

John #49: The Saviour of Failures (John 18:1-27)

PRAY

We have so many ways that we avoid or alleviate pain in our lives today

It's not wrong to address this fallen world's curse, or to seek relief from its pain

Though sometimes I wonder if we've gone overboard, with:

Drugs for every ailment, insurance for every risk, safety features and safety equipment that our grandparents would laugh at, locks and alarms and cameras for extra security, and the modern trends of 'safe spaces' and surrounding oneself with only 'safe people'

We do our best to only experience comfort and ease—and never discomfort or pain
Jesus is so different from us... He didn't seek out pain for pain's sake, but neither did he avoid it
He didn't surround himself only with perfect, pleasant people

No, he actually chose very unsafe people, who would fail him terribly

He truly was a 'friend of sinners' and that would cost him dearly

Christ knew what he had to do, and walked willingly, purposefully, boldly toward it

Right when most of us would quail and fail and blaze a trail right out of dodge

And today, I want you to see him in contrast to us

Please **OPEN** up a Bible to John chapter 18... John 18 [page #904]

We've now in the homestretch in our 2-year journey through John... Ready for it?

In ch.13-17, we slowed way down to focus on Jesus' last night with his disciples before death

He gave them a powerful farewell discourse during the last supper,

And then prayed a marvelous prayer for himself, for them, and even for us in ch.17

In chapter 18, we return to the narrative of Jesus' passion week, and the action picks up rapidly

I don't usually read a whole passage at once at the start of my sermon

But in this case, I think it will be helpful to see the whole dramatic picture

Before drawing out three key themes that keep popping up like a whack-a-mole

So follow along with me, from v.1-27: **READ v.1-27¹**

Backing up to the start of the chapter, we see Jesus going to the garden we know as Gethsemane

Which was an olive grove on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem

And a favourite hang-out for Jesus and his friends—perhaps where they camped at night

It was so frequented by them, that Judas knew exactly where he was likely to find them

Now, if I knew someone was about to betray me to the death, like Jesus did,

I think I'd avoid familiar spots—going anywhere other than where Judas would expect

But not Jesus, who almost seems to go out of his way to make sure this encounter takes place

The other significant detail of this location: Our history began and the fall took place in a garden

Jesus would rise from the dead in a garden tomb

And history will reach its culmination in a garden city

Likewise, here, Jesus begins his deathly march to the cross in a garden

READ v.3²... Some estimate there might've been near a thousand people in this mob

It was a combination of Jewish law enforcement and Roman military force

They knew if they were to arrest someone of Jesus' status, violence was a possibility

So this big contingent of men with torches and weapons was mustered together,
Their fires lighting up the night, and their marching and clanging breaking the silence
It would have been a striking scene... And more than a little frightening
Imagine a bunch of police cruisers, with lights on and sirens blaring, screaming down your street
You might look out your window, alarmed: “What’s going on?”

[tr] But then in v.4, a most shocking thing happens: *Jesus* approaches *them* to basically surrender
Till now, Jesus evaded capture and deadly mobs numerous times, as it wasn’t yet his time
But now, he goes willingly... *Knowing full well* how bad things were about to get:

READ v.4³... Here’s the first major point I want you to glean from John 18, that:

When confronted by pain, Jesus moved forward (v.1-11, 19-22)

[r] He intentionally went out to meet the pain that was coming for him, head-on

[r] When confronted by pain, Jesus moved forward

This is hinted at even back in v.1, where a seemingly innocuous geographical detail was given:

That Jesus crossed the brook of Kidron, which was in a little valley just outside the city
The first time we hear the name Kidron in the Bible is in 2 Samuel 15

Where King David’s son Absalom staged a coup, and David had to flee for his life

It specifies that David fled across the brook of Kidron on his way to the wilderness

So in other words, we’ve got an ironic reversal of a famous historic event going on

While David crossed Kidron, leaving the city to escape death and avoid bloodshed

David’s greater son, Jesus, crossed Kidron, leaving the city to embrace death and
allow his blood to be shed⁴... Thus, he is both like David and better than David

And then, as we saw, he intentionally went to Gethsemane, where Judas was sure to find him

That betrayal alone would have been a particularly brutal form of pain

If you’ve ever been betrayed by a friend or family member, turning their back on you,

You know it’s one of the most devastating experiences of life

How monumental was this moment for Jesus—and in redemption history?

Well, when Paul talks about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Cor. 11, he doesn’t say,

“On the night Jesus ate a last supper” or “On the night Jesus was arrested”

He says, “On the night he was betrayed...”⁵

This betrayal would’ve hurt more than much of the physical pain he endured

And then, as the mob approached, Jesus came forward, moving toward the trouble

‘Whom do you seek?’— “Who are you after?” “Jesus of Nazareth!” “I am he.”

