

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: The Gospel of John
Message: Take Heed, Lest You Fall

Transcribed Message
September 27, 2026
John 13:36-38

Two or three times a week, without fail, I get a couple of emails that are very discouraging. I don't want to read them. I don't want to open them. When I see who they're from, I don't want to read them. I don't want to open them up. But I know I should, and so I do. And as I read them, it's confirmed what I knew going in. They're sad, they're discouraging, they're hard. Now, as ominous as all that sounds, the good news is I don't know these people that are sending them to me personally. In fact, they're Christian ministries that are committed to transparency in the evangelical church. And so, they send out two or three emails a week, without fail. And in these emails, every week I read of the failures of pastors, of church leaders, of volunteers. Sometimes those failures are moral in nature. Sometimes they're just very poor judgment. Sometimes they even involve criminal activity. But it's always a reminder to us of the biblical principle that pride is what comes before the fall.

I don't think there's any more appropriate principle than that when we come to our passage this morning in John chapter 13. In 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds us in the 10th chapter and the 12th verse, therefore to him he thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. That is the lesson of John 13:36 to 38. This final look at the prelude to Jesus's farewell discourse, and we want to see this morning, temptation comes to all of us at any age and at any time. And anyone can fall if we take our eyes off the Lord Jesus.

Let's do this quick review of this last look at John 13, remember we have said that this is a chapter that's filled with contrasts. And those contrasts are really captured in those four statements there on your outline. The foot washing experience, this picture of servitude on the part of our Lord, so unexpected. It's almost incomprehensible that Jesus would take the basin and the towel and wash the feet of the disciples who just had previously been arguing amongst themselves as to which of them is the greatest in the presence of Jesus.

And then of course there's the prediction of betrayal, this absolute treachery on the part of Judas, and all of that of course in light of the pure devotion that Jesus has for him. And then the cross. The cross which from the human viewpoint looks to be the place of absolute and utter humiliation. It would be hard to envision anything that would qualify for that description, and yet Jesus looks at that and from the divine viewpoint he says this is the place of greatest glory as he reflects on his relationship with the Father and the Father with him.

And then that last look last week with the command that is given. We live in a world that is so conditional. You know, you do this for me, I'll do this for you. You treat me this way, I'll treat you this way. You love me, well I'm willing to love you back. And Jesus says leave all of that thinking behind and step into this new command that says you will love each other unconditionally. And so, you have these amazing contrasts.

Well, let's look this morning at the downward path. And if chapter 13 and all these descriptions are filled with contrast, and it is, then these verses it seems to me are filled with irony. And it begins with two men and two different destinies. Two men and two different destinies. It's Judas and Peter that I want us to see first in terms of their similarities. And you know it might almost at some point seem offensive to say Judas and Peter and similarities. I mean this is the man who committed the ultimate treachery against Jesus on the one hand, and the other of course is a man who was driven by his passion for Christ and his love for our Lord and his desire to follow him. But there are similarities and we can in fact learn from those similarities. So, let's note three of them.

The first one. They had both been with Jesus for three some years. It wasn't like Judas came along after the fact or much later. No, they were both with Jesus the whole time from the very beginning. They walked with Jesus.

Secondly, they both heard and had seen amazing things and had seen and witnessed amazing miracles. They both saw all the things that we've already looked at in the gospel of John. The miracles that John says, I'm writing to convince you that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. They both saw them. They were eyewitnesses. They heard Jesus teach in a way that was profound and authoritative.

Thirdly, they had both been loved unconditionally by the Lord. Even in that one last scene when Jesus in some sense of the culture is honoring Judas by handing him this piece of bread and saying to him perhaps there's still an opportunity for you to repent and turn away.

But those similarities being what they are, there are also great differences aren't there? Judas and Peter and their differences. Again, there's three of them. What we have seen all the way through this 13th chapter, and we've received it repeatedly is one was a believer and one was not. The scriptures make that very clear. In fact, back in verses 10 and 11, remember during the foot washing, Jesus said the one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet but is completely clean and you are clean but not every one of you. He said that in the beginning of the chapter in the second verse that Satan was going to be at work and the devil was going to use Judas. And that of course is what exactly happened as you come to the end of that section in the 27th verse. Peter is clean. Even though he wanted the whole wash poured over him, Jesus said you don't need that Peter, you just need your feet washed. So, Judas is an unbeliever. Peter is a believer. Judas is an antagonist against everything that Christ stood for. Peter was a devoted follower.

