

From Failure to Fruitful: *The Power of Restoration*

Luke 22:31-34; 54-62; John 15:15-19

Introduction: We have categories for success, but even then we don't always know how to handle it well. When it comes to failure, however, we have a much more difficult time coming up with categories much less knowing how to move past its inevitability.

At the end of the roaring 20's, life in America was seemingly moving up at non-stop rates, both in production and financial wealth. But it had become a mirage as multiple factors hit the economy hard: production waned, unemployment was on the rise, wages were low, there was a proliferation of debt, stocks were in greater excess of their real value, banks had given an excess of large loans that could not be easily liquidated, and the agricultural sector was struggling. Heading into 1929, the stock market saw a rise in wild speculation, which led to a series of days of massive trading, ending on what is known as "Black Tuesday", October 29, 1929 where over 16 million shares were sold, leading to investors losing a lifetime of assets, and fortunes that seemed to come easily over the last decade were gone in an instant.

Though the reaction to this day has become overly dramatized, there were instant and disastrous responses to this failure:

"This is not to downplay the toll of misery that the Crash exacted. Morgues were not the only places registering victims. Physicians treated a rash of nervous breakdowns. The apple sellers, the breadlines, and the "Hoovervilles," too, soon bore witness to the consequences of the Crash. In five-hours' time on Oct. 29, "Black Thursday," an invisible, odorless, weightless phenomenon -- numbers changing on a ticker tape -- cost the American people as much money, by one estimate, as the United States had spent on the First World War.

Contemporary newspaper and wire service accounts detailed some of the casualties. Ignatz Engel was a retired cigar maker in the Bronx who invested in the market in time to be wiped out by the Crash. On Nov. 13, depressed over his losses, he lay down on a blanket in his kitchen and opened all the jets of the gas range. The next day, the president of the Rochester Gas and Electric Corp., no longer able to endure his loss of more than \$1,200,000, ended his own life using -- what else? -- gas. A Chicago dentist snuffed himself with gas on Dec. 12; police said that he had succumbed to remorse for having persuaded his young woman assistant and laboratory aide to put all of their savings into the market in the euphoria before the Crash."¹

This captures only a portion of the response to failure. How do we deal with it? How do we deal with failure at work, school, marriage? How do we deal with failure when things are out of our control like the stock market, but how do we deal with our own moral failure? How about our kids and spouse? How do we move forward **after** failure?

In God's training curriculum, He adds classes that are often avoided because they are too difficult and costly (like Biology or Speech in college). He calls us to learn in the gym of suffering, the lecture of trials, and the **laboratory of failure**. The Bible is full of losers, failures who are liars, adulterers, abdicators, deniers, wimps, and deceivers who vied for their own glory, sought their own comfort, and feared their own death. This is the group of people God not only called to Himself, but the ones He chose to **use in His harvest, to take part in ministry, and reign with Him forever**. Have you failed? You are in good

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1987/10/25/the-jumpers-of-29/17deff9-f725-43b7-831b-7924ac0a1363/?utm_term=.f57

company. Embracing the restoration made possible by Christ's death and resurrection make it possible to move from **failure to fruitful, from loser to minister, from shameful to free.**

(Un)seen Factors of Failure (Luke 22:31-34)

"Simon, Simon, behold **Satan demanded to have you**, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'

Peter said to Him, '**Lord I am ready** to go with you both to prison and to death.'

Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until **you deny three times that you know me.**'"

We come back to the hours before Jesus died on the cross. In the upper room, the disciples had kingdom fever, anticipating the earthly reign of Christ in a matter of moments and debating which ones of them would be greatest in rule. Jesus reiterated to them about the necessity of humility, sacrifice, and service, but that message went over their heads like someone speaking a different language. It is here that **Peter** gets singled out. Peter was the leader of the group, bold, passionate, and convinced of who Jesus really was (see John 6:68-69), and would be a key component of the coming church (Matt. 16:13-20). But as is often the case, those who are out in front are prone to two unseen factors of failure: **pride and attack.**

Deceptive Pride

- "**Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away**" (Matt. 26:33)

After the meal together, the group went with Jesus to the Mount of Olives where He broke the bad and shocking news: *You will ALL FALL AWAY because of me this night.* This was not only to fulfill prophecy (Zech. 13:7), but also as part of the ultimate training for the disciples. It was here that Peter showed the ignorance of his own heart and his need for a strength greater than himself. He trusted that he was strong enough to withstand whatever would come, and proved it to a certain degree by pulling a sword on the Roman guard (again, physical strength). What Peter lacked is what most passionate people lack in their youth: **a humble regard for our own weakness.** We believe that in youthful vitality we know better, are stronger, and where others failed, we will succeed. This is Pride 101, and until it is dealt with by faith, it will hinder true ministry and usefulness.

