

127. The Gospel of John—13:36-38

“The Guilt of Failing God”

(12/20/20)

As we enter the thirteenth chapter of John’s gospel—we have entered into the final hours of Jesus’ life and ministry before His crucifixion.

The evening began in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the Feast of Passover together.

After Judas left the room to carry out his betrayal of Christ, Jesus instituted Communion with His remaining disciples—and proceeded to give them one final teaching before His death.

The purpose of this final teaching was to prepare and encourage them for what lay ahead.

In just a short period of time, He would be returning back to His Father in heaven leaving them to continue the work He had begun on earth.

This extremely important discourse (that only John records) covers John 13 thru 16 culminating in chapter 17 with Jesus’ ‘high priestly prayer’ to His Father.

As we come to John 13—our text this morning is verses 36 thru 38:

John 13:36-38 (NKJV)

³⁶ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I

am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." ³⁷ Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake." ³⁸ Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.

Let me give you a composite of this exchange between Peter and the Lord Jesus from all 4 gospels—

Then Jesus said to them, *"All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: '...strike the Shepherd, and the sheep...will be scattered'...Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble...I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."*

Jesus said to him, *"Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."* But he spoke more vehemently, *"If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"...*

Fast forward 7 or 8 hours—Jesus has been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and taken to the house of Caiaphas the high priest:

Matthew 26:69-75 (NKJV)

⁶⁹ Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." ⁷⁰ But he denied it before *them* all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." ⁷¹ And when he had gone out to the gateway, another *girl* saw him and said to those *who were* there, "This *fellow* also was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!" ⁷³ And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are *one* of them, for your speech betrays you." ⁷⁴ Then he began to curse and swear, *saying*, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

Have you ever made the Lord a promise—a promise that, with all your heart, you intended to keep?

- Maybe you said to Him, *"Lord that's it I'm going to quit smoking, drinking, taking drugs, or looking at pornography."*
- Or maybe you said, *"Lord, things are going to be different between us, I'm going to start getting up earlier so I can spend some time with You in prayer before I start my day."*

- Or “*I’m going to stop watching so much T.V. and spend that time in the Word.*”
- Or maybe you purposed to start being more of a verbal and visible witness for the Lord at work or school or some other place.

If you’ve ever promised the Lord things were going to be different, you were going to make some changes, only to fail and feel the guilt that comes from failing the Lord—then you know how Simon Peter felt.

Now I believe that Peter was sincere, I believe with all of his heart he meant to keep that promise to his Lord—I mean, the spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak.

And that’s the problem with making God promises, no matter how sincere or well-intentioned they are—you’re putting confidence in *your* strength instead of relying on *His* strength.

(You can’t use the flesh to defeat the flesh—only the Holy Spirit can give victory over the flesh—that’s why New Year’s resolutions fail!)

Jesus told all His disciples they would forsake Him before the night was out and yet Peter assured the Lord that his love and commitment to Him was stronger than the other disciples.

He promised Jesus that even though the other disciples fail Him—“*I will never fail You! You can count on me Lord; I won’t let you down!*”

However, roughly 8 hours after Peter made that promise—Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and was put on trial by the Sanhedrin in the home of Caiaphas the High Priest.

The thing that must have really humiliated and devastated Peter was that after he had assured the Lord earlier in the evening that he would die before he would ever deny Him—

Not only did he break his promise—but the first two times he denied the Lord was to a couple of young servant girls!

With the third accusation, Peter began to call down *curses* on himself and he swore with an oath that he didn't even know Jesus! (Matt.26:74)

The calling of curses upon oneself in Jewish culture was a legal way of seeking to affirm one's innocence—if no calamity followed, the person (in this case Peter) would be presumed innocent.

As Peter publicly denied the Lord for the third time—immediately a rooster crowed again.

That triggered in his thinking the words of Jesus that—**“before the rooster crows twice, you will have denied Me three times”**.

At this point, Luke tells us something about that scene that no other gospel writer records.

Luke tells us that immediately after Peter denied the Lord for the third time that Jesus, from where He was standing in Caiaphas's house—turned and looked at Peter.

What kind of a look did Jesus give Peter? We're not told—we're left to speculate.

Was it a look of anger?

There are a lot of Christians who think that when they fail, God is angry with them.

Maybe it stems from having an earthly father, who was hard on them, a father they could never please, who never acknowledged their accomplishments but only condemned them for their failures.

