

Falling Forward – Peter Falls Forward

March 26, 2017- Pastor Randy

Over the past few weeks we have been in a series entitled “falling forward”. We have looked at what God’s word teaches us about how we should respond when we fall into sin because of our missteps, and how we should respond when we fall when we have been “knocked down” by misfortune. Today, I want to speak to you about falls that we experience that result from our mistakes. A mistake is different from a misstep in that a mistake is a non-moral failure. “Mistakes” include such things as accidents, unsuccessful attempts, forgetfulness, and errors in judgement.

We just heard a story of a brother who made a mistake in judgement that resulted in years of pain. Last year I told you about my good friend, Pastor Garry Patrylo Jr, who suffered second and three degree burns in a fire. He wasn’t in the act of committing arson! He had just buried his father back home in Queens, NY and he was three hours away in upstate NY, pulling up carpet in a home they had purchased and renovated in order to house a recovery ministry for men with addictions. It was late at night. He was tired mentally and physically. He did not consider the danger posed by the water heater sitting in the room as he was pouring a flammable solution on the floor to remove the glue that had held down the carpet. He ended up engulfed in flames. I still remember him expressing disappointment, anger, and guilt over his mistake which had not only caused him to suffer, but his family as well. This happened while he was sacrificing his time to help broken men find freedom in Jesus. He was certainly not sinning. Neither could his actions be described simply as misfortune because he was not as careful as he should have been. Mistakes, although they may be failures of a non-moral nature, make us vulnerable to the discouragement that results from self-condemning self-talk such as, “I’m a loser”, “I’m a failure”, “I’m an idiot”. The discouragement of self-condemnation turns into the depression of self-loathing. The guilt that Steve experienced was painful regardless of the fact that nobody could accuse him of harm, or even neglect. Our mistakes bring hurt that can only be healed by God’s grace.

Peter could accurately be described as Jesus’ “right hand man” and part of Jesus inner circle along with James and John. He was raised in Galilee and was a fisherman by trade. One of Peter’s strengths is that he was a man of initiative; a man of action. No one would accuse him of being too passive or overly cautious. Those were not his weaknesses. However, Peter’s

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willingness to take action, his boldness, his initiative, was often accompanied by impulsiveness. An impulsive person is one who acts and speaks without forethought. One who is driven more by emotion than by reason. He was often too sure of himself, overconfident.

A. READ Matt. 14:24-31

Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. 25 About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!" Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

The disciples are in a boat that is being battered (literally: "tortured") by the waves. They are fighting for their lives. It is sometime after 3am at night when Jesus approached their boat, walking on the water. It shouldn't surprise us that they thought he was a ghost. When you are tired and in danger you are inclined to interpret everything in a more negative light. Jesus called out to them, identifying himself so as to calm their fears. The normal response would be, "Jesus, if that's you, get over here! Help us." But Peter asked Jesus to prove Himself by calling Peter to get out of the boat and walk on the water. And then, when Jesus told him to come, Peter actually did! I doubt many of us have as much bravery or belief as Peter. But as Peter was walking on the water he began to focus on the waves instead of on Jesus, and he began to sink. Then Jesus said, "Where is your faith, you loser", and He walked away leaving Peter to drown. No! That was not Jesus' response. Jesus did chide Peter. Scholar Craig Keener suggests it was a gentle rebuke. The important thing is that Jesus reached down, grabbed Peter, lifted him up and took him into the boat.

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Peter's failure in this story must be viewed in light of his success. It is easy to view Peter as the disciple who failed in this story; the one who had to be rescued because of his weakness of faith. But Jesus also rescued the other disciples who never got out of the boat. Peter is the only one who actually walked on water. His faith was deficient, but it was still greater than that of those who were clinging to the boat. The spotlight gets placed on Peter because he was the only one who had the boldness to actually believe that Jesus would enable him to walk on the water. Notice that Jesus did not reprove Peter for asking to come to Him on the water, but only for allowing his eyes to focus on things that shifted his focus and faith away from Jesus.

Falling Forward Truths:

1. The pursuit of God is accompanied by the risk of failure.
2. It will most often include some degree of failure along the way.
3. Failure is a part of learning and growing.

Matt 16:13-23

From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!" Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

Right before this encounter Jesus asked the disciples to give their opinion about His true identity. Peter was the one who boldly professed faith in him as the Messiah, the Son of God. After commending Peter for the accuracy of his bold profession of faith, Jesus then predicted that he would suffer, be killed, and rise again on the third day. Peter's response was to take Jesus aside and correct Him. Jesus response to Peter was, "Get behind me Satan".

It is never one of your best moments when Jesus says to you, "Get behind me Satan". Peter's mistake is not just that he misunderstood the necessity of the cross in order for there to be a kingdom. Peter's response demonstrates that

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his mistake was in his failure to listen. Jesus said that he would rise from the dead. Peter apparently let his emotions hamper his ability to listen fully. His response should have been, "Tell me more about this resurrection!"

READ John 13: 4-9

So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will." "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet to teach them by way of example that they needed to serve one another, He predicted that one of them would betray him. Then he proceeded to predict that he was going to be leaving them. In John 13:36-38 we read,

Simon Peter asked, "Lord, where are you going?" And Jesus replied, "You can't go with me now, but you will follow me later." "But why can't I come now, Lord?" he asked. "I'm ready to die for you." Jesus answered, "Die for me? I tell you the truth, Peter—before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me."

Peter had to be corrected by Jesus twice during Jesus' last supper with the disciples. First, Jesus had to correct Peter for his failure to listen and learn. Second, He had to correct Peter for placing his confidence in himself. In both Matthew 16 and John 13, Peter's failures were motivated by his sincere love and devotion to Christ. Peter was acting out of loyalty to Jesus, not in rebellion against Jesus.

Peter failed because he was too quick to speak and too slow to listen. Someone once said, "I have never learned anything while I was speaking".

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Peter's other "mistake" was in being too self-confident. He was not aware of his own weakness, but he soon found out when he did in fact deny Jesus.

Falling Forward Truths:

1. We can avoid future falls if we place our confidence in the power that is available through the Holy Spirit, rather than trusting in our own strength.
2. We can avoid future falls if we listen and learn before we speak or act.
3. You must receive God's grace for your mistakes just as for your missteps. You have no business condemning yourself when God doesn't condemn you.
4. Mistakes and failures made while sincerely trying to do God's will may not require repentance, but we ought to learn from them so we can make less of them!
5. You must own your failure without allowing your failure to become your identity. You can own it, without identifying with it. Jesus didn't define Peter by his mistakes; not even by his missteps. Despite Peter's repeated failures with his speech and actions, Jesus never defined Peter by Peter's failures. He never labeled Peter a failure. Here was the label Jesus placed on Peter:

"You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

When Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times in one night Jesus also predicted that Peter would repent and come away even stronger so he could encourage the other disciples. Peter's failures never made him a failure in Jesus eyes. Jesus still called him "Rock", because Peter kept following.

We will make mistakes, but as long as we keep following Him we are victors, not failures!

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