But then secondly, one was guilty of treachery, and one was guilty of pride, right? Judas's actions were deliberate. They were calculated. They were cold. They were planned out. He opened himself up to the enemy to use him in the way that he did. Peter, on the other hand, was swept away in the emotion of it all. Overconfident? Yes. Prideful? Yes. But certainly a man who was devoted to his Lord.

And then the third one being one repented and was restored and one ended his life so very tragically. Obviously two very different endings.

So, we learn from these two men that this story puts forward that even a leader of the disciples is subject to falling, and falling in a significant way, and so can we. If we don't keep our eyes on the Lord and if we don't keep our heart open to Him in dependence and reliance on Him, we can experience the same thing.

Let's look at this in Peter's life, one man and his fall, and we'll just see some of the downward steps. One of the things that as I read these sad and discouraging emails about failure in the lives of men and women who certainly knew better, you might think for some of

these stories that this just, came out of nowhere. It just happened. Unexpected. No warning sign. And that can happen. I mean, you can be driving down the road and have a tire blow out, and it's totally unexpected. But very often that tire has been telling you some things about its wear, of its condition. Maybe it's underinflated. Maybe it has another flaw. And that's very true in our spiritual journey. There are catastrophic failures that perhaps come on to somebody totally unexpected, without warning, no indication at all. But I would suggest to you that the vast majority of the time, there are ample warnings. There are many signs that something is not right between you and your Lord, between you and your walk with God, between you and other significant people in your life. There are oftentimes those warning signs. I think we see them in Peter. Here's what I want you to see.

First of all, he was talking when he should have been listening. That probably is true of many of us at times, right? Look at verse 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 will follow afterward. Kind of reminds me of, you know, the story of Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus, isn't she? She's learning. She's just like a sponge taking in the teaching that Jesus is offering. And Martha is in the kitchen, and we know we want to eat, so we appreciate that. But she's distracted from this opportunity. Remember in that interaction, Jesus says to her, Martha, Martha. And remember when anybody says your name twice in a row, that's not a good sign, is it? Martha, Martha. Why aren't you taking advantage of the greater opportunity is basically what Jesus said.

Well, here's Peter. Now, Jesus has been speaking about his death. These disciples, they're not grasping that, are they? They're not understanding. Every time he talks about it, it just goes right over the top of them. He's been talking about this glorious relationship between himself and the Father, and how this reciprocating love for each other results in glory being reflected back and forth. This deep mystery of this relationship between the Father and Son. He has just spent time giving them this transformative command, right? To love each other in a way that they should have just stopped dead in their tracks and said, how could we ever do this? All of this is a part of this context. It's obvious that Peter is really not listening very much to any of this because he's thinking about something else. He's missing out on any opportunity

for Jesus to explain more about his death on the cross, explain more about this glorious relationship. Jesus, explain more. How is it that I'm supposed to love these men in this room the way you've described? Because some of these guys are just really hard to love. He doesn't do any of that, does he? All he could focus on was himself.

What he heard when Jesus said he was leaving and the thought that overwhelmed him was, I'm going to be alone. If I heard this right, Jesus said he's going to leave. And it seems to me on some level, Peter's heart speaks to every one of us about our attitude towards the Word of God. Whether it's in a setting like this and we're sitting and listening to the teaching of the Word, or whether it's our own personal time of opening the Word and hearing what it is that God has to say to us. It speaks to the significance of that. It speaks to the need of that.

I don't want to be too hard on Peter, right? I don't want to be too hard on Peter. I mean, it's good to ask questions and he asks a question here. It may not have been the best one that he could have asked. But I think what is happening here is simply the reality that all of what Jesus has been speaking about would have given Peter an opportunity to step in and respond to that truth with an open heart, just as when you and I opened the Word and asked the Holy Spirit to speak to us. Somehow he turns it all back on himself rather than the opportunity to hear what it is that Jesus has said.

