



SERMON TITLE: From Failure to Fellowship

DATE: May 2, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 21:1-14

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SERIES SUMMARY

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

We have come to the last chapter in our 'over-a-year-long' study in the Gospel of John. John 21 is the epilogue of this great biography of Jesus. The Gospel of John begins with a prologue in vv1-18 where we read about who Jesus was *before* he came from the Father to "save us from our sins." It ends with this epilogue that shows us what Jesus is like *after* he died on the Cross to pay the penalty of our sins and was raised from the dead. So, we have these two bookends showing us who Jesus was *before* and *after* his redemptive work was completed. In this chapter, we have another clear testimony that Jesus is alive from the dead. In fact, at the end of the first section, there in v14, it says, "*This is now the third time that Jesus was revealed to his disciples after he rose from the dead.*" The *first* time was when he appeared to his disciples behind locked doors, but Thomas wasn't present. The *second* time was when he appeared behind locked doors and Thomas was present. And, the *third* time is right here in John 21. So, the main focus of this chapter is that Jesus is alive from the dead. But there are more things going on here than that. In fact, there are a lot of things going on in this chapter. You see, if John's Gospel ended in 20:31, there would be some very important questions left unanswered. The first being—*What was Jesus like after he was raised from the dead? Is he the same, or is he different now that he has a new, "glorified" body and he's about to ascend back to the Father?*

Last week, Matt Densky walked us through Jesus dealing with Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples who had serious doubts that he had actually risen from the dead. But, when Thomas saw the risen Jesus, he declared—"My Lord and my God"—which is a kind of *climax point* for this whole Gospel. So, now that Jesus is recognized as almighty God, is he different? *Is he less personal and more transcendent? How do we know?* Well, we *do* know that he was somehow physically different because Jesus' resurrected body, which was a physical body with supernatural properties, could pass through grave clothes; it could pass through walls; it could appear and disappear. So, his physical body was somehow different. I mean, no one recognized the Risen Jesus at first sight. So yes, Jesus looked different *But what about Jesus himself? Was he different?* The first 14 verses of chapter 21 answer that question. The '*big picture*' of chapters 20-21 is that John is not simply showing us that Jesus has, in fact, risen from the dead. It's that, but it's more than that. John focuses our attention on how Jesus relates to three people after he rose from the dead—Mary Magdalene, Thomas, and Peter. And in these personal interactions with Mary, Thomas, and Peter, we see what Jesus is like after the resurrection. We learn what Jesus is like in seeing how he deals with three of his closest followers who are weighed down with three different emotional struggles. *With Mary Magdalene*, we see how Jesus relates to someone who is *grieving*. *With Thomas*, we see how Jesus relates to someone struggling with *doubt*. *With Peter*, we will see how Jesus relates to someone who has *failed*, and failed big time. And the '*big idea*' is that none of these people's pasts got in the way of Jesus' loving care for them. Jesus meets us in our grief, in our doubt, and in our failures. And what we see in these personal interactions is that Jesus is the "same yesterday, today, and forever (cf Heb 13:8)." The Resurrected Jesus is not some detached, ethereal being who is now so caught up in the business of overseeing everything from galaxies to governments that he doesn't have time for you. No, he is just as personal, just as caring, just as full of grace and truth as he's always been. That's what these three personal interactions show us about Jesus. The fact is, we come to know who Jesus is in other people's stories of grace. Different people bring out different sides of Jesus. Different people's struggles, different people's personal *experiences* with Jesus show us different sides of Jesus. Living in community with Marys and Thomases and Peters shows you Jesus in a way that you could never know by yourself. You will never know the

multi-dimensional glory and beauty of your Savior unless you know him in community. In other words, you need to be in community with other people who personally know the grace of Jesus—people who are different than you—people with different grace stories than you—in order to know Jesus in all his fullness. You’ve got to know *them* more fully in order to know him more fully.

And today, we’re going to look at how Jesus relates to Peter. We will see how Jesus relates to someone who has failed and failed big time. Some of us wonder if some past failure has consigned us to a certain destiny. Like, we took the easy way out. We said “no” when we should have said “yes,” or we said “yes” when we should have said “no.” Maybe, we made a promise to ourselves, to someone else, to God, and then we broke it. The question is, “Has that failure sealed your fate?” “Does that past failure determine your destiny? I regularly talk with people who have done something wrong—something they knew was wrong, something they’re now ashamed of, some failure that still haunts them—and some of them think, “God can’t/God won’t forgive what I did.” Or they think, “I know God forgives me, but I just can’t seem to forgive myself.” Does some past failure dangle in your mind like a loose thread? If so, John 21 is for you.

