

# FACING FAILURE

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## Mark 14

### Introduction:

The last week of Jesus' life, before his crucifixion and resurrection was a very busy one. He spent it in and around Jerusalem, knowing from the beginning how it was all going to end. His lodging place during this last week was out in Bethany, at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethany was a small village out on the Mount of Olives, about 2 miles east of Jerusalem.

We read in Luke 21:37 that *"...every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet."* The first three days of what we call the Passion week are quite clearly defined in the gospel accounts.

- Day 1/Sunday – Mark 11:1-11
  - the triumphal entry into Jerusalem
  - surveying the activity in the temple
- Day 2/Monday – Mark 11:12-19
  - cursing the fig tree
  - cleansing the temple, teaching
- Day 3/Tuesday – Mark 11:20-14:2
  - the withered fig tree
  - challenge to Jesus' authority
  - parables and teaching in the temple
  - questions from the Pharisees and Sadducees
  - more teaching – the time of the end
  - the plot to kill Jesus – 14:1-2

This is where it starts to get a bit fuzzier. Wednesday seems to kind of disappear from the record; it may have been a kind of rest day for Jesus and his disciples. The anointing at Bethany—Mark 14:3-9—probably occurred some time earlier as it is recorded in the other gospels. Judas's betrayal agreement with the chief priests—Mark 14:9-10—may have been made late on Tuesday night or sometime on Wednesday.

That brings us to the day of the Passover. On the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month on the Jewish religious calendar, the people were to kill and roast a specially chosen lamb, as a reminder of how God had delivered their forefathers from Egypt. And so, Jesus chose to celebrate the Passover with his disciples in a carefully chosen room in Jerusalem.

*Read Mark 14:12-16* – the remainder of this chapter details the events of a very dark and disturbing night. It was a night filled with distressing and unsettling events and troubling revelations. Let me just quickly outline what we find in Mark chapter 14.

- The revelation that one of the disciples would betray the Lord, and the disciples' questioning, "is it I?"
- Institution of the Lord's supper—the bread and the wine—a ceremony of remembrance.
- The assertion by Jesus that they would all abandon him, and that Peter would deny him.
- The agony of Jesus as he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane in anticipation of his coming death.
- Judas turns his Lord over to the authorities; Jesus is arrested and taken away; all the disciples flee.
- Jesus is taken before the council to be tried and is ultimately charged with blasphemy.
- Peter denies three times that he even knows Jesus.

That is a quick overview of Mark 14. Clearly there is far too much material to cover in any detail, so I am not even going to try. I want to focus on one particular theme that stands out in this chapter. As you may have guessed from the message title, we are going to look at the idea of failure and how we deal with failure.

How do you define failure? A dictionary defines it as *"a failing to perform a duty or expected action."* For example, a ballplayer is expected to hit the baseball when he steps up to the plate. One particular ballplayer struck out over 1300 times in his career. On one occasion he set a league record by striking out 5 consecutive times in one World Series game. By some accounts that would be considered a failure. But that player was none other than Babe Ruth, who also hit 714 home runs in his career, the major league record for many years.

You see, failure is only failure if you cannot recover. To be knocked down is only a failure if you do not get up and try again. This morning we want to look at the failure of Peter and consider what led to his failure as well as how he recovered from it. *(I have borrowed some of my outline this morning from a Baptist minister from Texas – David Dykes).*

## Peter's Failure

*Go through Mark 14:66-72, looking at the events as they occurred.*

- Peter is warming himself in the courtyard as Jesus is being questioned by the Sanhedrin.
- A servant girl recognizes him and identifies him as a disciple.
- Peter denies it and moves further away to the outer court.
- The servant girl sees him again and begins to speak to others about his connection to Jesus.
- Peter again denies it.
- The others standing around begin to question him – his accent identifies him as a Galilean.
- He not only denies but begins to curse and swear that he doesn't even know Jesus.
- The rooster crows for the second time, and Peter remembers the prediction Jesus had made earlier that evening.
- He realizes the extent of his failure and breaks down and weeps.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever wept, knowing that you have failed your Lord? I can think of many times I failed the Lord. Perhaps not by deliberately denying the Lord but denying him by my silence. All through my high school years...