Secondly, as a result of not listening but speaking, secondly, he failed to see himself as he really was. He failed to see himself as he really was. And that's what the Word of God does for us every time we open it, and every time we listen to it, and every time we hear it, and every time we meditate on it, and every time we memorize it. It's like a mirror, James says, that we look into and it reveals things to us that we wouldn't otherwise know. When you think about what the Bible says about itself, listen to how the Bible just self-describes. It's a lamp. It's bread. It's honey. It's gold. It's fire. It's seed. It's water. It's milk. It's a sword. It's a hammer. It's a mirror. That's just some of the ways the Bible describes itself. The Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, isn't it? It divides the soul from the spirit. It divides the joints from the marrow, the writer of Hebrews says, and it's a revealer of the thoughts and very intents of our heart. That speaks to the power of God's Word. That speaks to the life-giving force that is the Word of God.

We say it all the time. We need to have a plan to be in the Word on a daily basis. If you're going to hear the voice of God through His Word on a daily, consistent basis, you need to have a time, you need to have a place, and you need to have a plan. You need to have a time, and that may vary from even day to day. It's hard at times, isn't it? Especially if you're a young mom or you're a busy dad or you're a single person with a busy schedule, it's hard sometimes. If you want this Word that is living and powerful and sharper than anything in your life, if you want the benefit of that Word in your life, then that's what you and I have to do. We have to discipline ourselves with a time, a place, and a plan. That's what God would have us see here.

Peter is totally unaware of what it was that Jesus wanted him to learn at this moment. He failed to see his own weakness. Here's what A.W. Pink said: Peter knew he really loved the Lord, but how little he knew about himself. How little he knew about himself. Listen to what J.C. Ryle said: We never know how far we might fall if we were tempted. We fancy sometimes, like Peter, that there are some things that we could not possibly do. We look pitifully upon others who fall into certain sins, and we please ourselves of the thought that at any rate, we should not have done so. We know nothing at all. The seeds of every sin are latent in our hearts, even when renewed, and they only need occasion or carelessness to put forth an abundant crop. Peter had no awareness of that.

We need self-awareness. We all need self-awareness, and that's what the Word does. The Word is a mirror that we look into. It shows us who we are. That's the blessing of God's truth in our life, isn't it? Help me understand and see myself for what I really am, who I really am, what my needs really are, and God will do that for us.

Thirdly, he saw himself as something he wasn't. He saw himself as something he wasn't. Look at verse 37. Peter said to him, Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Now, again, reminding us of what had happened just earlier in the evening, this discussion among themselves about who's the greatest of all, and in Peter's mind, by the way, he won that argument. Can you imagine? Peter figured that he won that one.

Remember Mark's gospel is Peter's gospel. Peter didn't write a gospel, but Mark really gives to us Peter's gospel, so he's almost like giving us Peter's personal experience. This is what it says in the 14th chapter in verse 29. Peter said to him, even though they all fall away, I will

not. Peter says, Lord, you know, I'm not surprised these other guys are going to fall away. I figured they might, but I'm not going to. That was his claim here, wasn't it? In Peter's mind, he was going to be the one out of all the disciples that was going to be faithful to the Lord. I don't know about these guys, but you can count on me. It's almost as if, again, in verse 37, there's this almost this tone of correcting Jesus, you know. Lord, you might be wrong on this one, because I can handle this. I'm going to be there for you. I'll come through.

That leads us to the fourth thing. He failed to depend on the Lord. He failed to depend on the Lord. The attitude that we've seen to this point in each of those previous points culminates in this one. It becomes very apparent when we leave the upper room and we go to the Garden of Gethsemane. He failed to depend on the Lord. In Luke 22, when Luke records the experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, what happens? Jesus says to the men, now you guys stay here. He then breaks off with the smaller group: Peter, James, and John. They go a little farther. Jesus says, I'm going to go off even farther. You men stay here, and you pray. You pray for me. You pray for yourself, but you pray. And remember, three times Jesus comes back, and they're not praying. They're sleeping. We all know the importance of a quiet time, and we all know that a quiet time sometimes can become very quiet, and that's exactly what happened here, right?

