

John 18:15-18, 25-27 [NIV]

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter.

He replied, "I am not."

¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

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²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "I am not."

²⁶ One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

If you have a Bible with you, I'd encourage you to open it to John again today – the 18th chapter, the passage that earlier was read for us. John, Chapter 18.

I've mentioned before how we don't have cable or internet TV at our home, much to my sons' dismay. We have, instead, one of those flat antennas – so we get 15 channels (for free) instead of 150 channels (that cost money.) Through the years I've tried to tell my kids that having 15 channels is far better than the three or four channels we got when I was growing up, but so far that argument has not been convincing.

Anyway, besides channel 18-2 (meTV), which is just old TV shows, my favorite of our 15 channels is probably 56-4 (TBD-TV), which is mostly shows filled with short videos that people have taken with their phones about either funny things or amazing things or beautiful things or dumb things that happened and that they managed to record.

The show I like on there is called *Fail Factory*, which is really just one short video after another of people attempting something but not succeeding. It's videos of people crashing while they're skiing, or falling off a rope swing, or trying to jump something and wrecking, or wiping out while skateboarding or surfing, or falling off a trampoline or someone (who should not have been riding one) crashing a hover-board.

It's that kind of stuff, just like the title, *Fail Factory*, suggests: it's just videos of one fail after another.

And most of them are hilarious. They're not gory or bloody. Nobody gets really hurt or mutilated or anything like that, so they're funny to watch.

I don't understand the psychology of why it's funny to us when we watch others wipe out, but I do know that's how most of us work.

To quote the great theologian, Mater, from the movie *Cars*: he said, when he and Lightning McQueen were out "tractor tipping" in the field, "I don't care who you are, that's funny right there."

I don't know why one person's misfortune is often another person's humor.

There is, however, a line to be drawn in there somewhere. There does come a point where someone else's failure is no longer funny, but instead moves to concerning and maybe even to tragic.

A really bad sports accident or bike or car accident: that's not funny, of course. A plane crash. A gas explosion or a house fire. They are all fails, really, but not funny fails. That's not footage we want to see over and over again.

The magnitude of the event, and the result of it, changes our response.

When someone thinks they can jump a pit of water on their bicycle, but they wind up catching their front wheel in the pit and they fly over the handlebars and land in a patch of thistles, we think that's funny – as least all my friends did when that happened to me in the woods behind my parents' house about 40 years ago.

But when someone we know thinks they can get away with immorality or dishonesty, or when someone thinks themselves more courageous or steadfast or capable than they actually are, and instead of succeeding they wind up flying over the handlebars and landing in life's thistles of shame or embarrassment or sin, well, that's not funny.

We've actually watched that happen too many times recently. We're watching it happen now, in the lives of people of national and international influence, and we don't want to see any more of that footage.

And, if we happen to be one of those people, as most of us have been in one way or another, to some degree or another, at one time or another, we certainly don't want it recorded and broadcast for other people to see.

Yet, here in John we have recorded for us the apostle Peter's most, as some would say, "epic" fail. Here in the court of the high priest – here at the fire.

The great British preacher G. Campbell Morgan said about this moment, "It is a dangerous thing for a person to find comfort in fires built by their enemies."

How well Peter learned that lesson.

John describes the moment so well that we don't need a video recording. We can easily imagine it in our minds, but it's not one of those fails that causes us to laugh.

Now, of course, it's not as though Peter hadn't failed before.

We remember a time before this when back at the Sea of Galilee, Peter started out walking *on* water, but wound up swimming *in* it.

Peter also once rebuked *Jesus*, of all people. Told Him he thought His plans were crummy. Then Jesus had to rebuke him.¹

Not long at all before this moment here at the fire, Peter had whipped out a sword and cut off Malchus' ear, only to have Jesus denounce what he did and heal the damage he'd caused.²

There were several moments in Peter's life that he would not have wanted recorded and broadcast to the world. But of them all, I'd think this was the worst.

Peter had promised, not long before, that he would never deny Jesus, and in that moment, Jesus even said to him, "*Really Peter? The truth is, you'll deny me three times before morning—before the rooster crows.*"³

So, Jesus had even warned Peter of the potential, and yet still, Peter did the very thing he said he would never do.

And it was recorded here for us and for all the world to see.

I want to say just two things about that event this morning.

The first is this: Yes, Peter failed Jesus magnificently here. That is true. But we need to remember that only Peter and one other disciple were brave enough to even follow Jesus this far. The rest of them left Jesus at the garden—at the arrest.

But here's Peter—finding his way into the home of the very people who were out to kill Jesus.

What Peter did here—that took a lot of guts, didn't it?

There is a bravery, you see—a courage in Peter that the others didn't have.

No one else jumped out of the boat to try to walk to Jesus.

No one else tried to defend Jesus, even from Himself, you see?

At least Peter tried! At least he was willing to make the *attempt* to *help and save and preserve*.

A least Peter wasn't content to just sit and watch.

Sitting to the side offers immunity from failure, sure. But sitting to the side also makes you immune to success.

Everything Peter had done up to this moment spoke of his commitment to Jesus:

his promise to never deny Him,

his promise to even die with Jesus,

his drawing his sword to defend Jesus,

and, even here, his sticking with Jesus all the way to this point to try to do something—anything he could—to help his friend, even if his understanding of help was incomplete.

Peter was not one to sit on the sidelines.

That's partly why Jesus called him a rock. Not so much because his comprehension was what it needed to be, but because his heart was what it needed to be! In all Peter did, his heart was right.