And then, in one of the craziest moments imaginable: **READ v.6⁶**... Haha!

At the minimum, Jesus simply said, “That’s me; here I am”

And the mob was taken aback by Jesus’ sudden appearance,

Or his directness in identifying himself, in the face of such a threat

Alternatively, this moment could’ve just involved a supernatural invisible push by Jesus,

displaying his divine power which he could’ve kept brandishing, had he wanted

But there’s another possibility here... The words Jesus said were the same words as ‘I am’

We don’t know for sure if he was implying anything more, but I suspect he was,

Given the mob’s over-the-top shock... They all fell to the ground!

If he was unapologetically claiming to be the great I AM here,

That would explain why they staggered back, falling down
The audacity, even in the face of arrest,
to come right out and repeat his boldest claim, would've stunned them
Even if they weren't aware of these overtones, John certainly would have been
Whatever the case, it's a humorous scene: "I am he." Boom: flattens an army.
It indeed showcases the power Jesus could have wielded at this moment
He was outnumbered, maybe a thousand to one, but he wasn't scared... They were
So if Jesus didn't want to get arrested, he wasn't getting arrested... He's in control here

I don't think *we* are staggered enough by the fact that Jesus knew all that would happen to him,
And he *came* forward, essentially volunteering
He was already experiencing the emotional torment of Judas' betrayal
He foresaw the agonies he'd have to endure—every form of pain imaginable
But he was no martyr yielding to a cruel fate... No this was his plan
He moved toward the pain... Suffering and dying of his own free will
What kind of love would cause him to put such incredible power back in its sheath,
Allowing a much-weaker-than-him mob to take him into their custody?
What kind of strength of will did it take to so willingly yield himself up, even to death?

As J.C. Ryle said: *"To suffer voluntarily, when we have the power to prevent it, and to suffer for a world of unbelieving and ungodly sinners, unasked and unthanked—this is a line of conduct which passes man's understanding... Let this thought abide in our hearts and refresh our souls. We have a Saviour who was far more willing to save us than we are willing to be saved."*

It must've taken the mob a few seconds to get back on their feet and regroup
Then Jesus asked *again*: "Whom do you seek?" ...More reluctantly: "Jesus of Nazareth?"
This is pure speculation, but maybe Jesus was hinting: 'You sure you want to find me?'
Jesus' more obvious motivation is given in v.8... He was looking out for his disciples:
READ v.8⁷... Jesus wasn't worried about his own safety, but for the safety of his friends⁸
And v.9 says this fulfilled a promise—a guarantee—he had made: **READ v.9**⁹
In John 17:12, earlier on the same night, he'd prayed: *"I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."*
They'd be kept physically safe in the short-term
And through what Jesus was about to do, they'd be kept eternally safe as well
But this verse is so important to remember in the context of what happens next
With a whole bunch of failure from Jesus' disciples... He'd lose none of them
And believer, if you are in Christ, you stand in the footsteps of these early disciples
Both in failing to live up to our calling, and in being totally secure in Christ's grip

In v.10, Peter, always impetuous, whips out a sword, and takes a wild swing at the crowd
And in a flash, he connected with some flesh! A lunge, a scream, some blood, and an ear!
I imagine the soldiers must have quickly reached for their own swords
But Jesus quickly steps between them, rebuking his own follower: **READ v.11**¹⁰
What John doesn't record is that Jesus also reached over and healed Malchus' ear
Again demonstrating his supernatural power to those who came to seize him
But in those short seconds, Jesus defused a potential disaster for his disciples
While explaining to Peter his resolve to go ahead with God's plan for him to die:

‘Don’t try to stop them Peter. Would you stop me from following the Father’s will?
No, I must drink the cup.’ ...In essence: Let me go. It’s OK. God’s in control.’

What cup was Jesus referring to? In his prayer in Gethsemane, he spoke of it: “*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*”¹¹

It was the cup of God’s wrath, a metaphorical poison drink that terrified even God’s Son
Here in John 18, we see that, after his prayer, he’s regained resolve: ‘I will drink it.’
Jesus moved forward, even under the looming shadow of the most extreme spiritual pain

The rest of the passage continues to show further examples of Jesus’ early suffering
Including what must have been deep grief at Peter’s denials
And then physical pain in v.22, as the high priest’s officer slaps him across the face
The first blow of physical abuse Jesus suffered
In the face of these, Jesus keeps the gears in motion that would lead directly to his death

[tr] This passage in John 18 is meant to show us Jesus’ supreme love and resolve
In light of people’s falling short, over and over again—They stand in stark contrast
And that’s the second main idea I want you to notice today... Jesus moved forward... But then:

When confronted by Jesus, people fell back (v.2-3, 5-6, 10, 12-18, 19, 22, 25-27)

[r] In coming face-to-face with Jesus, being confronted with him, people fell back

