

Danger in the Distance

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Preacher: Travis Evans

[0:00] I've got to take it off mute. There we go. Good morning, everybody. How are you doing? Good to see you out there. Hey, we have a real treat. I'm going to call my buddy, Travis. Those of you that may be newer to One Harbor that are not really familiar with our story as a church, we are a church that got planted a little over 10 years ago in Moorhead.

And since then, God's just blessed us with just bringing more and more amazing people. And so we branched out and put sites in the cities where people were driving a far ways from.

That's why we are a One Harbor Havelock site of One Harbor Church. And so one of the things that God's really blessed us with as we've sewed out and sewed out is he's always backfilled just amazingly well, just bringing people in and raising up leaders.

And Travis and Becky, if you remember, Becky was here last week, and she was part of the team leading worship last week. Like she really was, yeah, you and Bart were amazing, Becky. Thanks for that.

But Travis and Becky kind of sailed into our lives, pun intended. Bro, Travis is a sailing man. So, yeah, you'll probably hear some of that in the sermon, I'm sure. A little bit. It could happen. You never know.

[1:10] But just a great guy. And, man, he's a good friend, too. I know this man's heart. He loves Jesus. He loves the church. He loves God's people.

And so I just want to commend you guys to him as he comes and he preaches today. Open up your hearts to him. Really excited, bro, what you have to share with us today.

And I am looking forward to sitting under your preaching. Thanks, bro. Go for it. Good morning. It's good to see you. Oh, yeah. I'm so happy to be here.

As Jesse said, my name is Travis, one of the pastors in Moorhead City. Just to take a few moments to give Jesse and his wife and Bear and his wife some honor.

They have 72 kids between the two families, so they're doing a good job growing the church. But Jesse is a dear friend and a brother. He's a guy that when he speaks, I listen.

[2:05] And, man, he has this amazing gift. It's like two-handed gift. On one side, he has this brilliant mind that's able to interpret current events through this amazing lens that is godly and wise.

I'm always asking his opinion on things and what he's preaching about to see if I can steal some of his material. But also with his left hand, he has this, like, pastoral and priestly heart that's able to walk through tough times with people like few can.

And the same with all the eldership here. It's a blessing to know him. And so I honor him and Haley and Bear. I hope you guys are as blessed as I am by knowing them.

Guys, it's good to be with you. That said, welcome to anyone who is here for the very first time. It's good to have you. Or if you are joining for the first time in a long time, and maybe you've been watching online or had a break and you've been coming back, welcome to you as well.

I'm sure that you were greatly missed. If you know One Harbor, then we are normally right in the middle of a series or going through a book of the Bible, in this case Proverbs.

[3:15] And I hope you guys have been enjoying that as much as we have in Moorhead. But this week, Jesse has allowed me to speak something that we're going to kind of have as a standalone message, but just something that's on my heart that God has been working with me in my walk.

And so I just want to pay it forward. We're going to kind of take a break from our normal scheduled programming. And so this morning, I want to talk to you about closeness.

Closeness to our Savior, nearness to our Lord and to our King. It can be argued that often many of our downfalls come not due to the accuracy of our theology or the diligence of our doctrine, but rather the nearness of our walk to the one in which that theology is about.

Dryness in our bones all too often is not due to a lack of faith itself, but rather a lack of proximity to the one in which we place faith. What I've learned is that few people will outright deny Christ. But even within the church walls, many are so far from Him. And I've learned that God only calls us out of darkness and into a marvelous light, but He has called us to be near to His heart and follow Him ever so closely.

[4 : 37] Yet so many remain distant. I know my heart is so prone to wonder, and I would be willing to bet that I'm not alone. So I'd like to talk just for a few moments for a sermon that I'm calling Danger in the Distance.

There is danger in the distance. Let me pray really quick. Lord, we thank You that Your Word is a lamp into our feet and a light into our path, that You have promised us that it will illuminate life. And so we invite You into this moment to do what only You can do. Speak to all of our situations. A preacher can't do that, but You can. We honor You. We welcome You, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen. We use this word distance more than ever. We are hyper aware of the proximity and distance from each other like never before.

And that's a good thing, and that's helping with our safety. What I am concerned about, however, is the distance between us and our Lord. We are living in times that have revealed so much of where our hearts lie.

[5 : 49] It seems the smallest of inconveniences cause so many to throw off the reins and distance themselves from the very things that God has called and anointed to give us life.

So many are buying into this version of Christianity that has a general proximity to Jesus, but deny the intimacy it takes to follow Him and hear His voice. And Jesus warned us of this.

He said, you confess me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me. So I want to speak to someone this morning who is here in person, but your bones feel dry.

