

April 29, 2018

John 21:5-19

FAILING FAITH ISN'T FATAL OR FINAL

Today, we're looking at Peter's story of restoration with the risen Jesus! Peter could be remembered for many wonderful things: ***"To whom else would we go, for only you have the words of life!"*** & ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!"*** – truths upon which Christ's entire kingdom is built!

But for what do you remember Peter? Denial = "faith failure!" that turned out not to be either fatal or final! *How do we know?* The account of Acts tells us that Peter withstood beatings, imprisonments and death-threats – all for speaking the name of Christ. He authored 2 letters that encouraged Christians to be faithful under all kinds of persecution as they awaited His return. Peter's ministry should not be summed up in one failing episode, but by what he learned thru faith-filled experiences!

-1Pet 4:12,13

Like Peter, our failures in faith and the condemning feelings that come as a result, seem fatal; but they are not final because we are eternal with Jesus thru the conversion of salvation! Therefore, there will always be a "next time!" for us to get it right – just as there was for Peter after denying Christ!

Do you remember how Peter responded when Jesus told him, ***"this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times"?*** "No!" Peter insisted. ***"Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!"*** **2 things to keep in mind:**

- 1) *All the other disciples promised the same thing; all denied!*
- 2) *Jesus had earlier prophesied @ Peter's restoration (Lke 22)*

How long do you think this one episode disqualified Peter in his own mind as one of Jesus' disciples? Like Peter, you & I pay much more attention to our failings (*and especially the failings others*) than to the few successful experiences of hearing & obeying what God's says. ***It is the human condition!*** And for this reason, it was necessary for Jesus to restore Peter for Peter's benefit, for the rest of the disciples (including us) & for the kingdom work that God would accomplish thru them!

READ: John 21:15-19 (NLT) *Jesus restores/reinstates*

*Peter in front of the other disciples, not in private! Why? They all needed to know that **failing in faith is not fatal or final!***

- 15-16) Peter is given 3 opportunities to declare his love for Jesus – precisely the number of times Peter denied Him.
- Twice, Jesus uses a different word for love than Peter does
 - "Peter – do you **love** Me?" (agapao)
 - "Yes, Lord; you know that I **like** you!" (phileo)
 - "...more than these" (other disciples)
 - Do you love Me more than you love them?*
 - Do you love Me more than they do?*
- 17) Jesus uses Peter's word; "Peter, do you like Me?" (phileo)
-"Lord you know all things; you know I like you"

Jesus doesn't seem to be bothered by Peter's word choice! This, too, feels like **failing faith!** But Jesus is very willing to let Peter's faith grow & mature thru life's circumstances! ***Why?*** Because Jesus knows that Peter's faith will work itself out thru the power of the Holy Spirit & continual opportunities to test & prove that God is worthy of trusting in the details of life. **Jesus accepts that perfect faith is unrealistic; but progress in faith comes naturally to Peter (and all of us) as we experience Jesus in the details of life – growing to know & love Him more/more!**

****ILLUS:** quote from Dr. C. Baxter Kruger

What if "Denier" isn't what God thinks when he sees Peter?
What if God looks at Peter and sees a beautiful mess: a faith-filled son who doesn't trust perfectly, but learns to trust as he gains confidence in Jesus thru 1 life experience after another. ***What if our failures are not what define us in God's mind...*** but rather every successful act of trusting Christ, whether great or small? ***What if our "faith failures" are really opportunities to trust God NEXT time?***

Peter finally realized that failure in faith isn't fatal or final!

Have you realized this yet?

INVITATION TO RESPOND PERSONALLY:

- 1) Are you expecting to love & obey Jesus perfectly?
- 2) Do "faith failures" preoccupy you & your talks with God?
- 3) Do you realize that following Jesus is easier than making your own way thru life?

WORSHIP IN MEDITATION:

We'll see today that trusting Jesus is a matter of knowing Him better and loving Him more. There's no shortcut: faith only grows thru time & circumstances; the more you & I experience Jesus in person and in need, the more we will know, love & trust Him!

Like Peter, Ashley has testimony is about hearing a word of restoration from God! Though the circumstances were entirely different, hearing God speak to us in our unique situations according to our unique needs always brings truth, hope & promise!

Though his circumstances were very different, Peter, also heard a word of restoration from the risen Jesus:

Luke 22:31-33 (NLT)

31) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." 33) But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34) Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

As you can see, Jesus prophesies that Peter's restoration will occur after he "turns back" to Christ! We'll examine the story that sets up this truth: **Failing in faith isn't fatal or final!**

Sermon in a Sentence: **Failing Faith Isn't Fatal or Final**

ILLUS: One author notes: "God doesn't wonder what you will do or what choices you will make. He already knows. Let's say, for example, that He is trying to teach you how not to hide inside of lies (like "God couldn't love me!"). He knows it will take 47 situations before you will hear clearly enough to agree with Him and change. So when you don't hear Him the first time, He's not frustrated or disappointed... He's thrilled! Only 46 more to go! And that first time will be a building block to construct a bridge of healing that one day you will walk across into greater trust & freedom."

Are you expecting to love the Lord perfectly, completely, thoroughly, & transparently? IT WON'T HAPPEN on this side of Glory! (*Besides, it's the very reason Christ came!*) Do your best; but realize that you love Him as you know & experience Him thru life – more & deeper with every experience! You've already messed up – just like me & like Peter! ***But God does not define you by your failures! Therefore, neither should you!***

Failures give you opportunities to succeed by trusting Jesus more/better next time – until He returns! Peter learned that being thrown in prison for faith in Christ wasn't the worst thing. *Do you know how?* He was thrown in prison! Every experience in life gives us opportunity to trust Jesus, and to know Him better and love Him more until He comes again! The Church is meant to help each other do just that – and often, by testimonies!