## The Pathway to Personal Failure

What are some of the steps that lead to failing Jesus when we are faced with a difficult situation? We see some clear stages in the life of Peter. It all begins with...

### A. Disagreement with God's Word

Remember the incident a few weeks earlier up at Caesarea Philippi? Peter gave a clear declaration of his belief that Jesus was indeed the

Messiah, the Son of God. Following that confession, Jesus began to open up to them about some of the things that were to happen.

*Go to Mark 8:31-32a – read it.* That was a distinct message – a clear revelation from God.

But Peter disagreed with God's word. We read – verse 32b. Matthew expands on that by saying, *"Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.'"* (Matthew 16:22-23)

When we begin to disagree with what God says, we are headed for failure. The second step is...

### B. Overconfidence

When Jesus warned his disciples that they would all fall away, what was Peter's response – see v. 29 – Not me, Lord. Maybe the others will abandon you, but you can count on me.

When Jesus went on to predict that Peter would not only abandon him but would actually deny him three times, Peter became even more confident and sure of himself – Not me. I would even die for you; I will never deny you.

The Bible has strong warnings about pride. Proverbs 16:18 says, *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."*

Pride can lead us to believe that we are incapable of sin. But the truth is that any one of us can deny our Lord at any time. Let us not become overconfident about our ability to stand up for Jesus.

The third step we see in Peter's situation is...

### C. Peer pressure from the wrong crowd

As Peter sat and warmed himself in the courtyard, he found himself surrounded by people who were hostile toward Jesus and anyone associated with Jesus. That is always a difficult place to stand up for Jesus and confess our faithfulness to him.

Mark 14:54 makes an interesting statement – Peter followed Jesus at a distance. That is a dangerous place to be. When we are no longer following close to Jesus we are in danger of falling away from him.

Peer pressure is a powerful influence. And when we are surrounded by those who do not share our beliefs and convictions, we will find ourselves facing a lot of pressure to turn away from our Lord.

Those are the three key steps we see leading to Peter's failure – disagreement with God's Word, overconfidence about his own ability, and submitting to peer pressure from hostile unbelievers.

So, how you come back from that kind of failure? When you have failed the Lord and find yourself at rock bottom how do you find your way back to that close relationship with God?

## The Pathway to Personal Restoration

Again, I want to suggest three steps which will lead to restoration.

### A. Admit your failure

As soon as the rooster crowed, Peter realized he had failed the Lord. He remembered what the Lord had said. The issue now was how would he respond. When we fail, the big question is, what will we do next? We can admit our failure, or we can try to cover it up. The Bible says, *"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."* (Proverbs 28:13)

### B. Repent of your sin

We read that when Peter realized what he had done, *"...he broke down and wept."* Luke says, *"...he went out and wept bitterly."* Clearly his conviction led to a desire to change. The word "repent" means to have a change of heart that leads to a change in behaviour. Peter wept because he was ashamed of his behaviour and wanted to change.

Sorrow and repentance often go together. The Bible says, *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."* (2 Corinthians 7:10)

There is one more important step...

### C. Return to serve with God's people

After Peter's sorrow and repentance, he took an important step. He returned to rejoin the disciples. He was with them in the upper room when Jesus appeared after his resurrection.

Back in the upper room, before Jesus predicted Peter's denial, he also made another statement to Peter. Jesus said, *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."* (Luke 22:31-32)

Later on, after his resurrection, Jesus met with his disciples in Galilee. He spoke with them and had a special conversation with Peter. It was a time of restoration and commissioning.

And a few weeks later, Peter led the disciples on the day of Pentecost, with a powerful message that God used to bring thousands of people to faith as the church was born. He went on to become one of the key leaders of the early church.

## Conclusion

Failure – as human beings we are going to fail sometimes. There are times when we will fall or be knocked down. But the people God wants to use are those who do not stay down but get up and keep on serving him.

John Maxwell wrote, "Failing doesn't mean I'm a failure; it just means I have not yet succeeded. It doesn't mean I've accomplished nothing; it just means I've learned something. It doesn't mean I'll never make it; it just means I have a reason to start over again. It doesn't mean God has abandoned me; it just means He has a better idea!"