

Steps Toward Failure

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores the steps that led to Peter's failure and the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit to achieve success in our Christian walk and life.

Duration: 37:42

Scripture: Psalm 19:1-4, Psalm 19:7-9, Matthew 24:1-2, Matthew 25:1 - 26:2

Topics: "Failure"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by quoting Psalm 19:3-4, emphasizing that the voice of God is heard throughout the entire world. The speaker then transitions to the story of Peter's denial of Jesus and his subsequent remorse. The sermon highlights the deep sorrow and repentance that Peter experienced after denying Jesus three times. The sermon also mentions how Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection and how Peter, feeling discouraged, decided to go fishing. However, Jesus appeared to them and asked if they had caught anything.

Transcript

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to Psalm 19 for our scripture reading today. I'll read the first, the outnumbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the reading of the even-numbered verses, and shall we stand as we read the Word of God.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever, and the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than

gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

And moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleansed thou me from secret faults? Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me, and then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Let's pray. Father, we join with David in the prayer that you would help us, that presumptuous sins would not rule over us, but rather that the meditations of our heart, the words of our mouth might be acceptable, Lord, in your sight.

We come to you today, Lord, conscious of our own humanity and frailties, the weaknesses of our flesh, but coming to you, Lord, that we might experience the power of your Holy Spirit working in our lives. Teach us this day, Lord, through the word. In Jesus' name we ask.

Amen. You may be seated. Last Sunday night, we were not able to get beyond the 24th chapter of Matthew as we dealt with the prophecies that relate to the coming again of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 25 is really a continuation of chapter 24, in which Jesus gives us certain parables to exhort us to be ready and to be watching and of the conditions that will exist when he returns. So tonight we will be taking Matthew 25 and 26, which means that next Sunday we will finish the book of Matthew and move on into the gospel according to Mark. This morning we'd like to draw your attention to Matthew chapter 26.

And I'm interested, especially this morning, the 69th verse through sort of the end. Now Peter sat without in the palace, and a damsel came unto him saying, You also were with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what you say.

And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him, they that stood by and said to Peter, Surely you are one of them, for your speech gives you away.

Then he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the rooster began to crow. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the rooster crows, you shall deny me thrice.

And he went out and wept bitterly. At the last supper, just shortly before this event that we read, Jesus had said to his disciples, All of you are going to be offended tonight because of me. And as Peter affirmed his resolute determination never to be offended, declared, Lord, though they may be offended, I will never be.

And Jesus said, Peter, before the rooster crows, you will have denied me three times. And Peter said, I would never deny you. I will die for you.

But here we read of the tragic failure of Peter. When the pressure was on, when this little maid said, I think I saw you with him. He said, I don't know what you're talking about.

When another maid said, He is one of the disciples. He swore I'm not a disciple. And when the soldiers began to say, You have a Galilean accent.

Your speech gives you away. You are one of them. He began to curse and to say, I don't know him.

Earlier in the ministry of Jesus, he had said to his disciples, If you confess me before men, I will confess you before my father, which is in heaven. But if you deny me before men, then I will deny you before my father, which is in heaven. And here we see Peter's failure, his denying his Lord when under pressure.

When Peter heard the rooster crowing, he remembered the words of Jesus, and he went out and wept, it says, bitterly. Most of us know the sore throat that comes from swallowing salty tears when we have failed and are familiar with what it is to fail under pressure. Sin does not always spring forth from a rebellious heart.

It isn't something that I willfully, deliberately do against the Lord. Quite often it just comes from the weakness of my flesh. Earlier in the evening, Jesus said to Peter, You know, Satan has desired that he might sift you like wheat, but I've prayed for you.

And when you are converted, strengthen your brothers. It must have been very comforting to hear Jesus say, I've prayed for you. It's going to be tough.

You're going to go through a heavy trial, but Peter, I'm praying for you. How would you like the Lord to say, it's going to be hard, but I'm praying for you? Wouldn't that be wonderful? Well, to tell you the truth, He is praying for you. We read Paul's letter to the Romans.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ who has died, yea, rather he is risen again, and he is even at the right hand of the Father, making intercession or praying for us. In Hebrews 7.25, it says, Wherefore, he is able also to save unto the uttermost all who will come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Jesus is praying for you.

What is he praying? Well, John tells us in the 17th chapter of John, he records for us the prayer of Jesus as he is praying for his disciples, but then he went on to say, Neither do I pray for these alone, but also for those who shall come to believe on me through their word. That is you and I who have come to believe on Jesus Christ through the witness of the apostles and the word of God. His prayer is that they might be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me and the glory which you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.

Father, I will that they whom you have given me will be with me where I am, that they might behold my glory which you have given to me, for you love me before the foundation of the world. He's praying, Father, I want that they should be with me, that they might behold the glory that I've had with you before the foundation of the world. Peter, it's going to be a test, but I'm praying for you.

It's interesting to note that his prayer was that your faith fail thee not. His faith didn't fail, his courage did. Under the pressure, he gave in to the peer pressure and denied the Lord, but his faith did not fail.

