

Failure and Obedience  
Matthew 26:30-46, 69-75  
May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Big idea: While Peter was overconfident in himself and failed, Jesus submitted to the Father's will even though he recognized it would be painful.

Intro

I recently came across an online magazine devoted to human failure. Among other things they feature "this day in failure" in which you can find examples of human failure from that day in history. Some of course are serious, others are pretty funny.

From the May 8<sup>th</sup> entries:

2009: A Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority trolley rear-ends another MBTA trolley in downtown Boston, injuring 49 people. The operator of the moving trolley—a 24-year-old who had been on the job for 22 months—admits he was sending a text message to his girlfriend at the time of the accident.

2006: Guy Goma, a prospective BBC employee, is accidentally interviewed live on BBC News 24 about the Apple Corps v. Apple Computer lawsuit. Goma arrives at the BBC's London headquarters to interview for an information technology job, but is mistaken for Guy Kewney—a British Internet expert and the intended interview subject—in the reception area. After being introduced on live television as "Guy Kewney," Goma evinces a look of shocked disbelief, yet he plays along and answers the interviewer's questions to the best of his ability.

We are often painfully aware of our own failures. If our consciences are tender, we can't miss the ways we fail to obey Christ. Parenting gives a never ending series of opportunities to feel guilty for something we have done or not done.

Our passage today shows a vivid account of human failure. But it contrasts it with the faithfulness of Jesus, who did not fail.

In the disciples' human failures, we will see things about ourselves. Their overconfidence, their lack of perspective, their physical weariness.

1. The disciples were ***self-confident*** and ***naïve*** about their own weakness. (26:30-35)
  - a. Jesus told his disciples they would all fall away that night because of Him. (31)
    - i. Not that they would abandon Him forever or cease to be His disciples, but that they would scatter when He is arrested and crucified.
      1. He tells them it would happen this very night. You would think that would put them on high alert.
      2. He quotes from Zechariah 13:7 as a predictive picture of this abandonment.
      3. Even sprinkled in with this bomb about them falling away, is a nugget of encouragement – He won't stay in the grave, He will meet up with them in Galilee to the north where they spent most of their time together.
  - b. All of the disciples protested but Peter was the loudest.
    - i. He fails in three ways here:
      1. Condescension toward the other disciples

2. Confidence in himself as an exception
  3. Contradiction of Jesus' word.
- ii. Luke records some specific warnings and encouragements that Jesus gives to Peter.
  - iii. **Luke 22:31-33** "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." <sup>33</sup> But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"
    1. Even his failing is in the Lord's hands to work for good.
    2. Even Satan had to ask permission to affect Peter in such a way.
- c. But even then he pointed ahead to his resurrection and eventual reunion with them in Galilee. (32)
    - i. We should watch Jesus even more than we watch ourselves. They were over-confident in their own strength. They would be proven wrong. But had they listened they would have heard Jesus' assurance that His death was not the end and He would be reunited with them after His resurrection.
  - d. Self-confidence, condescension will lead to our own falling.
    - i. **1 Corinthians 10:12-14** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.
    - ii. **Proverbs 16:17-18** The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life. <sup>18</sup> Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.
      1. The Puritans used to talk about the discipline and virtue of self-watch or watchfulness, being aware of the creeping presence of sin and compromise in our lives that can lead to moral failing.
2. Jesus modeled **submission** to the Father's will, but He also drank our cup of **suffering**. (26:36-46)
    - a. He modeled submission for us, and there is much we can learn by His example, but He was far more than an example. If all He was in this story was an example, all we would be left with was a higher bar that we still could not meet.
      - i. Our sense of failure would be intensified and deepened.
      - ii. But He did more than that. He prepared Himself to drink the cup of suffering in our place, for our failures.
    - b. The location – Gethsemane – the name means “oil press” and it was on the western slope of the Mount of Olives, separated from Jerusalem by the Kidron Valley. John 18:1 refers to it as a garden.
      - i. Perhaps significant that Adam failed in a garden. He said to God, “Not your will by mine be done” but Jesus said to the Father in a garden, “Not my will but your will be done.”
      - ii. This feels like holy ground.
    - c. He went to pray and took His 3 closest disciples, Peter, James, and John (the two sons of Zebedee)
    - d. He was grieved and distressed.

