**Livin’ the Life**

**Peter’s Failure and Jesus’ Faithfulness**

**John 13:31-38**

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We are in our sermon series in the Gospel of John, Livin’ the Life, looking at the life of Jesus and the life he promises. We are finishing up John 13 in 13:36-38, looking at Peter’s Failure and Jesus’ Faithfulness. Chapters 13 -17, tell us what Jesus did, said and prayed on the night before his death he sought to prepare his disciples for life after his earthly ministry. So let’s listen as John 13:36-38 is read.

Jesus is preparing his disciples to take up his mission. The focus of their lives will shift from fulfilling the mission alongside Jesus physically to fulfilling the mission in the power of the Spirit.

**Jesus’ Faithfulness (36)**

Last week we saw Jesus telling his disciples that after he leaves, the world will know they are his disciples by loving one another as he has loved them (31-35). Today we pick up that conversation with Peter backtracking by asking where Jesus is going. Jesus informs him that where he is going the disciples cannot follow now but will afterward (36), referring to his sacrificial death, his resurrection and exaltation to the Father. This tells us two truths, first is that the work of redemption, Jesus going to the cross to pay for the sins of humanity can only be done by Jesus alone. Everything he taught, every miracle he did, and everything he promised was contingent upon the cross. The cross will give them the power of Jesus to fulfill the mission he gave them. Secondly, it is a promise that Peter will follow afterwards, after the cross. Jesus is promising Peter and the rest of the disciples, that after his exaltation, when Jesus returns to the Father, they will follow him and ultimately be with him in heaven (Jn 14:1-7; see also Phil 1:21-24). This means that the cross does not just secure our salvation but also secures our eternal destination (1 Pet 1:3-5). The work of the cross does not just reconcile you to God when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, the work of the cross secures your eternal destiny also. The work of the cross sustains your faith into all! How can Jesus make this promise? Because the God the Son has the ability to back up that promise. What assurance.

**Peter’ Failure (37-38)**

Peter boasts that he will follow Jesus to the death, I will lay down my life for you (37). But Jesus, who knows Peter better than Peter himself responds, really Peter? Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times (37-38). I think Peter means it. Peter loved Jesus, he jumped out of a boat and walked on water to get to Jesus. He recognized Jesus had the words of eternal life, and the next day he will raise his sword against those who come to arrest Jesus and cut off an ear. But Peter did not understand his own frailties. He had too much confidence in his own abilities and too little respect for his own sinfulness. We are all like Peter in that way. We are often overconfident in our ability to follow Jesus and underestimate our sinful tendencies. Your confidence in being faithful to Jesus is not found in your abilities and power but God’s ability and power to keep you. Jesus tells Peter that Peter will deny him but because he was one of Jesus’ own (13:1), Jesus will restore him. Jesus tells him that you lack the resources to do what you so confidently boast you will do. You will deny me not one, not twice, but three times by morning. God knows, is not surprised, not caught off guard by your sin.

We see this played out in John 18. Jesus has been arrested, jailed, and is being questioned. All of disciples abandoned Jesus when he was arrested but Peter and John follow Jesus in the background, watching to see what is happening. A servant girl recognizes Peter and asks about him being one of Jesus’ disciples but Peter denies it (18:15-18). Then Peter is standing around a fire with some soldiers and other servants keeping warm while Jesus’ questioning continues. Some of them ask Peter if he is one of Jesus’ disciples but Peter denied Jesus for a second time (18:25). Then another servant, who was a relative of the guy whose ear Peter cut off, asks Peter if he was in the garden with Jesus when Jesus was arrested and Peter denied Jesus a third time. Immediately the rooster crowed (18:26-27). The gospels are clear that the disciples are ordinary men who experienced the spiritual ups and downs of life with Jesus like the rest of us. All of us have denied Jesus, maybe even this week. There is an increasing social cost to following Jesus. Sometimes we fear what others think (Prov 29:25).

But Peter’s sin and failure does not define him nor have the last word in his life. The third time Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection, Jesus is on the beach and when Peter recognizes him, he throws his clothing on and jumps in the water and swims a hundred yards to shore (21:7-8). When we fail Jesus, the best thing to do is to run to Jesus, not away. When all the disciples are on shore, Jesus makes them breakfast. We have no record of Jesus addressing Peter’s sin, no rebuke, no confrontation. But this time, the third time Jesus is with his disciples, he addresses Peter. After the meal Jesus asked Peter if he loves him, not once, not twice, but three times. Jesus is always the initiator in our relationship, whether you feel it or not, recognize it or not, your response to Jesus is a response to his prior work of grace in your life. All your returning, repenting and turning to Jesus is because he initiated it. And Jesus’ last words to Peter in this account, is follow me (19). You cannot follow me now but afterwards you will (36). Though Peter failed Jesus, Jesus did not fail Peter. Jesus is faithful to his promise and Peter follows Jesus. Peter was restored because he was one of Jesus’ own (13:1, 10). Your greatest failures in life are the opportunities for the greatest testimonies, the greatest trophies of God’s grace. The gospel came you, because it is moving toward someone else.

Jesus did not fail Peter; Peter failed Jesus. Peter promised to die with Jesus but Jesus died for Peter, for his failure, for his sin, so in the end, he could and would follow Jesus to his death. Jesus made these statements to Peter in the context of the Passover Meal because it is at the heart of the New Covenant which Jesus established by his death on the cross. Jesus is the Passover Lamb who died for our sin - past, present, and future. His death on the cross defeats the penalty of sin in your life, the power of sin in your life, and ultimately, the presence of sin in your life. That is God’s work, not your work. Our work does not work. Peter’s failure and restoration reminds us that sin does not have the last word in our lives. Grace always triumphs over sin in the lives of Jesus’ own. We celebrate this amazing grace at the Lord’s table today. Jesus’ sacrificial death as the lamb of God who takes away the sons of the world and his resurrection is what overcomes the penalty of sin in your life, the power of sin in your life, and ultimately the presence of sin in your life. If you have not put your faith in Jesus yet, run to Jesus today by coming and partaking and believing. He is pursuing you, this message is evidence of his pursuit. If you have sinned and failed Jesus miserably this week, run to Jesus. His arms are the only ones that ultimately and eternally satisfy.

Life Group Questions:

1. What does Jesus mean by you cannot not follow me not but afterwards you will?
2. What are the two promises that are in this verse that David mentioned?
3. How do those promises encourage you today?
4. How can Jesus promise to secure our eternal destiny?
5. How does this promise encourage our faith and obedience?
6. Why do you think Jesus waited until the third appearance to the disciples before he restored Peter?
7. Have you ever denied Christ? Are you willing to share that with us?
8. How does Peter’s restoration encourage you in your faith today?