

Intro:

Men are falling at an alarming rate these days. Maybe it's because we have such an extensive media, and we hear more about it. It seems that hardly a week goes by that we don't hear the tragic accounts. Church leaders are falling. Televangelists are falling. So are politicians. Every day, the story is repeated where husbands and fathers, and wives and mothers abandon the commitments they've made to God and to those they once professed to love.

J. K. Gressett said, "God prepares great men for great tasks by great trials." (from The Man in the Mirror, 235) But sadly, not all individuals pass the trials. Some fall. In fact, at some time or another in our Christian lives, we'll all blow it.

Q: What happens when a person falls?

This morning, as we turn in our Bibles to John 13, the Word of God addresses the subject, "When Servants Fall." We've come to the final message in our series, "Called to Be Servants." We've learned that Jesus calls us to follow in His steps as servants. As Christians, it's our privilege and responsibility to serve God, and to serve one another.

But listen. Servants aren't supermen with bullet proof vests. Servants aren't heroes. Sometimes servants blow it. Sometimes servants fall.

Illust:

Q: What happens when a servant falls? What goes wrong? And can a fallen servant be restored? Those are tough questions to ask, let alone to answer. Yet the Scriptures give us relevant guidance and help.

READ: John 13:36-38

Proposition: John 13:36-38 gives us needed insight into what happens when servants fall. Let's notice 2 things from our text.

I. The Incident

- A. Peter's Question (36a)
- B. Jesus' Answer (36b)
- C. Peter's Question (37)
- D. Jesus' Answer (38)

II. The Implications

- A. Be comforted.
 - 1. Jesus loves us in spite of who we are.
 - 2. Jesus sees not only what we are, but what we will become.
- B. Be careful.
 - 1. Beware of the attitude, "It can't happen to me."
 - 2. We have a responsibility to those who fall.
 - 3. There's only One who can keep us from falling.

Please allow me to remind you of the Context (31-33). Jesus is with His disciples in the Upper Room. As we mentioned last week, it was a serious moment. Judas was gone (31). The betrayer had already set in motion his wicked scheme. Furthermore, Jesus would soon be gone (33). He was going to give His life for His own. Secondly, we observed that it was a significant moment. It was a moment of glory. Jesus announced that the Son was going to glorify God the Father (31). What's more, God the Father was going to glorify the Son (32).

Now notice the incident...

I. The Incident

Peter spoke up. Now I remind you that dear Peter had developed quite a reputation for "opening his mouth and inserting his foot." True, he had managed to keep silent since the Lord gently reprimanded his outburst earlier in the evening (9). But when he heard the announcement that Jesus had just made, he couldn't contain himself. So he blurted out a question in v 36.

That question led to perhaps the most devastating experience of Peter's life.

A. Peter's Question (36a)

V 36 "Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, where goest thou?"

Jesus words in v 33 are ringing in Peter's ears, "I'm leaving. And you can't come with me." So he asked Jesus, "Lord, where are you going?"

I want you to see something. Peter was a selective hearer. So are we. Jesus just gave His followers a hallmark command in vv 34-35. He told them to love each other, just as He loved them. But Peter didn't want to talk about that. He wanted to talk about v 33, about "eschatology." He wanted to get Jesus' prophetic timetable right. "Lord, you said you're leaving. Where are you going?"

To Peter's credit, don't miss this. Peter couldn't stand the thought of being separated from Jesus. He loved Jesus. He, like the other disciples, had left all to follow Jesus. To him, life without Jesus would not be life.

Q: Is that true of you? Can it be said of you that life without Jesus would not be life? Where does "being with Jesus" fit on the list of your values? Is being with Jesus a priority to you? Right there's the bottom line to why we struggle with being consistent in church attendance, and in having our personal, daily Bible study time.

B. Jesus' Answer (36b)

V 36 "Where I go thou canst not follow Me now..."

That was startling news to Peter (and to the rest). Think about what Jesus said, "You CAN'T follow Me now." How could that be? For the past 3 years, Peter had heard Jesus compel people to follow Him.