In looking at Peter's failure, we see there are steps that led to the failure. The first was boasting in himself. When Jesus said, all of you are going to be offended tonight because of me, Peter boasted, Lord, though they may all be offended, I will never be offended.

Trusting in the flesh, boasting in the flesh. Basically, Peter is saying, Lord, it may be that you can't trust those fellows, but you can trust me, you know, Rocky, you call me that, Lord, and I'll be there, you know,

you can trust me. Beware of boasting in the flesh.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, we worship God in the spirit, and we rejoice in Christ Jesus, and we have no confidence in our flesh. Writing to the Romans, he said, I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good thing. Confidence in our flesh will lead to failure, disappointment, and bitter tears.

The second step of Peter's failure, toward failure, was his arguing with the Lord. Jesus said, all of you are going to be offended. Peter said, Lord, though they may all, I will never be offended.

Jesus said, Peter, before the rooster crows, you will have denied me three times. Lord, I will never deny you, I'll die for you. What's he doing? He's arguing with Jesus.

Know this, if you ever find yourself arguing with Jesus, you're wrong. He's right. Don't argue with Jesus, and that was a real mistake on Peter's part.

The next step towards his failure, as they were coming now into the garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus is positioning the disciples in the garden, that they might watch and pray with him. He takes Peter, James, and John a little closer than the other disciples, and as they are there, he says, now watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. And he went just a little further from them, and he began to pray.

And we read in the scripture, he was in great agony. His sweat turned, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground, as he was fighting all of the forces of darkness and hell. It was a tremendous spiritual battle.

After a while, he returned to Peter, James, and John. Just why he returned the scripture doesn't say, but I would presume that it was just to get a little support. It's a heavy duty thing, fighting this battle alone, and no doubt coming to them to just receive some support, prayer support.

He found them sleeping rather than praying. And he said, Peter, are you sleeping? Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the problem, the flesh is weak.

And so, if you find yourself sleeping instead of praying at those crisis moments of life, you are setting yourself up for failure. The next step that led to his failure was when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus there in the garden. Peter pulled out his sword and began to fight, swinging the sword.

He clipped off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. And Jesus had to say, Peter, put away the sword. Peter was going to make it a fleshly battle.

This was a spiritual battle that was going on. He would bring it into the arena of the flesh, a mistake that we often make. And rather than helping the Lord, he actually gave the Lord a little more work to do.

He had to put the ear back on Malchus and heal him. And he said to Peter, don't you know, Peter, if I wanted to, I could call 12 legions of angels to deliver me. But the cup that the Father has given me to drink, shall I not drink it? As they were leading Jesus off to be brought before the high priest, we read, and Peter followed afar off.

That's dangerous. There are many people who are seeking to follow Jesus afar off. I don't want to get too close.

I believe and I want to keep sort of a distance so people don't associate me with him. I want to see what's going on, but I don't want to be so near that they relate me to him. Following Jesus afar off always leads to denial, to failure.

Rather than trying to follow Jesus afar off, follow him just as close as you possibly can. Keep close to Jesus. We find that as Jesus was being tried before the council, the soldiers had built a fire outside and Peter was warming himself by the fire.

That's a mistake. If ever you can find warmth by the enemy's fire, you are in a dangerous place. If in the environment of the world you feel comfortable, you feel warmed, it's an indication that you're in a dangerous place.

There are places where you and I as Christians should never be. The enemy's fires, that's a dangerous place to seek warmth. If you are an alcoholic, a recovering alcoholic, you know better than going into a bar to get a coke.

There are places you just shouldn't be. And here is Peter by the enemy's fire and that's where the little maid came up and said, haven't I seen you with him? Aren't you one of his disciples? And Peter denied when she returned and said, I'm sure I saw you with him. He denied again, only this time with an oath, I swear, don't know what you're talking about.

And that is when the soldiers picked up on his Galilean accent and affirmed, surely you are. Your speech betrays you. And that is when he began to curse in his denial that he knew Jesus.

And at that point, the rooster began to crow. And the words of Jesus flashed in his mind before the rooster crows, you will have denied me three times. And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

The same kind of weeping that we often experience when we have failed miserably in our walk with the Lord and found ourselves saying things, doing things that we knew we should not say or do as a child of God. Jesus was crucified. He rose again the third day.

He said to his disciples, go up to Galilee and I will meet you there. So they went up to the Sea of Galilee and they were waiting for Jesus. And when he didn't show up at the appointed time, Peter said, I'm going fishing.

Many of the others said, well, we'll go with you. And they went out and they fished all night and caught nothing. In the morning, Jesus was standing on the shore.

He called out and he said, have you caught anything? And they said, no. He said, well, cast your nets on the other side. And so they cast their nets on the other side and immediately they were filled with great fish.

So much so, so heavy that they couldn't pull it into the boat. Now, when John saw that they could not pull in the net because of the multitude of fish, he said to Peter, it's the Lord. And Peter grabbed his coat and dove in and swam to shore.