- "**I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death**"

Pride also works itself out in our lives by giving us an overestimation of our readiness. As Jesus laid out to Peter what Satan had asked for, Peter declared that he was ready to face the future, even the attacks of Satan. This speaks well to our Western sense of rugged individualism, but not for servants of Jesus. It was not as if Peter was lying nor was he insincere. He believed it with every fiber of his being. However, he had not yet gone through the proper steps, taken the right classes, or experienced all that he needed to be truly usable. He still pointed to himself as the reason for his readiness. His source of strength was himself, and this made him vulnerable to failure.

Satanic Influence

- **Satan's method, goal, and limitations**

"*The devil made me do it*" goes back to the Garden of Eden, as Eve blamed the serpent for her failure (Gen. 3:13). The truth is, the devil CANNOT MAKE us do anything, but he is powerful in the tools he uses against us. Satan asked for Peter to "*sift him like wheat*", the idea that he would shake Peter's life and

watch parts of it fall into the wind. Much like with Job (though God approached Satan with Job, and here Satan approached about Peter), Satan had to ask for God's permission to do anything to one of God's own. But to the wonderment of all, Jesus did not deny Satan access to Peter. In fact, it already seems like Peter was under Satanic attack in his response to Jesus' prediction of death. Peter said, "This will never happen" to which Jesus responded "**Get behind me Satan**", showing the influence had already begun. We remember this about Satanic work:

- **It's always based on a lie** (John 8:44) and works through deception
- **He cannot take away our salvation**
- **His power is limited to what God would allow** - Satan could only do to Job what God would extend to him, nothing more
- **He is more powerful than we give him credit for** - In Ephesians, the key word is "walk", but when it gets to our response to demonic schemes, we are told to "stand" (Eph. 6:11)

- **Jesus' protection, prayer, and power**

Notice that Jesus gave permission, but also protection. He interceded on behalf of Peter that though he would fail, his faith would not be destroyed. In other words, the goal of Satan in sifting Peter was failure, but the goal of Jesus for Peter was refinement, that Peter would pass the ultimate test. Satan cannot take us out of Jesus hand (John 10:28; Rom. 8:38-39), but he can work to deceive, lie, and influence us to make us distracted, unusable, or to cause us to *think* we are unusable. This is why the results of failure are so devastating.

Unexpected Results of Failure (Luke 22:54-62)

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a **servant girl**, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it saying, "Woman I do not know Him." And a little later **someone else** saw him and said, "you also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not."

And after an interval of about an hour **still another** insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean."

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about."

And immediately while he was still speaking, the **rooster crowed**.

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.

And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.'

And he went out and wept bitterly

As Jesus was being shuttled between different magistrates homes, Peter was huddled in a common courtyard around a fire. Three times he was approached, once by a servant girl and twice by men, who called him out as a follower of Jesus. He began with a simple denial that he knew Jesus, but Matthew records that he ended with invoking a curse against himself and swearing that he did NOT know Jesus. The courage to take out a sword against a Roman guard quickly faded in the aggressiveness of a young girl. Jesus was no longer beside Him, He had been arrested, and the now he was all alone. Luke records three denials, and then a **look**. When Jesus looked at Peter across the courtyard, it would have not been a look of condemnation but rather of an saline saturated, tear welling sadness of not only the sting of a loved ones denial but the reality of what Peter was going through. At the conclusion of the cross-courtyard gaze, the blaring sound of the rooster was heard, and Peter wept bitterly, hiding himself. We do not see him again until the empty tomb, where he still believed someone had stolen the body. When

he goes up to Galilee he had returned to the beginning, once again fishing. This was what was comfortable, controllable, and buried what he felt with activity. There was no passion, zeal, or bravado left, only broken disappointment.

Its important to see the consequences of felt failure if we are going to breathe the fresh air of restoration. What do we gain and lose in failure?

What we “gain”

- **Heightened sense of inadequacy** - Failure causes us to shrink our focus on ourselves, fixing our gaze on our own failure. In this we are paralyzed from moving forward because we believe failure is our new identity, which is a lie from our own selfishness and pride.
- **Buried Shame and Guilt** - Guilt and shame go back to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve hid from God and covered themselves from their spouse. **Shame causes us to look down and guilt causes us to look back.** We are constantly looking at the past and believe that what we did, or what was done to us, is now who we are. This core issue can be covered up with activity, success, power, money, pleasure, or achievement as we try to counter how we feel, but shame and guilt keep us buried in sand, and though we can smile and present ourselves a certain way in public, we constantly see ourselves in the mirror of past wrongs.