READ 21:1-14 — Seven disciples are together, fishing on the Sea of Galilee. And there’s something in each of the ‘named’ disciples’ backgrounds that’s interesting. We have Peter, the failure (18:25-27)—after Jesus was betrayed and arrested, we know that Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed out of fear that he too would be arrested. And there’s Thomas, the doubter *at the end* (20:25), and Nathaniel, the doubter *at the beginning* (1:46). Both these men moved through their doubts and made amazing professions of faith (1:49 and 20:28). And so, for them, the loose ends have been tied up. But for Simon Peter, the loose end of failure is still dangling in his mind. Jesus had instructed his disciples to go to Galilee and to wait for him to join him there on a certain mountain (Mt 28:10,16). The problem is, as this story begins, these seven disciples are not on the mountain waiting for Jesus; they are down on the lake fishing. And it was Peter who led the way. I’m thinking that Peter got tired of waiting for Jesus to show up. I mean, he can’t just sit around and do nothing—Peter has to do something. So, he goes fishing. It’s the one thing Peter knows how to do for sure. But it was disobedience. Another failure. And as “luck”/God would have it, they fish all night and don’t catch a thing! What happens next is very intriguing. Jesus will orchestrate some déjà vu moments for Peter that will remind him of some past events in his life in order to transform the memories of failure into a new memory of fellowship. First, this story of fishing all night and not catching any fish and Jesus telling the fisherman where to cast their net, and then they bring in a massive haul of fish is reminiscent of the fishing story in Luke 5. Sure enough, it triggered that memory in John’s mind so that he recognized that the mystery man shouting to them onshore, telling them where to fish, was the Risen Jesus. In Luke 5, when Peter experienced Jesus as the Master fisherman, he said, “Depart from me Lord, I am a sinful man.” This time though, Peter jumps into the water and starts swimming to shore. This time he can’t get to Jesus fast enough. We see the second déjà vu moment in the words “charcoal fire” (v9). The only other time that John references a charcoal fire is when, on the night in which Jesus was betrayed, Peter denied knowing Jesus 3 times before the rooster crowed. That night, Peter was warming himself by a charcoal fire (18:18). For Peter, the charcoal fire marked the scene of his failure. This is no coincidence. This is intentional. Jesus is cooking Peter’s breakfast over the charcoal fire of his failure. The charcoal fire is the place Peter failed. Now it’s the place from which Jesus nourishes Peter. John picks up these two strands from Peter’s past, the first fishing miracle in Luke 5 and Peter’s failures, and he weaves them together into Peter’s present. Why? To assure Peter that his failure doesn’t disqualify him from fellowship with Jesus—to assure him that his past failures will not determine his future destiny. *Isn’t that good?* The place of failure becomes the place of deep and restorative fellowship with Jesus. And if you meet with Jesus in this way, he’ll give you a new memory—the memory of how he met you in your failure. Do you think Peter ever forgot the breakfast he shared with Jesus on the beach? No way! Jesus can transform our failures into places of fellowship if we let him. Is there a loose end of some past failure still dangling in your mind? Admit your failures. Don’t be afraid. Run to Jesus, and he will meet you in your failure and transform the haunting memories of failure into memories of deep, satisfying fellowship.

Discussion Starters —

- Begin by reading John 21:1-14.
- What have you learned about Jesus from other people’s stories of grace? What have you learned about how Jesus deals with someone who is grieving? What have you learned about how Jesus deals with someone who doubts? What have you learned about how Jesus deals with someone who has failed? How have other people’s stories of grace helped you understand the “multi-dimensional glory and beauty” of Jesus?
- What was the problem with Peter and the other six disciples going fishing?
- Tell about a time when you got tired of “waiting on God” and you set out on your own to try to figure out a solution to the problem you were waiting on God to fix.
- What are the two déjà vu moments Jesus used in Peter’s life to help transform the memories of his failures into places of fellowship?
- Tell about a time when something in your present reminded you of something in your past that still needed to be dealt with.

- How have you personally experienced Jesus' love and forgiveness during a time of personal failure?
- What is your biggest "aha" and/or "take-away" from this passage and this message?