And so now when they fail as a Christian, they imagine their heavenly Father saying (in their earthly father's voice)— *"I told you, you were no good! You're nothing but a failure, you'll always be a failure, and I'm sick and tired of putting up with you now—get out of my sight!"*

Was it a look of disappointment?

There are many Christians who, when they fail—think they have let God down.

They imagine the voice of God whispering in their ears, *"I can't believe you did that! I expected more from you. You've really disappointed Me!"*

This produces an incredible amount of guilt and shame which causes them to—*'run and hide'* from God as Adam did in the Garden when he blew it.

Maybe Jesus gave Peter a look of sadness.

Often, we feel that our failures cause God to look at us with the kind of sad look that one would give a person—who is a lost cause.

That the Lord is looking at us, shaking His head like we would look at some sad, pathetic loser who, no matter how many chances they are given—always blows it and will never amount to anything in life.

Of course, that causes a person to feel like it's no use trying anymore, *"I'll never amount to anything so I'm just going to give up!"*

Let me ask you—**What kind of look do you think Jesus gave Peter?**

I'll say this to you—the look you think Jesus gave Peter in light of his failure reveals how you think Jesus looks at you when you fail as a Christian.

Let me tell you what I believe about the way Jesus looked at Peter that day.

1) I don't believe that Jesus looked at Peter with a look of anger.

The Bible teaches that God's anger is reserved for those living in rebellion, those who refuse to repent for their sins and not for those who try to live for Him but sometimes fail.

2) I don't believe that Jesus looked at Peter with a look of disappointment.

You see for God to be '*disappointed*' with us it means that our actions took Him by *surprise*—that we acted in a way He didn't *expect*.

However, that is impossible for God Who has all-knowledge and knew *every* sin we were going to commit before He ever made us!

We know that Peter's denial of Jesus didn't catch the Lord by surprise and disappoint Him because when Peter promised the Lord, he would never be stumbled because of Him—Jesus told Peter that before the night was out, he was going to deny Him 3 times.

I believe Jesus told Peter this in advance—not only to warn him not to put his trust in his own strength—but also to prepare him.

To soften the blow of his failure by teaching Peter (and all of us) that our sins never surprise or disappoint God—grieve Him yes, surprise Him no.

3) I don't believe the look Jesus gave Peter that day was a look of sadness.

The kind of look we might give a person who was a lost cause—a hopeless loser!

The kind of person we often feel like for blowing it as much as we do—which causes us to say,
“Lord, I’m hopeless, I’ll never amount to anything as a Christian—why don’t You just give up on me—I’ve given up on myself!”

Forgetting that we are ‘a work in progress’ and that Paul wrote to the Philippians, “...*being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil.1:6)

You say, **“Okay pastor, what kind of look do you think Jesus gave Peter?”**

I personally believe it was a look of loving compassion—the kind of look a parent would give a child who is learning to walk but keeps falling.

Hosea 11:1-3, 8 (NLT2)

¹ “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt. ² But the more I called to him, the farther he moved from me, offering sacrifices to the images of Baal and burning incense to idols. ³ I myself taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand. But he doesn’t know or even care that it was I who took care of him...

⁸ “Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go?...My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows.

If the Lord can forgive Israel, *their* rebellion under law—don’t you think He will forgive *you* for *your* weaknesses and failings now that you’re His child under grace?

Look, God loves you. He’s not angry with you.

He is not up in heaven condemning you for your failures.

He knew all the times you were going to fail before He ever created you—and He still wanted you to be His child.

And now that you are His child, He's not going to condemn you because you're weak and sometimes fail and fall in your walk with Him.

Paul the apostle made this clear in Romans 8 when he asked the question, "*Why would God condemn the very people He sent His Son Jesus to die for—those who are now His children?*"

Look, God knows our weaknesses. He knows us better than we know ourselves—and He isn't putting any confidence in our strength.

Psalm 103:8, 10-14 (NKJV)

⁸ The Lord *is* merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy...¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth, *So* great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; ¹² As far as the east is from the west, *So* far has He removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father pities *his* children, *So* the Lord pities those who fear Him. ¹⁴ For He knows our frame; He remembers that *we are* dust.

God knows that we are weak and prone to failure—He is not condemning us for our failures because, as His children—He uses them to teach us how to walk with Him better in the future—

As someone has written—

"I went to the throne with a trembling heart the day was done. 'Have you a new day for me dear Master I've spoiled this one? He took my day all spoiled and blotted and gave me a new one all unspotted and into my tired heart He cried, 'Do better now My child.'"