Yet in his beautiful stout-heartedness, Peter wound up venturing here, as someone said, "farther than his courage could follow." Here Peter dared more than he

could carry through and he was caught off his guard by the questions he was asked. So, he was surprised and then flustered and then frightened—and that sent him sliding down a fateful slope."

Because once you start lying, it's hard to stop.

This is not what Peter meant to do, but it is what he did, and any of us who are tempted to condemn him only have to look back at our own lives to find an example of a time when our hearts were right, but our courage failed us.

Our spirit was willing, but our flesh was weak.

And in that moment of failure—when we catch a glimpse of the disappointment in the face of Jesus—when we hear the rooster crow, we experience the same sort of shame that Peter did.

We know what Peter felt when our own fail was far from funny.

But here's the second thing I want to say: we need not live that moment and that feeling of shame over and over again. Our worst moment does not have to define us for life.

Just as there was redemption for Peter's failure, so there is redemption for ours.

How do we get there?

Well, we don't get to redemption by simply ignoring our failures—wishing they didn't happen or denying that they did.

Jesus does not simply ignore our failures. He looks us in the eyes as He points them out to us, just as He did to Peter.

He calls us to *face them*, and to *face Him*, and to *face ourselves* with sometimes just brutal honesty.

It's painful to face our sins, and it should be.

But you see, the very same Jesus who looked at Peter with such knowing sadness and disappointment on this day—there by the fire, that same Jesus also looked at Peter with hope and mercy just a few days later—this time by the sea.

John makes sure to tell us about that moment too, over in the 21st chapter.

It's there that we find that for every time Peter denied Him there by the fire, Jesus gave him opportunity for redemption, for restoration, to set the record straight and to return Peter to his true, better self—and not just for Peter's own well-being or peace of mind either, but so God could use Peter.

Jesus forgives and redeems Peter so that just a few days later, the Holy Spirit could fill Peter and move Peter to live out His name—to become the steadfast and sure "rock" that Jesus knew he could be. We read about all that in the second chapter of Acts.

And Peter does become the rock—the fearless one who would boldly stand for Jesus. Peter would become just as brave and bold as Jesus Himself was there on that night before the High Priest and all the rest of His accusers.

¹ Matthew 16:23

² John 18:10

³ Matthew 26:34

You see, the Spirit of God empowered Peter to be what he wanted to be and what he tried to be, but what he was powerless to be—all for the sake of Jesus.

Friends, failure may well be part of our past, but failure does not have to define or determine our future. Not with Jesus' forgiveness.

Not with the Holy Spirit's empowerment.

That's why Jesus told his disciples, "Really, it's better for you that I go away," so that God could send His Spirit to fill His followers, and so that we could fulfill our missions—our purposes—in His Kingdom.

Jesus died that we might be forgiven our sins—our failures.

God sent His Spirit, then, so that we may be empowered to succeed in faith—to stand—to be more like Jesus and less like Peter on that night by the fire.

So—three questions to consider here in closing:

First, do you know—have you experienced—the failure of Peter? I already know the answer to that: yes, we all have. We all know about that.

Second, have you experienced the forgiveness of Jesus? If you have not, you can today. Admit your failure to Jesus and ask for His forgiveness. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* That's First John 1:9.

You can find forgiveness today.

And then third, do you know—do you experience in your life—the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit?

To courageously stand for Jesus and with Jesus?

To overcome sinful habits and addictions?

To speak for Jesus?

To live for Jesus?

To fulfill the purpose God has for you in His Kingdom?

You can be filled with the Spirit here today.

There are actually simple, example prayers for each of these on the back of the worship folder there.⁴ Those get at the sentiment of where we need to be and what we need to do to be forgiven and to be empowered—purified and sanctified—with the Spirit's presence.

If you are struggling with the shame of failure, Jesus offers forgiveness.

If you are struggling with spiritual weakness, Jesus offers power.

If you need one or the other or both, why don't you ask God to give you what you need?

After Communion, as we sing, if you want to come and have one of the pastors pray with you, we will. If you'd just like time alone with the Lord at the altar here, that's fine too—we'll leave you alone.

But there is no reason for anyone to leave this place ashamed of failure or spiritually weak today.

The Lord is here to lift us above our failures.

Jesus offers Himself *to* us, just as He offered Himself *for* us on the cross all those years ago—that act of love that we remember and celebrate now, as He's called us to do.

Holy Communion

Closing Song: *Come Everyone Who Is Thirsty in Spirit*

Benediction:

It's amazing to me that, at the very time Jesus was saying to His accusers in John 18:21 there, *"Ask those who heard me – they know what I said."*

Peter, one of the ones who heard Jesus most often was saying, "I didn't even know the guy."

But then, in Acts, Chapter 2, we find that same Peter proclaiming to crowds, *"Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. So repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Sometime today, I'd challenge you to read about Peter's failure here in John 18.

Then read about Peter's restoration in John 21.

Then read about Peter's proclamation in Acts 2.

Connect the dots between human sin and Jesus' forgiveness and the Spirit's transforming power, and then ask yourself, "Where am I in Peter's life, and what do I need God to do in me?"

All material may be freely used where needed and helpful, but in the interest of integrity, please note the source.

⁴ PRAYER SEEKING SALVATION: Lord Jesus, I know I have sinned against You. I believe that You died for me, and I place my trust in You. Forgive my sins and save me from the judgment to come. Help me to turn from my sin and live a life wholly devoted to You.

PRAYER SEEKING SANCTIFICATION: Lord Jesus, I recognize my need for holiness. Purify me of all that is unlike You. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit until I am totally Yours, and set me apart for Your purposes from this day forward.