I want to speak to someone who maybe at one time you followed Jesus closely, but somehow in some way along the way, you've lost hold of something that once was, and you would never say it out loud, but inside you're feeling more lonely than ever.

I'd love to show you that the same Savior that called you to follow, maybe for some of you all those years ago, is still calling you today to return to Him. I'd like to look at a story in the life of a man named Peter.

[6 : 57] I'd like to just tell a story today. A lot of you guys likely know Peter if you've been coming to church at all in your life. You may know at least some of the details of Peter's life.

I relate a lot to Peter. I'm a sailor and a mariner, as was he. He stuck his foot in his mouth a lot. I can relate a lot to that as well. But I would like to show you some details of Peter's relationship with Jesus that hopefully will bring us some hope this morning.

And I'd like to do that by looking at three different encounters of Jesus and Peter over the course of three years. The first of which takes place at the beginning of the relationship in Matthew chapter 4. It will be on your screen. This is how it all started for Peter. Verses 18 and 19. While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he, that's Jesus, saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

And he said to them, and this is the first words that Jesus chose to speak to Peter. The first time that he heard his voice, our king said this, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

[8 : 16] And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And this is how it all begins. Faith begins with an encounter with Jesus.

Not an inheritance of your parents' faith. Not perfect church attendance. Not being really good. An encounter with Jesus. And this oftentimes happens when we're seeking the Lord.

And this oftentimes happens when we're not. Just like in this case. Peter was doing what he had always done. Likely what he did every day. He was going about his life.

And one day, seemingly out of nowhere, he encounters this man named Jesus. Now, undoubtedly, he had encountered people on a regular basis. But something was different about this encounter.

And we have little details to know exactly why. But what I do know is two men with the fortitude and strong-headedness to become career fishermen in a treacherous sea like the Sea of Galilee would not have been men easily swayed or convinced to simply drop what they were doing and follow a stranger on a moment's notice.

[9 : 24] This detail has always been so fascinating to me. But yet it says immediately they left their nets and followed him. This shows me that Jesus has this ability to speak to people's hearts and

desires.

And his voice is undeniable when he wants it to be. Peter must have felt something deep in those simple words that day that compelled him to respond. Follow me.

And it's worth noting, if you're new here and you're checking all this out for the first time, that Jesus' call is just as simple to you. He will take you just as you are and exactly where you are.

Peter was not worshiping in a synagogue or helping an elderly man across the street. He was not on his knees in prayer when Jesus decided to encounter him. He was doing what he'd always been doing, where he'd always been doing it.

He didn't need a 12-part Bible study in order to understand how to follow Jesus. He merely decided to respond to the simple words that said, follow me. And so it began, this epic story that played out over the course of the next few years with Peter and the others.

[10:37] And what started out as an unassuming response to follow turned into a movement that changed history as we know it. Peter saw Jesus heal the blind. He saw him feed thousands with a little boy's lunch.

He was firsthand to the Sermon on the Mount when mankind was given this priceless and precious gift of hearing what God's heart himself was like and what he cared about.

He witnessed demons being casted out of people and even a man named Lazarus be raised from the dead. Day after day, he was able to walk with the living and breathing God-man himself who taught him and showed him the goodness and fairness and holiness of God's heart.

The manifested Christ himself, whose feet touched the same ground as Peter's, poured into Peter day after day and month after month. Peter witnessed unthinkable things, incredible things.

What a gift this must have been for the lowly fishermen from Galilee. Peter's heart grew fond of Jesus and he loved him deeply. I mean, how could he not after all of this?

[11:45] How could a person not be infinitely loyal to someone who has been perfectly loyal to him? For years this unfolded. The story started out so well.

Yet years later, after all of this time with Jesus, we see in a garden called Gethsemane as Jesus approaches his darkest hour, a side of Peter's heart that reveals so much of our fickle human nature.

And we learn that Peter denies Christ in multiple encounters. We see Peter denying the Christ when he pressed to pledge his allegiance to him.

This is perplexing. A guy who had nearly nothing yet was given so much. A guy who was chosen not because anything he had done, but merely because of the Lord's kindness and goodness.

A guy who had seen Jesus reveal his power and faithfulness time and time again, who brought him into his inner circle. The same guy refuses to associate himself from Jesus when it mattered most.

[12:52] And this is the question that this asked. Why? Why does this happen? How does this happen? How do we get into places where we are not the people that we want to be and find ourselves at a place in our walk that used to be foreign to us?

And this is where Peter found himself. And I'd be willing to bet that many people find themselves as well there today. I want to explore some details of the moment leading up to this denial that I find imperative to understanding how denial works in our own hearts.

If you look at me at this second encounter, it's in Matthew 26, 57 and 58. Just to set a little bit of context, Jesus had been bringing things to a boil with the disciples for a few days, letting them know that he was leading to his death.