What we “lose”

- **Joy** - When we are stuck in the mud of our past, we CANNOT enjoy the joy that is ours in Christ. This was David's cry as he kept silent over his sin in Psalm 51, as he tried to move forward in life without dealing with the sins of his past. "Restore to me the joy of thy salvation" was his cry as he wallowed in the reality of past failure.
- **Intimacy** - Unresolved, un-restored sin kills intimacy in marriage, moving those who are *one* in the Lord to strangers living together. When we stay mired in the failures of our past we cannot move forward with intimacy with the Lord because we DO NOT want to be fully known, so we cannot comprehend that we are fully loved. Intimacy is experienced when one knows ALL about you, sins and all, and still loves. This is what God is willing to do because He was willing to cleanse us from sin.
- **Trust** - Trust is a choice in human relationships, but a command when it comes to our relationship with the Lord (Prov. 3:5-6). When it comes to our past, we have a hard time trusting that God can forgive, that God can still love, and that God still wants us. When trust is broken, relationship is broken. Restoration must take place for trust to return.

Undeserved Realities of Restoration (John 21:15-19)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "*Feed my lambs*"

He said to him a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "*Tend my sheep.*"

He said to him a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was grieved because he said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "*Feed my sheep.*"

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' (*This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.*)
And after saying this he said to him, "**Follow Me.**"

Restored to Love by Love

This is possibly one of the greatest stories in the Bible. Jesus knew Peter and the disciples were broken, were low, and they needed to be restored. Can you imagine trying to look Jesus in the eye after you saw Him for the first time? It would be hard to look past the ground. But Jesus is not in the business of keeping us in guilt and shame, and He does not seek a *pound of flesh* from us. In fact, He took care of all that for us. Notice that Jesus sought Peter out, met him where he was, and treated Peter in a way that Peter WANTED to see Him (he jumped out of the boat...again). What do we see in Jesus' restoration of Peter?

- **The meaning of restoration** - The idea is to make new, be renewed, and become better/stronger than before. We are restored in salvation (2 Cor. 5:17) when we come *new creations* in Christ; restored to joy after we sin (Ps. 51:12); we are to *restore* those who have sinned in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1). It means to mend, like the mending of nets, where something had been broken. Our restoration with God allows and demands our restoration with each other.
- **Love, not "Do"** - Notice that Jesus calls Peter back to love. He did not try to restore Peter by telling him "you better never do that again!". He asked three times "do you love me?" Much has been made for the different usages of the word "love" here (agapao vs. fileo), but there is not enough to press the issue. The issue is whether Peter loves **more than these**. This either refers to fishing, in which case the point is "do you love me more than earthly gain or earthly things", which is possible. Or it means "Peter, do you love me MORE than the other disciples?" The latter seems more appropriate based on Peter's past. Had Peter learned that he was NOT stronger than everyone else? His response is telling. He does not point to his own virtue of love, but rather to Jesus' knowledge, dependant on Him for validation. Love had everything to do with it. By restoring Peter to the foundational realities of love, all other obedience and sacrifice would flow out of that spring.
- **No required time or "makeup"** - Wouldn't we think Peter would have to prove himself to Jesus again? That's how I think sometimes. "Peter, your back in, but only on a trial basis, and if you screw up again, you're out!" But that is not the way of Jesus. When Jesus died, He took all of our sin, guilt, and shame on Himself and it was nailed to the cross, along with all our debt! The pound of flesh was pounded out through the nails on the cross, and when Jesus rose again, we had to bear it no more!!! Restoration comes through Jesus, not our makeup efforts. No one gets away with anything, and all sin is paid for.
- **Entrusted with what was most important to Jesus** - Peter was NOT relegated to secondary status, but was instead entrusted to do shepherding, pastoral ministry. He was to feed, care for, and shepherd the ones entrusted to Jesus to save. Peter was restored to the highest form of ministry, that of the Good Shepherd Himself.

Restored to Life and Sacrifice

But the story does not end there. Jesus described to Peter how he would die, and it would be through crucifixion. I'm not sure this is information that I'd like to hear or not, because there was no timeline given, only certainty. Peter would live many years before facing this reality. But what Peter had

boasted in his own flesh and strength was NOW possible because he no longer did. he now trusted in Christ alone, learned to humble himself (see 1 Peter 5:1-5), and learned that his hope was in the resurrected work of Christ alone. This gave him the ability to live out the reality of a true disciple, which is a life of sacrifice.

The result of restoration was a **simple charge: *follow me***. Once we can find rest from our past, forgiveness for our sin, and restoration from guilt and shame, we can get off the mat and move forward by following Him. Follow me in obedience. Follow me in faith. Follow me into death. Follow me into the hope of the future. Follow me in trust that I have paid for your shame. Follow me by looking up and looking forward. What does this mean for us?

- **What are you holding onto from your past? What is weighing you down from the joy offered in Jesus?** Do you have skeletons in your closet that you don't want to be known, so you keep them hidden at the cost of joy?
- **Who are you holding back restoration from?** Have you committed forgiveness to someone but refuse to be restored? We restore each other the way Jesus restores us: completely based on the work of Jesus on the cross.

We are reminded this morning that we are all losers, all have failed, all have been broken by sin. But we are equally reminded that God redeems our failures to make us usable ministers of His gospel. That is the best news we can hear today.