I’m using the picture of ‘falling back’ which we saw in v.6
to describe what happens spiritually to nearly everyone else mentioned in this passage
Everyone is failing but Jesus!
Just consider this long string of disappointments and disasters... a parade of them:

In the first several verses, Judas is mentioned 3x, and labelled as the one “who betrayed him”
v.5 says he was “standing with them”... But, ironically, by then, he’d already fallen
This is Judas’ final appearance in John... His betrayal had been forecasted multiple times
But after the dirty deed was done, he doesn’t even merit another passing mention
Remember, though: We can identify with many people’s sinful failings in Scripture
But we shouldn’t identify with Judas’... His was a historically unique case
And he was the lone exception that proved the rule that Jesus loses *no one* else

We also see the failure of the bloodthirsty mob that accompanied Judas
They weren’t innocent... They were parts of the systems that wanted Jesus dead
The fact that both Jews and Gentiles were involved was an indictment on the whole world
Note the contrast in v.4 and v.6 between Jesus coming forward and them drawing back
Then v.12 records the actual arrest: **READ v.12**¹²... As if binding him would do any good!

Then there’s Peter... Oh, Peter... slashing off an ear, in a clumsy, reckless misunderstanding
He was fighting the wrong battle... Trying to protect Jesus from God’s plan

Then there’s the high priests mentioned in v.13-14, who were definitely plotting for blood
Including Caiaphas, who had inadvertently prophesied that Jesus *had to die*
v.14 is a flashback to chapter 12: **READ v.14**¹³

It was better that one man die than that all die... Amen!

This is exactly what Jesus would do on the cross,

Sacrificing himself in place of all who would believe in him

But Caiaphas and his father-in-law, Annas, would tag-team a sham of a trial to condemn Jesus

The detail of people warming up around a fire because it was a cold night is significant

Because true above-board trials didn't take place at night!

v.19-24 focuses on Annas interrogating him about two things:

His disciples—in case his followers would cause an uprising

And his teaching—because he sounded like a blasphemous false prophet to them

They were afraid he was leading masses of their people astray

And they were zealous to protect God's law... But getting it all wrong!

Before that scene though, in v.15-18, we get Peter again, who takes his failure to another level

He and another disciple, likely John himself, followed Jesus at a distance

They get into the proximity of Jesus' trial, in the high priest's courtyard, and things go south:

READ v.17¹⁴... Now, remember: What did Jesus boldly say earlier? "I am he"

And now we have Peter fearfully going, "I am not"... What a contrast!

Also how tragic! Peter's violent defense of Jesus has swung to vehement denial of Jesus

While Christ moved toward pain to save others, Peter moved away from it to save himself

Peter chose the route of self-preservation through self-distancing: "I am not"

Like Judas, Peter is described as "standing", in both v.18 and 25... But he too had already fallen

*"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."*¹⁵

Are there times that you, like Peter, don't want to be associated with Jesus?

When identifying yourself as a Christian may cost you some social cred

When you see how other more outspoken believers are treated on campus or at school

When you feel sheepish about some potentially embarrassing parts of the Bible

When you'd rather just keep your faith really private, like good Canadians do

When you fear you may lose a friend, respect, an opportunity, or your job

When, if you don't distance yourself from Jesus, family may distance themselves from you

On the recent topic of social media, I despise the memes that go around from time to time,

Saying "Share this post if you're not ashamed of Jesus!"

That's dumb; you don't need to share the post... *But* it prompts a good question

We should ask our hearts regularly: Are we ashamed to be associated with Jesus?

If you are confronted with the power, love, and truth of Jesus Christ today, what's your reaction?

To get shy and turtle? To zip our lips to not stir the pot? To mutter an excuse or apology?

Or would we be willing to be, in a non-romantic sense, a bit more like Buddy the Elf:

"I'm in love, I'm in love, and I don't care who knows it?"

OK, OK, maybe more like Paul: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..."* (Romans 1:16)

After Peter's denial, the scene shifts back to the trial, and the high priest's and officer's failures

But I think John was strategic in weaving Jesus' trial between Peter's denials

It shows, as one scholar says, *"a dramatic contrast wherein Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing, while Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything."*¹⁶

We return to Peter and his shameful descent in v.25: **READ v.25b**¹⁷

Finally, someone was there who'd probably been staring at Peter in the dim firelight,

Thinking, 'I'm sure I saw you recently': **READ v.26**¹⁸

Like, 'You're the one who took a sword to my cousin... I wouldn't forget that face'

But: **READ v.27a**¹⁹... And then, dramatically, poetically, and devastatingly: **READ v.27b**²⁰

Earlier that night, Jesus had heartbreakingly asked: *"Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."*²¹

To have that happen at that very moment, immediately after his third denial?

Can you even imagine the sinking devastation in Peter's gut?