Let me close with a true story about a little boy named William.

William is a pastor's son who, at the time of this story, was about 7 years old.

It seems that William was a rambunctious little boy who often pushed the patience of his teachers.

One Sunday while driving home from church William, who was unusually quiet, suddenly blurted out, *“Dad, is God watching me?”*

William’s father knew something was behind that question and so he asked, *“Why do you ask me that William—did someone tell you God is watching you?”*

William responded in a sheepish tone, *“My Sunday school teacher told me God is watching me—is it true dad? Is God really watching me?”*

William’s father probed deeper, *“Why did your Sunday school teacher tell you God is watching you William?”*

“Well, because I was kinda acting up in class—but is it true dad? Is God watching me!?”

Now this pastor knew that the way he answered that question had the potential to shape William’s concept of God for many years to come.

So, he prayed quickly for wisdom and then said to his son, *“Yes William it’s true, God is watching you—He’s watching you because He loves you so much He can’t take His eyes off of you!”*

And the same is true for all of God’s children—God is watching you.

He’s watching you, not because He’s angry with you or disappointed in you or disgusted because you fail—He’s watching you because He loves you so much, He can’t take His eyes off of you!

And like any parent, He wants what's best for you and so He patiently keeps watching over you, protecting and guiding you each day.

And when you fall, He stands ready to pick you up, dust you off, take you in His arms and whisper in your ears, *"I forgive you child, now draw your strength from Me and I'll teach you how to walk with Me better in the future"*.

Remember you and I are a work in progress—and He who has begun that work will see it all the way through to completion.

So be encouraged and draw close to your loving Father in heaven every day for strength—and remember:

"If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." (1John 3:20)

Our heart may condemn us when we fail—but God is bigger than our heart and knows that deep down in our heart we love Him and want to obey Him and please Him—He knows the truth!

Remember when Peter failed how that after Jesus rose from the dead—the Lord asked him, *"Peter do you love Me?"*

To which Peter rightly responded, *"Lord, You know all things—You know that I love You!"* (John 21:17—Elaborate)

The devil used Peter's failure to condemn him—but Peter appealed to Jesus' omniscience because he knew that God knows all things!

This was John's way of comforting and encouraging us when we fail as children of God when he said—**"If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things"**.

It's John's way of saying that—sometimes a child of God can be overly hard on themselves where they set the bar so high that they begin to have unrealistic expectations in their walk with the Lord.

Expectations so high that they border on *perfection* so that any sin, no matter how small and unintended, becomes the justification to condemn themselves as worthless failures.

Now look, I'm not saying that 'small' sins aren't an issue and only 'big' sins need to be taken seriously—remember what Solomon said in Song of Solomon 2:15, that it's "*the little foxes that spoil the vine.*" (Explain)

All sin is serious in God's eyes and He wants us to take all of it seriously as well.

It's just that we are all like little children learning to walk, and when we fall (to sin) He wants us to acknowledge our sin, confess it, repent—and get back up and start walking with Him again!

When Peter did deny his Lord 3 times the next day—his failure caused Peter, a proud and self-confident man—to fall and fall hard!

When it happened, he went out and wept bitterly.

In his mind he had committed an unforgivable sin—a failure so great it had damaged his relationship with Jesus forever.

Further, I'm convinced that Peter believed his ministry for the Lord was now over—all was lost, he had made the Lord a promise he didn't keep—what a hopeless failure he had become!

What Peter, no doubt, didn't realize at that moment of failure was that—his greatest days of relationship with Jesus and ministry for Jesus—were yet ahead!

Peter's failure hadn't irreparably damaged his relationship with the Lord—in many ways it strengthened it!

The Lord used his failure to teach him an incredibly important lesson, one that Paul would later articulate in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians—*“When I am weak, then I am strong!”* (2Cor.12:10)

We are all a work in progress, and in that regard, God is teaching us many lessons that will help us grow in our walk with Him and in our ministry for Him.

One of the greatest of these lessons—is not to put confidence in our own strength!

It only leads to failure (as Peter discovered) and gives the devil an opportunity to condemn us.

Again, God knows that we are weak and prone to failure—He is not condemning us for our failures because, as His children—He uses them to teach us how to walk with Him better in the future.

If you have “failed God” recently, your walk and ministry aren't over—learn from it and if you do—

Your greatest days of fellowship with and service for Jesus could yet be ahead!