at the time of his crucifixion, he will actually say, “I’m not worthy to die like my Master. Crucify me upside down.” He was no longer afraid. He no longer denied because Scripture says in *1 Corinthians 13:8*, *love never fails*. Only two things are mentioned in the Bible. One – God never fails. And love never fails. That’s why He asks the question, “Do you love Me more than all these?” There is only one thing that never fails – that is love. Love never fails. So, we have looked at how Simon fell away and how Simon Peter was restored. In restoration, he did a few things and God asked one question. In *1 Corinthians 13:13*, Scripture says,

### **1 Corinthians 13:13**

***<sup>13</sup> And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.***

And in closing, it’s interesting. One of the final words of Jesus to Peter in *John 21:18*, He says something. It’s the final lesson for today.

### **John 21:18**

***<sup>18</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.”***

It’s talking about the way He would die but it’s more than that. Specifically that but He is telling something to Peter and telling to all of us there. In simple words – when you were young, you did what you wanted. When you are old, you will do what somebody else wants. And in the same chapter of love, *1 Corinthians 13:11*, in the middle of this entire narrative about love, Paul suddenly breaks into something else and says,

### **1 Corinthians 13:11**

***<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.***

Please listen to that carefully.

***...I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.***

It’s not written, “I put away childish things and became a man.” I became a man and I chose to put away childish things. Everyone sitting over here, except for the young ones, are men and women. And you need to put away childish things. Children are moved by feelings. They react to outside or inside stimulus. That’s the nature of a child. He said, “When I became a man, I put away childish things.” It’s not that I put away childish things. Meaning – you can be a man and never put away childish things. And that’s what God told Peter, “When you were young, you were always impulsive. A day will come when you will be led. Peter, that’s when you will be a man. You will put away all these childish things.”

So, the closing argument in the trial room of, not Pontius Pilate, is this – do you love Him more than all these? And if you do, put away childish things. Don’t think like a child; don’t speak like a child; don’t understand as a child. Put away your Good News Bibles. Stop doing your “daily devotions” which you have been doing for the last 30 years. Start getting into serious business not to study the Word but to hear from God so that your vision will be 20-20. 31 days. Actually, 30 and a half days. 30 days and 12 hours, exactly, you have left, to come back to God. But always have this about God – it doesn’t matter how low you have gone, where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. It doesn’t matter how low you have gone, you can’t go too low for God because He went as low as a man could go, to save us. You can’t go lower than that. So, it’s restoration and renewal and He sends you right back to where He called you for. “Do you love Me more than all these?” “Yes, Lord.” “Feed. You are not disqualified. Now, you are qualified because you have fallen; you have come back and now, you can go back and strengthen your brothers because you know what it is to fall and you know what it is to rise. So, you can go back and strengthen others.” Amen? Shall we stand? Shall we pray?

### **Closing Prayer:**

*Father, this morning, we just come to You. Truly, Father, the more we understand You, the more we know You, Jesus. You are the Lover of our soul. Nobody has and nobody can love us the way You do, Father. All of eternity, we will never, ever*

## **Simon Speaks!**

*encounter another Person like You and we don't even really know You. There is none like You. There is none besides Thee, Lord. And this morning, I commit the Church into Thy hands and I pray, O Father, restoration, renewal and focus. Everyone will recommit themselves back to the King and to the Kingdom and there would be a fire lit in us; not the fire in Ananias' court but a fire that is lit in Heaven itself and birthed in us, Lord; that these 30 days and the New Year that is coming, no one will be barren or unfertile. Everyone will be fruitful and full, Lord. Full of You and fruitful, Father, wherever they go. And wherever we go, we do not deny You; we acknowledge You and we will proclaim You. And they will know us by our conversation to who we belong. Thank You, Father. As a Church and our Churches, all Your people go into another 30 days, I bless them in Your Name. May the hand of the Living God rest upon each one, empower them, heal them, strengthen them and equip them to fulfil Your call and Your purpose in their lives, O Lord. Now, by faith, believing the Word of God, the Blood of Jesus, the Spirit of God has sanctified us, we lift up holy hands in Your sanctuary and we bless Your holy Name. And we open our mouths and we proclaim – Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever, Lord. Thank You, Father. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*

### **Benediction:**

*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and abide with each one of us, Amen.*