He heard Jesus say to him on the day He called him, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Mt 4:19) He heard Jesus say, "My sheep hear my voice, and follow Me" (John 10:27). Once after Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to be killed, he heard Jesus say, "Get behind me Satan...", and then, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Mt

16:23-24). He heard Jesus tell a rich, young ruler, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me." (Mt 19:21).

All along Jesus had commanded people, "Follow Me." But now, His loving eyes penetrated Peter's soul, and He said, "Peter, you are not able to follow Me now."

Q: Do you know why not?

A: Where Jesus was going, He had to go alone. Where was He going? He was going to the Cross.

Illust:

C. Peter's Question (37)

V 37 "Peter said unto him, Lord why cannot I follow thee now?"

Peter was perfectly sincere. His question was not pious or brash or disrespectful. He wanted to be with Jesus.

Q: How can you tell what kind of person you really are?

Illust: Last week I heard Warren Wiersbe suggest 3 tests of character. Ask yourself 3 questions: One, what makes you laugh? Two, what makes you cry? (isn't it amazing how we'll ball our eyes out watching reruns of Lassie, but won't be phased when missionaries come and report that millions are dying who have never heard the gospel?) Three, how do you react when there is a crisis?

Take a close look at what Peter did in v 37. He asked a legitimate question. But he didn't wait for an answer! He interjected his own answer, his own solution.

V 37 "I will lay down my life for thy sake."

Those words sound familiar, don't they? They are nearly identical to the claim Jesus made in Jn 10:11, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep."

We're often do the same thing Peter did. We try to bring to God our problems AND our solutions. We need to learn to practice the biblical mandate, "Be STILL and know that I am God." We don't have to understand everything. We're called to walk by faith. I remind you of the quote we pondered Wednesday evening (taken from Willard Stull's prayer letter), "Jesus didn't die to solve our problems. He died to make us holy."

Peter's problem (as G. Campbell Morgan pointed out) was that he did not know himself. He did not understand the weakness of his nature.

But Jesus knew. Jesus knew Peter. Jesus knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself.

Illust:

D. Jesus' Answer (38)

V 38 "Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down...?"

The apostle John recorded Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial. Peter was his former fishing buddy, and good friend. John's not the only one to include this account. So does Matthew, and Mark, and Luke. All 4 gospel writers convey the sad prediction of Peter's denial.

Those were staggering words, "Peter will you really lay down your life for me? Will you?" It's ironic that Jesus knew the exact opposite was going to happen. It was not Peter, but He Himself who would lay down His life.

"Ah Peter, I tell you the truth, the dawn will not break until you have denied me three times." That word "deny" must have felt like a sledge hammer in Peter's stomach. "Me, deny You Lord?!"

That prediction was shocking, and not just for Peter. Just imagine what the other 10 apostles must have thought. After all Peter was their spokesman, their pacesetter. If brave Peter was going to deny the Lord, what hope was there for the rest of them?

John doesn't tell us what Peter said in response to Jesus' sobering prediction of his denial. In fact, by reading John's gospel, you get the idea that Peter went into shock. Typically outspoken Peter doesn't say another word until ch 18!

In Matthew's gospel, Matthew records that the subject came up again, after the band left the upper room, and went to the Mount of Olives. There Jesus spoke to all 11, and said in Mt 26:31, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night." Guess who spoke up next? Peter!

Mt 26:33 "Though all men shall be offended...yet will I never be..."

Mt 26:34 "Verily I say...before the cock crows, thou shalt deny Me thrice."

Peter could not be silent...

Mt 26:35 "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." (double negative, "I will certainly not deny Thee." Mark says Peter spoke "vehemently," 14:31)

Peter was not alone in his self-defense.

Mt 26:35 "Likewise also said all the disciples."

I don't have to tell you that it happened just as Jesus predicted (see: Jn 18:15ff). Three times Peter denied his Lord. Blatantly, and even dogmatically, the words came out of his lips, "I don't know the man!" (Mt 26:74) And then the cock crowed.