They had went to this garden and he had, a lot of you guys know the story, he had asked them to pray and he kept finding them asleep. I think they were scared, that's why. And the one known as Judas comes with the guards to arrest Jesus and Peter in his boldness draws the sword and cuts off the ear of one of the guards.

Jesus picks up the guy's ear and puts it back on. What a moment. And then he takes, they take Jesus. And what happens next is a detail I often find overlooked.

[14:20] It says in Peter, note this, was following him at a distance. As far as the courtyard of the high priest. And going in, he sat down not with the disciples, not with the ones associated with Jesus, but he sat with the guards to see the end.

And it's only moments later that we read about this famous fail that Peter lives out when he outright denies Christ. But these details show me that he had already set himself up for danger and for failure.

Living in denial begins with distance from God. You see, for so many, we would never boldly declare that we don't know Jesus and therefore outright deny him. But we live much of our lives in denial towards our walk with God.

And we are in a season and time in Christendom and in this cultural moment where we have endless distractions raging against the intimacy God seeks to have with us.

The news and opinions and endless media outlets are shouting and social platforms are shouting that have muffled the often still small voice of our Savior.

[15 : 37] The voice that says, do not fear. We just sang it. The voice that says, follow me. The voice that says in John 16, 33, in this world, you will have many troubles.

Don't be surprised by it. Don't be fretted by it. But take heart for I have overcome the world. This is what I've learned. The devil shouts his lies. But oftentimes, God whispers his truth.

He whispers. He whispers. I know this may be awkward. But he whispers because he's powerful.

He whispers because he's close. You see, if the devil can't make the church outright deny Christ, he will create such distraction as to encourage distance from God so he can make us ineffective in our fight against darkness.

There is danger in the distance. Peter was close enough to see the general direction that Jesus was following, but far enough away as to avoid the danger that was associated in following him in that moment.

[16 : 53] He then disassociated himself with his own people and sat down with the very ones that were about to kill him. It's no wonder anymore that moments later, he denies him.

He had already distanced himself and disassociated himself. We are in a time, church. We're taking a stand for our faith and being loving but bold about where God's heart is on issues and events is becoming harder and harder.

It's easy to become and be a Christian when it's convenient and the cool thing to do so. It's easy to gather when gathering looks like how we've always gathered. It's challenging when the seasons of life come that requires boldness and devotion and deep wisdom rooted in prayer and community and nearness of spirit.

Without the closeness of spirit of God both in our families and in our communities, we are just playing church and going through the emotions and the motions with little effectiveness.

Those who seek God in the quiet moments will not live in denial in the hard moments. James 4.8 Do not draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

[18 : 07] This is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. It's not that he saves those who only want to save themselves. No, no, no. Salvation belongs completely to the Lord. He seeks all of us when none of us are seeking, Romans says, but then he reserves an area of his heart for those who lean in, those who seek him, those who thirst for his spirit.

And I am convinced that the next seasons of our world will not be like the last and God's people have this incredible opportunity to draw close and listen in like never before.

Our lives can be marked by faithfulness even amongst uncertainty. I want to encourage you today that God is still on the throne that he's always been on. Can I get an amen through a mask?

He is faithful to you today as the day he revealed himself to you. But the enemy has gotten it so right in so many people's heart that we walk around with shame because we have fallen so short in our walk and we undervalue God's grace and this beautiful side of God's heart that wants to begin anew with us.

I mean, let's face it. We have made some mistakes a lot of us just like Peter. Some of us like Peter have made huge mistakes and gotten in front of God and cut off the ears of our enemies.

[19 : 31] Gotten in front of him instead of letting him fight our battles and it's caused shame and guilt and ultimately distance to come. Many others have gotten behind God and like Peter allowed idols of false safety and cultural convenience to bring distraction to us that has slowly led to a lackluster faith that is lukewarm and ineffective.

We walk around with a low-lying shame and guilt because deep down we know our own hearts. Allow me to remind us that our right standing before God had never had anything to do with our outstanding faith and behavior in the first place.

Our obedience will always be imperfectly executed. That's why the gospel is so amazing. That's what makes returning again and again to the foot of the cross so pure and so beautiful.

It realigns our hearts and shows us it was never about us and our ability to perfectly execute but the fact that he did. Can you imagine the shame Peter must have felt late that evening as Jesus was unfairly tried falsely convicted and punished to death.

A man so faithful to him yet in those crucial moments Peter acted like a coward and denied that he even knew him. And I don't have a verse for it but I can only ascertain that he wept late into the night as reality set in that Jesus would die and Peter's last moment of allegiance was tainted.

[21 : 12] If only he could get another chance he would make it right. If somehow things could be different. The next day Peter's fears were realized.