There is a lot going on here that we can learn from in our walk with God. This sense of daily dependence on the Word, this sense of daily dependence on the Holy Spirit, this sense of understanding who we are before God, asking God to reveal Himself and to reveal ourselves so that we can understand what our needs are before Him, the encouragement and accountability of other believers. You know, there's a dynamic. We say this all the time, but there's a dynamic that the Lord has put in place when we gather as the people of God, and when we miss that, we're missing a vital part of our walk with God, because a vital part of our walk with God is personal relationship and accountability and interaction and encouragement. That's just vital to our spiritual life.

Look at verse 38. Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times. That statement in verse 38, will you lay down your life for me? Does that sound familiar? Will you lay down your life? Yes, it

should sound familiar, because it takes us right back to John 10. In John 10, remember the good shepherd, Jesus said that He would lay down His life. Peter now is laying claim that he's going to lay down his life for Jesus. The irony, as I said, of it all, that Jesus now is reminding him, truly, truly. This is important. Get this. Instead of dying for me, Peter, you're going to deny me. What a word for Peter to receive, and everybody else heard it as well.

Now, here's the thing. This isn't the end of the story, so let's look at this last point. What about the way back? What about the way back? And we're going to wait until chapter 21 to see this fully developed, because John will give us a beautiful summary of this, but here is the way back, at least in a form that we get in these verses. And the first part of it is Jesus' promise to Peter. Look again at verse 36. I don't know what Peter heard in that moment, probably didn't hear a lot, but I am almost positive that as he reflected back on this conversation later, that word "afterward" is one he hung onto with all of his might, because that signifies something very important.

It can mean two things. One of two things, but I think it means both. I think it means that Peter will follow Jesus to glory. He will. We're going to see that in the 14th chapter. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go, I'm going to come back and get you and bring you with me, right? That's the promise of the 14th chapter, so a great assurance. Failure need not be fatal, and it doesn't have to be final. As hard as it was for Peter to work through the denial that he offered up of our Lord three times, there was a way back, and there's that promise.

Then I think there's also the sense of just the promise to follow Jesus in service. He's going to follow Jesus to glory, yes. You'll follow me afterward to glory. Yes, you will, but you'll also follow me in service. Peter is going to dominate the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts. He's going to step into the forefront of leading the early church. He certainly did that as well.

But what about us? Let's just wrap up with what this says to us. What's Jesus' promise to us? Well, again, I think it's twofold. First, it's the promise of eternal life to all who will believe. That's been the theme of John's gospel, that he's writing these things that we might believe, that we would see ourselves as being sinners. And what does sin do? Sin separates us from God. So, we're born into this world in a spiritual condition that is spiritual death, and we have no relationship with God. God created us to be in a relationship with Him, but sin has broken

that. And so, what we need is to understand that we are sinners. We need to understand the impact of sin in our relationship with God, that it severs that, it breaks that.

And then we need to understand that what Jesus did was to restore that. What Jesus did was to make it possible for us to be in this relationship with Him through His death on the cross. And if we believe that Jesus died for our sins, then He gives us the gift of eternal life. That's a part of this promise.

Then I think secondly, just as with Peter, it's a promise of restoration to all who repent, right? There is always a way back. There is always a way back. If we have a broken and contrite heart, there's a way back. If we keep short accounts with God, there's always a way back. We keep short accounts with each other, and there's a way back. That's the principle that God puts before us here.

So, what do we take away? Don't overestimate your ability. That's what Peter did. Don't underestimate the enemy. Peter did. And don't overlook your need. Ask ourselves, where am I relying on my own strength? Where am I saying I can handle this? I've got it. To Him who thinks He stands, take heed lest He fall.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank You for Your grace. We thank You for Your mercy, Your kindness to us. Father, we thank You for the lessons from Scripture that speak so clearly to our own life and our own condition. We're thankful for the work that Jesus has done to make it possible for us to be in a relationship with You. Thank You, Father, for the promise that if we confess our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Father, I pray that You will impress upon everyone here in this room and everyone listening that there is always a way back with You. There is always the afterward if our heart is repentant and broken and contrite before You. If we acknowledge our need of You, we thank You for that. We thank You for Your grace and Your mercy, Your kindness to us. In Jesus' name, amen.