

## “Pride Before the Fall”

John 13:36-38

### Introduction

Can I ask you to conjure up an unpleasant memory? When have you failed the Lord? Has there been a time when you have really let Him down; when you've not done what you'd promised Him you would do; or when you failed to do something He asked of you? Have you had any significant failures? If you have, I wonder if you've thought much about why it happened – if you've been able to identify particular things that led up to your sin. Certainly there is always a prelude to major sin. It doesn't come out of no where.

True believers can fail God at any time. That is a sobering thought. And yet a realization of that truth can lead to good things – and can actually be a key component to walking in victory. Thankfully, the Bible tells many stories – not only of believing men and women who failed God – but also stories also of men and women who overcame tremendous opposition to walk faithfully with God.

Today we are going to study the things that led up to Peter's most public sin and his greatest failure. It's something he's still known for – His denial of Christ. And as we look at this, we want to see that the strength of sacrificially living for Christ comes, not from within, but from Christ Himself.

[John 14:36-38]

We know Peter was a man of many passions and of great zeal. He was also one of the three disciples most close to Jesus. He had the privilege of walking with Jesus, hearing and seeing His ministry up close and personal. He was privy to the prophecies and warnings given personally by Christ. Jesus had told Peter and the other disciples that He was going to die. He had done everything He could to prepare them for His coming departure. He even, as we've read here this morning, warned Peter of a personal temptation and sin that would come to him, not at some unspecified, distant time in the future, but in a matter of a few hours. In spite of all of these advantages, Peter still sinned. This man who was one of the pillars of the church failed God. If it could happen to Peter, would we not be wise to recognize that it could also happen to us?

This morning I'd first like us to see some of the things that led to Peter's sin. And then, we will consider some of the principles that can guide us to victory.

### I. Precursors to Sin

Before we look at some of the particular issues that led to Peter's troubles, we need to acknowledge that what we see here in Peter is by no means all bad. There is a mixture of wonderful desires, but misplaced trust. And in that way, Peter stands as a great reflection of us. Isn't it true that if you love Jesus Christ, your failures most often come, not from a rejection of Christ, but rather from a neglected duty or a misplaced desire? For instance, in these few verses before us we can see that Peter is:

1. Focused; but on the wrong thing. (Listening, but hearing only certain things: things he wanted to hear. Out of balance.)

Last week we saw that Jesus had a very important thing that He wanted his disciples to do. Because Jesus was about to be taken out of the world; because the world would no longer be able to see and observe the love of Christ first hand, Jesus gave the disciples a new and crucial commandment. They were to love one another just as Christ had loved them.

But in spite of the beauty and the richness and the depth of that command, it's almost as though Peter didn't hear what Jesus said. Rather than being stirred by this directive from His Lord to love, rather than allowing his mind to be consumed and directed by that teaching, Peter was able to focus and hear only one thing – Jesus was leaving them.

Now again, it's not hard to want to excuse Peter. There is no doubt that Peter loved Jesus. The realization that Jesus was leaving was a great weight. But still, at the heart of Peter's reaction was a certain level of selfishness. At stake here is the focus of the mind. What will determine what we think about? Two warnings:

1. Rather than allowing Christ to direct His thoughts, Peter allowed His circumstances to consume His thinking.

How many of our troubles begin in our minds? When we allow our troubles to dictate our thoughts, and to control our thoughts, without the influence of God's Word, we get in grave trouble. Romans 12:2 teaches that the way to victory and walking in Christ's will is to allow our lives to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And so as you struggle with issues in your life, God doesn't ask you to pretend that they don't exist or to deny your hurts – but He does ask you to bring them to His Word. He does want to focus your thinking so that you have a

godly, biblical perspective on your life. By ignoring what Christ was teaching, Peter lost the opportunity to escape the snares that awaited Him.

2. So consumed with one idea, one doctrine that we lose perspective:

- end times
- spiritual gifts
- soteriology
- etc

We need the whole counsel of God. We need application of truth.

2. Faith; but a lack of vision.

We already know of Peter's wonderful confession of faith – *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God*. But here he shows his lack of comprehension of the work that Christ must do.

*Where are you going? Why can't I follow you?*

Earlier, in one of the previous times when Jesus had explained to the disciples of His coming death and resurrection, Peter had again revealed his lack of understanding. *God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to you!*

If we don't comprehend the nature and the necessity of the atonement of Christ, certainly we will build our lives upon a shaky foundation.