Jesus dies and for three days Peter's shame seems to be final. He blew it. What once was had turned into something else because he had allowed distance in between him and Jesus in those dark moments.

And I know that's where so many people find themselves with their faith. You have made millions of mistakes and wish you had a million do-overs. It started out so well.

I mean for some of you Jesus revealed himself at some point along the way and your life had an explosion of joy and peace that you'd never had before. Your desires changed.

Your passions changed from seeking the things of this world and what only the world can offer to what only the Lord can offer. Your intimate walk with Jesus defined you. Tears would roll down your face as you contemplated the goodness of God's grace on your sinful soul.

[22 : 25] That he would give you new life in him overwhelmed your heart with gratitude. This was your story at some point. But along the way slowly you begin to compromise.

I begin to compromise and distance ourselves. Just a little at first and then more. It didn't happen overnight but if you're honest with yourself your walk right now is nothing but a shell of what it once was.

And you keep coming to church gatherings but deep down you know you've lost something that you once had and in your most private and most vulnerable of times you wonder what you even believe at all.

And I know that sounds heavy but if that's you I would like to share with you the rest of the story.

You see Jesus died and was buried and with him all the penalty of our shame and our sin and after three days a man who claimed he was God showed the world exactly that and he rose from the grave.

And upon this event that shook history Jesus revealed himself to his disciples one last time. And I would like to read for you some details of a third and final encounter between Jesus and Peter.

[23 : 46] It's in John 21. A little bit of context. Peter was full of shame, full of guilt. The Bible says that he decided to go back fishing. You know sometimes when we're overwhelmed we do the only thing we know how to do.

We put one foot in front of the other and just try to numb it out and get through the day. He went back fishing. He'd fished all night. The Bible said he hadn't caught anything. We'll pick up in verse 4. Just as the day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore. Yet the disciples did not know it was Jesus. And Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish?

They answered, no. He said to them, you guys heard this story, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. So they cast it. Now they were not even able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish.

But then note this, the disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord. I can only try to close my eyes and imagine Peter in that moment.

[24 : 48] What? When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment for he was stripped for work and he threw himself into the sea.

Some translation says he recklessly jumped off the boat. I'm a sailor, rule one, don't jump off the boat. But Peter didn't mind. There's no way he was going to waste this moment once again.

He did all he could do to go to Jesus. All his shame and guilt, everything that he had been carrying, he had another shot with the king. What a moment.

What a moment this must have been. The Bible says this kind of famous conversation, he gets to the shore, Jesus, Peter. Jesus asked him multiple times, do you love me?

I love you. I'm sorry, I love you, I'm sorry. Do you love me? Yes, I love you. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep.

[25 : 52] As it's to say, you're still called. Your sin is no longer held against you. Your denial was epic, but it's no longer final. Your standing in heaven is secure.

Not because of what you've done, but because of what I just done. After that, he said this to him, as I close. He'd said all that, and he said, Peter, follow me, just before he ascended into heaven. And I find it fascinating that all those years before, if you remember, the very first thing he said to Peter when he first met him and Andrew on the boat was, follow me, I will make you fishers of men. The first recorded words of Jesus to Peter. And after all these years, all this time, the last thing he says to him is, follow me. almost as as to say, I am the same God who called you all those years ago to a life that was much bigger than yourself.

And I am the same God calling you today to follow me. My message and your calling has not changed. Only now you understand grace more deeply.

[27 : 11] Amen? So if you're here and you're not a Christian, and this means no matter what you've done, no matter how big your sin is, Romans tells us that when sin increases, grace abounds.

No matter what your story is, no matter how far from God you are, that the message to you is the same. And you can bring all of your trouble, all of your questions right into a relationship with Jesus. And if that's you, and you've been skirting on that for a while, we'd love to talk with you. You can talk to Jesse or Bear or myself, any of the leaders. If you're here and you are a Christian, and your story sounds a lot like Peter's.

At one time, man, this thing was from a pure heart. Along the way, somehow it's become something else. I want to encourage you today to look at the grace of the Lord towards Peter in this story. It was never about our ability to pull it off perfectly, but yet that we can come again and again and lay it back down to him. Amen? Let me pray for us. Yeah, Jesus, we thank you for the story that we've read today.

[28 : 20] We thank you for your heart to find us in places when oftentimes we're not even seeking you. I thank you that you seek us out and you give us what we need when we don't even know.

And so Lord, I'm just humbled this morning to be with these people. I pray for anyone in here. they may be putting on a good face, they may be going through the motions, but deep in, they're dry. I pray that you do what only you can do. As we sing King of Kings and we remind ourselves of this amazing story that you've been writing for thousands of years that you've allowed us to be written into, Lord, we worship you and we thank you this morning.
Amen.