And the other disciples came in a small little boat pulling the nets. And as they pulled the net to shore with those big fish flopping in the net, they found that Jesus had a bed of coals and fish laid on and he invited them to come and eat. And then he began heart surgery on Peter.

Three times Peter had denied his Lord. Three times Jesus gives him the opportunity to affirm his love. Peter, do you love me more than these? What were these? I don't know.

Were they the flopping fish there in the net? Was it success in your chosen profession? Do you love the Lord more than success in your chosen field? Or was he nodding toward the other disciples? Because you remember, Peter had more or less affirmed that he loved Jesus more than the others. Lord, though they may all be offended, I will never be offended. And he was sort of boasting that he loved the Lord more than the other disciples.

And so whether the question, do you love me more than success in your chosen profession? Or do you love me more than the other disciples? We'll have to wait to find out what Jesus was referring to. But nonetheless, the question. And he gave Peter the opportunity to say, yes, Lord, I love you.

So the second time, Peter, do you love me? Giving him the second opportunity to affirm his love, commissioning him then to tend over, watch my little lambs. And then the third time, Peter, do you love me? And giving him the opportunity the third time to affirm his love for Jesus. How tender.

Jesus giving him three opportunities to affirm his love even as he denied his Lord those three times. Turning now from the last chapter of the book of John on into the book of Acts, we find in the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, the council once again. The council outside of which Peter had denied his Lord.

Peter is now inside the council. He has been arrested. He is being tried by the same council that tried his Lord and condemned him to death.

He is there because of a miracle that was wrought through faith in Jesus Christ. A lame man who had been lame from birth, who was about 40 years old, was healed, able to walk. And so he was brought before the council and is now being questioned by the prosecuting attorney.

By what name or by what power did you do this, causing this lame man to walk? And we read in verse eight, then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said unto them, ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we are being examined today because of the good deed done to the lame man, by what means he's able to walk, be it known unto you all and to all of the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught by you builders, which has become the head of the corner, and neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Could this be the same Peter who outside of this judgment hall said, I don't know what you're talking about, I don't know him.

Now standing before these men, he is boldly proclaiming that Jesus Christ, who they condemned to death, rose from the dead, and it is by him this lame man is standing here before you all, and there is not salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved. We read now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they marveled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. From a weakness of the flesh in denying his Lord, to this powerful proclamation that Jesus is the only way, what's the difference between the Peter who denied his Lord and the Peter who is boldly proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and the only Lord? It's back in verse 8, then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1.8, Jesus said to the disciples, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth, Peter filled with the Holy Spirit. The difference is Peter in the flesh, back in Matthew, and in Acts it's Peter filled with the Spirit, and that's the qualifier, filled with the Spirit. That's the key to success in our Christian walk and in our Christian life.

That is the difference between failure and success, filled with the Spirit, which of course then brings up the question, have you been filled with the Spirit? You remember that's basically what Paul asked those disciples that he found in Ephesus, who perhaps were sort of stumbling in their walk. There was something that was lacking, maybe the joy or excitement in Jesus, and he said, did you receive the Holy Spirit since you believed? And that's the question, have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed? This wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit, which Peter said, the promise of the gift of the Spirit is to you, to your children, to those that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. I can't describe for you the difference between trying to serve Jesus in the ability and power of the flesh, as it compares to serving Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If I want to live a the Spirit of God, enabling me, as you need the power of the Spirit of God, who is able to cause you to be victorious, not to be overcome with evil, but to overcome evil with good. Father, we thank you for the promise of the Holy Spirit is to us who are far off from those incidents that we read about in the New Testament, and yet we've been called to follow Jesus Christ. And it is our desire, Lord, to serve you, to live a life that is pleasing to you.

And Lord, we are aware of our failures. We're aware of the weakness of our flesh, and we're aware of the need of the power of your Holy Spirit. And so, Lord, this day, I pray that there will be a strong and powerful moving of your Holy Spirit in each of our lives, as we acknowledge, Lord, our desire to be filled with your Spirit.

Touch and strengthen us that we will not deny you, Lord, but boldly proclaim that you are Lord, and boldly proclaim our relationship to you, to the world in which we live. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are standing down here at the front.

They're here to pray for you this morning, you that would like to experience the power of God's Spirit in your life. Maybe you can really relate to Peter in the denial of the Lord. You've had that experience.

You know the bitterness and the bitter tears that come from failure, but you'd like to really know real victory in Jesus. The secret is the power of God's Spirit made available to us. So, I would encourage you, as soon as we're dismissed, make your way down to the front and talk to these pastors and just say, you know, I need the Spirit of God in my life.

I'm tired of failing. I want to live a life of victory in Jesus. Pray for me, and they'll be happy to pray for you that you might receive that power by which you can live a life of victory in Christ.

May the Lord be with you. Watch over and keep you this week, and may you know the power of God's Spirit working in you, working through you, helping you to be everything that God desires and wants you to be. May the Lord richly bless you in Jesus' name.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

God bless you.

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