3. Desire, but conditional obedience.

Again, we can see in Peter a drive to be with Christ. Such passion for the presence of God is to be emulated. But please notice also the subtle challenge Peter issues to Christ. Jesus tells him that where He is going, Peter cannot follow right now. Peter doesn't like that and basically contradicts Christ. *Why not? Sure I can! I'll lay down my life if that's what it takes.*

One of the greatest challenges we all face is the denying of ourselves and taking up our cross daily to follow Christ. That means that we have to be willing to lay aside what we might be most inclined to do, if we are called by Christ to something else. Jesus said to Peter, *you need to stay here for now*. And Peter said, *no, I'll do whatever it takes to be with you*. As noble as that seems, it was not the will of Christ. You may be involved in some good things – but do you know for sure you're doing what Christ wants you to do?

#### 4. Commitment; but self reliance.

It's interesting to notice that Peter showed a little bit of cockiness in his professed willingness to die for Christ. In Matthew 26:33 Peter said, *even if all of these fall away, I will never fall away from you*. It was a rather prideful statement, especially in light of the fact that Jesus had just said, *you will all fall away from Me this night*. But again, remember that Peter was a macho kind of man. He was an outdoorsman – strong, independent, able. He was pretty tough and courageous. I'm sure he meant what he said. But self-determination is not enough when fighting deep spiritual battles.

And so after all of Peter's bravado, Jesus answered, *Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times*.

And I'm sure as you sit here today there is some fashion in which you can relate to what is happening here. I'm sure that sin and failure have been a reality in your Christian experience. Surely there have been times when you have expressed great intentions to the Lord and failed. True believers are capable of failure at any time. All we have to do is look at Abraham wavering down in

Egypt; or Moses when he struck the rock; or David and his adultery; or Solomon and his foreign wives; or James and John and their desire to be above the other disciples – or any one of a number of other illustrations, and we know that sin is crouching at the door.

Does that mean that great sin is unavoidable? Should it resign us to its inevitability? Should we live in despair and paralyzing fear? Clearly the answer is no. The testimony of the Scriptures is *thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*. So what are some of the principles for victory? What can we learn from the mistakes of Peter?

1. We need a firm understanding of the nature of the gospel.

Jesus Christ has saved us from our sins. Our salvation is all of Him. Whether you like the new bulletin or not – on the back we still print the great Solas of the reformation. *Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide and Soli Deo Gloria*. The gospel comes to us through the revelation of the Scriptures alone; our salvation is won by Christ's atoning work alone; we receive it because God's grace alone awakens and changes us; it is applied to us only by faith and by no work that we add to Christ; and its sole purpose is that God alone might receive glory.

The more we understand that we have nothing to contribute to make us worthy the more we will know that our victory is not assured by our effort.

2. We need to rely on the Power of Christ as we walk in union with Him.

Many have noticed that Peter's point of failure was in the arena of his greatest natural strength. It was not by being overpowered in some area of

weakness that he fell into sin, but in his natural abilities, courage and independence. Who was it that brought Peter down? Wasn't it first a lowly servant girl, then a slave, and finally a total stranger – all standing around a campfire that led to Peter's denial? Where was his courage? How could these insignificant people with no power or authority lead to such a mighty crumble?

Where then is the hope of victory? How about in these things? Where do we find the power of Christ?

1. II Corinthians 12:9 &10 - *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Your hope of victory is not your own inner strength. It won't come to you because you are able. Your victory comes as you humble yourself before God and acknowledge that you are weak.

2. It comes from Christ's commitment to you. Remember when we studied the words of Jesus back in John 10 when He promised that no one can snatch us out to His hands? Here is a great illustration of that. In Luke's account of this passage, Jesus not only predicted Peter's sin, but He also added this: *but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.* What a great assurance! When Christ has saved you from your sins, He will prevent your faith from failing.

3. *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.* In chapter 15 Jesus will lay out in more detail the doctrine of union with Christ. But the essence of it is found in the words of 15:5. *I am the*

*vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.* If you walk closely with Christ and do not neglect the condition of your soul; if you humble yourself and pray; you will lay a strong foundation for victory over sin. But if you rely on yourself and are confident in your ability to be true, *take heed, lest you fall.*

The great comfort and joy of studying the life of Peter is not only that we see someone who is like us, but we also see in him someone who failed, was forgiven and went on to serve Christ with great power and fruitfulness. God took the failures of his life and used them to forge in Peter a renewed trust, a deeper conviction, a more humble countenance. May God do so for each of us as we learn to walk in His grace.