Peter fell.

Tran: What's the point? Why did God preserve this incident?

II. The Implications

I see at least 2 great implications for us.

A. Be comforted.

There's an unfortunate chapter break between ch 13 & 14. After his sobering announcement to Peter in 13:38, notice the very next verse. "Let not your heart be

troubled." The "you" is plural. Jesus knew His disciples hearts were breaking. So He gave to them a message of hope. He told them, "Yes, I'm leaving," and "No, you can't follow Me now." "But listen, the reason I am leaving is to go prepare a place for you!" (14:2). Look at 14:3, "If I go...I will come again and receive you, that where I am, there you may be also."

"Peter, I know you want to be with Me. That's a good desire. And Peter, you will be with Me. You all will be with Me, in a place much better than this!"

What a message of hope!

There are 2 lessons from this incident that offer us great comfort.

1. Jesus loves us in spite of who we are.

Oh, friend, ponder this amazing truth. Jesus loves us in spite of who we are. We don't merit His kindness. We don't earn His favor.

Jesus knew Peter and all of his glaring flaws and faults. He knew about his impulsiveness. He knew about his instability. As Barclay said, "He knew how he had a habit of speaking with his heart before he had thought with his head." (151) He knew what Peter was going to do to him. He knew Peter would go so far as to curse the Name of God in his denial of his Lord. Jesus knew all that.

Yet still He loved him.

Hymn: #68 "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

But wait. The fact that Jesus loves us in spite of who we are is no excuse to remain the way we are! In fact, a second lesson of hope emerges from this story.

2. Jesus sees not only what we are, but what we will become.

I want you to take another look at v 36.

V 36 "...but THOU SHALT FOLLOW ME AFTERWARDS."

See that? Jesus saw beyond Peter's failure. "You WILL follow Me."

Listen. There's not a one of us that won't fail in our Christian walk from time to time. That's not an excuse, nor a reason to abuse God's grace. But it's a fact of living in a fallen world.

Praise God for this. When we fall, there's hope! Jesus sees not only what we are, but what we will become.

Jesus knew that Peter would fall. But He also knew that after He had sharpened and refined his life, the day would come when Peter would follow his Lord. He would even die a martyr's death for his Lord.

Illust:

B. Be careful.

The story of what happened to Peter says to us loud and clear, "Be careful! Take note! Pay attention!" 3 exhortations...

1. Beware of the attitude, "It can't happen to me."

Fill in the blank, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he _____." (fall)

Illust:

2. *We have a responsibility to those who fall.*

We have a responsibility. Gal 6:1 "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (TEV "My brothers, if someone is caught in any kind of wrongdoing, those of you who are spiritual should set him right...")

And in light of Jesus' example with Peter, I think we can add this. We have a responsibility to those who are ABOUT TO fall. Jesus, foreseeing what was coming, warned Peter ahead of time.

Now I know we are not omniscient. We don't have a crystal ball. But listen. You don't need to have a crystal ball to be able to see where a road's going to take you.

This is not easy to say. I'm concerned for some here today. I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. But I see some who are on the verge of self-destructing. How do I know? Because the Bible says that what we sow we reap. If you sow to the flesh you reap destruction. Some of you are living with wrong values. Some of you have made some wrong choices. I plead with you.

Illust:

Jesus told Peter he was going to fall before he ever did it. He told him something else, as recorded in Luke's parallel account. Lk 22:32, "But I have prayed for you...and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Before Peter fell, Jesus told him that his fall did NOT mean that he was going to be put on the shelf. He wasn't through with him. "After you are 'converted' (=turned about) Peter, I've got a ministry for you."

Jn 13:36 "But thou SHALT FOLLOW ME AFTERWARDS"

3. *There's only One who can keep us from falling.*

I must speak from the heart. I am concerned for myself and my family. We are living in a day when many "good" men are falling. It's frightening. But there is one benediction that has been a great encouragement to me.

Jude 24-25 "Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling..."