'Oh no... What have I done?! I've done exactly what I said I would never do...

I've failed my Lord, like a total coward... How could he ever forgive me?'

I'd be weeping... Elsewhere it says Peter did just that, running off and weeping bitterly

Do you know that sinking feeling? Have you felt like Peter at times? I know I readily relate:

Knowing just how short I fall... Feeling like an utter failure... Beating myself up inside

Like, "Ugh, I can't believe my mouth got the better of me again"

Or, "Why can't I stop sinning?" "I keep hurting the people I love."

Maybe, "I haven't shared the gospel in years..." "Why didn't I speak up when I could?"

We go, "I'm a failure. God can't love me. There's no coming back from this one."

Incredible weakness can still be found in genuine believers, even right after amazing highs!

Peter had just heard "the most touching address and prayer" ever heard

And had been warned most seriously about not falling away²²

This is here as a warning for every one of us... So we may be kept from such sorrow

Pour contempt on all your pride... Forsake all your self-confidence... You can fall too

You may have a different form of grief today, not just for yourself, but for others:

For loved ones—children, grandchildren, spouses, dear friends—who have denied Jesus

Many of you have people who are dear to you walking this path right now

And they might not even be sad about it at all... But you are

We know that acknowledging or denying Jesus carries eternal consequences

So our hearts sink... We are afraid for other people... While we're still afraid for ourselves

[tr] So what do we do with all this failure and falling? Well, believe it or not

I'm convinced Peter's story is in the Bible not to condemn us or make us despair

But in order to encourage us and lift our hearts even in the midst of the worst failings

What should we do with our falling? We should keep looking back to what Jesus did with it:

When confronted by failure, Jesus stood firm (v.8-9, 11, 14, 20-23)

[r] He held fast to his people, even when they failed

[r] When repeatedly confronted by failure, Jesus stood firm

—Firm in his resolve... Firm in his courage and faith... Firm in his love and mercy...

Yes, we are great failures... But Jesus is the Saviour of failures!

This chapter vividly shows us the kinds of people Jesus died to save

Look back at v.8-9: He lovingly protected his disciples, knowing they were about to run away

He preserved their lives then, and he preserved their faith after, losing not one

Again, don't miss the fact: Right after he said he wouldn't lose anyone, he seemed to lose Peter!

But he didn't! ...v.9 reassures us, in advance: He wouldn't actually lose Peter
He had prayed for Peter... He would die for Peter... And soon, he would restore Peter
Peter has the last word in this passage... But Jesus has the last word on Peter

Jesus stood firm... We saw his utter resolve in v.11: **READ v.11b**²³

He would go all the way to the cross... He would drink the cup... He would die...

Just like the high priest had predicted: him instead of failing sinners

And therefore, God would raise him from the dead and exalt him

I hope you catch a glimpse of God's love for you in these events—of his love for sinners like us

So that you will be moved to repent of your sins and confess him as Lord

He doesn't want to leave anyone in the guilt and shame of failure

He wants us to walk in freedom from condemnation and the newness of his life

This story tells us that if Peter wasn't too far gone, neither are you

Jesus stood firm... We see this once more in his interactions while on trial

When the priest asked a dumb question about what he had been teaching,

Jesus appealed to witnesses: "Ask anyone! I haven't kept anything a secret!" **READ v.21**²⁴

So, he stood by what he had been teaching... He was 100% unashamed of it

Even after the officer hit him, Jesus held his ground... He confidently pressed on

CONCLUSION

Brother, sister: We surely will find ourselves still failing at times in this life

But in any given moment, don't assume that you *will* fail... Put your hope in Christ!

Because of him, failure doesn't define us... And we don't *need* to give into sin anymore

Even if we will be like Peter at times, we aren't called to follow Peter

We're called to follow Christ, and to become more like him

Standing firm and standing faithful, as he did—even when it's painful

In essence, he stood firm so we could be faithful... So we can live out a different story than Peter

And so, when we *do* repeat the same story as Peter, that there would be mercy and grace for us

Our failures are, sadly, very real... But praise God! Because of the cross, our failures are not final

Peter himself would later testify: "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*" (1 Peter 2:24)

Having been so healed, may we be ever more unafraid and unashamed

PRAY

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" So the band of soldiers and their

captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

² So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons

³ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

⁴ 2 Samuel 15:23; HT Garrett Kell

⁵ HT R.C. Sproul

⁶ When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

⁷ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go."

⁸ HT Sproul

⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one."

¹⁰ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

¹¹ Matthew 26:39

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.

¹³ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

¹⁴ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:12

¹⁶ R.E. Brown

¹⁷ So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not."

¹⁸ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"

¹⁹ Peter again denied it

²⁰ and at once a rooster crowed.

²¹ 13:38

²² HT Ryle

²³ shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

²⁴ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."