- i. These emotions are not bad or sinful, or else Jesus would not have experienced them. It can be appropriate to grieve. It can be appropriate to be distressed. We are not stoics.
- ii. He prays with such distress, such intensity that Luke records His sweat became like drops of blood
  1. **Luke 22:44** And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.
    - a. Fervently – used of an athlete straining their muscles to the breaking point
    - b. His sweat as drops of blood could be referring to a condition known as hematomidrosis, in which a person under physical or emotional distress has the capillary vessels that feed their sweat glands rupture. Its been observed in people facing execution or soldiers before battle.
- iii. Why is He so distressed? Is it merely at the thought of His own death?
  1. Is it the anticipation of the pain of the nails, or the dehydration, or the thorns?
  2. He has predicted His own death over and over, and appears to do so calmly and clearly. Why now would He be “grieved to the point of death”?
  3. Many have gone to death more calmly and confidently. Many followers of Christ through the centuries have gone to their deaths more serenely than this. Is this a weakness on the part of Jesus in this moment?
- iv. No, it shows the type of death He was about to die.
  1. It would be a substitutionary death for rebels.
  2. He would be alone.
    - a. **Matthew 27:46** About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"
  3. His experience is absolutely unique. No suffering you've experienced or could ever experience is like this. Nothing compares.
  4. No wonder he fell on His face as He prayed, and was deeply grieved.
- e. He asked the Father to take away the cup of suffering if possible.
  - i. Not a question of whether He would do the Father's will, but whether there was any other way.
  - ii. D.A. Carson – The cup refers not only to suffering and death but, as often in the OT, also to God's wrath
    1. **Psalms 11:6** Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.
    2. **Isaiah 51:22** Thus says your Lord, the LORD, even your God Who contends for His people, "Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of reeling, The chalice of My anger; You will never drink it again.
    3. **Jeremiah 25:15** For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it.
    4. His death wasn't merely a display of God's love (although it was that) and it wasn't merely an example of self-sacrifice we should follow (although it was that). It was substitutionary (in our place) and vicarious (for our benefit).

- iii. It was not here in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus took on Himself the sins of the world, as some teach. Rather He pleaded with the Father and committed Himself to the task.
      - 1. **Romans 5:10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.
      - 2. **1 Corinthians 15:3** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
    - f. He committed Himself to the Father's will.
- 3. The disciples failed to stay **awake** as Jesus prayed in internal **anguish**. (26:37, 40, 43, 45)
  - a. As Jesus suffered internal anguish, the disciples couldn't stay awake.
  - b. He asked them to keep watch with Him (v. 37)
    - i. Possibly to prevent interruption as He prayed. More likely to share with Him as He prayed.
  - c. He found them sleeping after an hour (v. 40)
    - i. And again later (v. 43)
    - ii. And again later still (v. 45)
  - d. With a detail like this in the text, especially one that is repeated, we have to ask, why is it in here?
    - i. Leon Morris – just at the time when Jesus was showing the victory of spirit over flesh, the disciples were manifesting the victory of flesh over spirit.
    - ii. You also see the compassion of Christ, that even in His moment of greatest anguish, He is concerned about His disciples and teaching His disciples.
    - iii. It's been suggested that they were sleeping not because they were tired, or because of the long week or the big meal, but because of sorrow and fatalism. Why pray? Why do anything if they were going to be scattered?
- 4. Peter failed by **denying** he even knew Jesus. (26:69-75)
  - a. We're skipping some things in vv. 47-68 - that we'll come back to next week - Judas identifies him, Jesus is arrested, they went to Caiaphas, the high priest, for a trial, they attempted to find false witnesses, they struck him, said he deserves death
  - b. The scene takes place in a courtyard, probably outside Caiaphas' house.
    - i. It was close enough to where Jesus was that He turns and looks at Peter in Luke 22.
    - ii. All the other disciples had left him and fled, according to Matthew 26:56, but Peter followed at a distance and sat down with the officers to see the outcomes (Mt. 26:58)
  - c. His first denial came in the face of a question from a servant girl who was probably between 10 and 15 years old.
    - i. Was he afraid he would get in trouble also?
      - 1. Probably, but not for very good reason.
      - 2. He and the others were with Jesus when he was arrested and they all could have been arrested then. Additionally, he cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest but he wasn't arrested for that. The hostility was directed against Jesus.

- ii. This story is not flattering to Peter, and yet the Bible records it. Peter isn't advancing his own power in the early church. He isn't setting himself up as an infallible leader. He records what really happened.
- d. His second denial came when another servant-girl said that he was with Jesus of Nazareth. (v. 71)
  - i. He denied it with an oath, a solemn curse on himself if he is lying.
- e. His third denial came when a bystander identified him based on his Galilean accent.
  - i. He swore again but also cursed.
- f. And the rooster crowed, he remembered, and wept.

## 5. Applying truth

- a. What do we do with this passage? How do we apply it?
- b. On one level – we see ourselves in the disciples and Peter.
  - i. Sometimes self-confident in a naïve way
  - ii. Sometimes physically and emotionally weary and although the spirit is willing the flesh is weak.
  - iii. Sometimes caving to the fear of people or fear of consequences and so we keep quiet or pretend to hold a different opinion than we do.
  - iv. We're convicted and resolve to do better – to be less naïve, more aware of our ability to be tempted or fall, less captive to the fear of man.
  - v. That's appropriate because the things written in scripture are written for our example, both positive and negative, to learn from, as 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 tell us.
- c. But more significantly – much more significantly – we learn that Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, for us, in our place, because there was no other way to save us.
  - i. The gospel is NOT do more, try harder, be better.
  - ii. The gospel is, Jesus has done this for you in your place. He drank your cup of suffering and wrath. Believe it. Receive His forgiveness.
- d. Moms, it would be easy to pull some points from the passage and apply it to you.
  - i. Don't be naïve about your own capacity to fail.
  - ii. Don't be controlled by the fear of other people.
  - iii. Like Jesus, submit to the Father's will and pray.
  - iv. But the main message you need to hear from this passage, is the main message we all need to hear, Jesus died for you. He died for your sins, including your parental sins. You rest on solid ground, forgiven in Christ because He died for you and you have received His forgiveness.



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