



I once was working on a video project for a school grad, and I was about 100 hours into this project when my worst nightmare came to fruition...suddenly my computer crashed and I lost over 85% of my work. Have you ever felt sick to the stomach and it had nothing to do with what you just ate? I literally screamed when this occurred, I remember my wife and kids came running down to my office probably believing I had just lost a finger or something, and all I could do was ask them to leave; I didn't want them to see a grown man cry!

Have you ever given a tremendous amount of time to something or someone, where you gave of yourself, I mean you poured everything you had into it, it became "your baby" or "your project" only to have a huge setback? Just when you thought everything was going according to schedule you find out the person or the outcome was nothing what you had envisioned? When I think along these lines, the Titanic comes to mind, or I'm sure BP oil would understand what I'm talking about this morning, especially when it comes towards oil rigs on the ocean?

As a parent you may encounter this with the expectations of your children, you try to mold them, shape them, give them a foundation from which they can work with and than suddenly out of the blue decisions are made, choices are decided and your left wondering what happened? Well if you would like any consolation, Jesus faced some of the very same setbacks, especially with those closest to him.

We have been in a series dealing with Christ's closest companions as He walked this planet, specifically honing in on Simon bar-Jonah, or as you may know him, Peter. If there was hopes set high for anyone, trust me Jesus had raised the bar for Peter. Right from the moment they met, when Jesus gave him his new name, it initiated a whole new onslaught of expectations in the transformation of Peter's life. How many people do you know where Jesus speaks to them directly saying, ***"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."*** Do you think there were any expectations connected to these words?

And yet as we observe Peter's life with Jesus, one can't help but notice that Jesus was experiencing a few setbacks along the way to this high and lofty goal. Wasn't it just last week we saw Peter questioning Christ's fishing capabilities, only to be proven wrong once again? And yet you can't argue Peter also demonstrated moments of hope and great aspirations throughout his experiences with Jesus.

Lets face it, it was only Peter out of all Jesus' followers who even attempted to follow Christ on testing out his water walking capabilities, but even here it wouldn't be but a few moments later Peter would be crying out ***"Lord save me"***, as he sank like a lead weight, to which Jesus sadly responds, ***"You of little faith, why did you doubt."***

This lack of faith theme would resurface on a number of occasions. On another water adventure when the disciples were in their boat and in the middle of a storm, again they would hear these very similar words, ***"How is it that you have no faith?"*** Here Jesus was sleeping when a storm arose, and this apparently bothered the disciples.

Just look at the question they ask Him, ***“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*** Mark 4:38. Now you would think, after all they had seen to that point in their experiences with Christ they would have known better!

They don't ask him about his ability to stop the storm, or his knowledge about the storm... *“Uh....Jesus do you see what were seeing?”* no they simply question His character, ***“Do you not care...”***

Now one would assume that time might solve these little setbacks that the more Jesus was with these guys, the better the odds of them finally getting it. They had seen Him heal countless sicknesses, healed a leper with just a touch, saw demons scatter at His mere words, let's face it, His resume is looking pretty good.

But alas when the disciples were with Jesus for nearly two years, with the cross only six months away, with countless signs having already been demonstrated by Christ, clearly pointing towards who He was, you would think by now they would understand Christ's true nature, yet once again Jesus was still forced to ask them, after all this time, ***“Do you still not understand?”*** (Mark 8:21)

In fact Jesus on another occasion asks them point blank ***“Who do you say I am?”*** And it was in response to this question we are introduced to one of Peter's finest moments, where he truly shone. I can only imagine the thrill Jesus experienced at that moment when he heard from the lips of his closest friend, ***“...You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”*** In spite of Peter's strong Jewish monotheism, Peter, against all his upbringing is willing to ascribe divinity to Jesus. To say he is God's Son was to suggest that He is God. It was an incredible leap of faith.

Jesus must have been thrilled, Peter was finally getting it, and from that confession Jesus began to clearly lay out his own personal mission as Messiah, that it would lead to Jerusalem, that He would enter as a King as the Palm leaves would be laid out at his triumphant procession, but... and a big “but” it was, that He would also have to suffer at the hands of the leaders and the leading priests and the teachers of the religious law. In fact this journey of Christ's would lead him to death, even death on a cross. He would be killed...but he would be raised on the third day.

Upon hearing this...it happens, the exchange between Jesus and Peter takes a remarkable turn...for the worse! The high was quickly turned to a low; the expectations were smashed right before Jesus, I'm sure his stomach sank, because upon Peter hearing this forecast of Christ's life, even after that incredible confession of faith, Peter takes Jesus aside and tries to correct God. ***“Peter took Him aside and corrected him. ‘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, and not from God’s.’”*** Matt 16:13-23

Now before were too hard on Peter, let's not forget none of the disciples got it, it was a group letdown, there were to be no “group hugs” at this moment. You see they all were products of the popular teachings of their time which said that the Christ would not

suffer. In fact all those OT prophecies concerning the “**suffering servant of the Lord**” were misinterpreted in the minds of the religious elite of their day, like the Pharisees, that they were the “Lord’s suffering servants” not the Messiah!

Nobody in Jewish circles could have envisioned that the promised One, the coming Messiah was to suffer; they were the one’s suffering under the Roman occupation, the Messiah was the one to deliver them from their suffering, so it really didn’t make sense that he would suffer unless he wasn’t victorious, unless he was a “failure”, and that option seemed incomprehensible!

How could the Messiah ever possibly experience suffering? It defiled all human logic, thus Peter’s harsh words, “**Heaven forbid Lord.” He said.” This will never happen to you!**” and at that moment Peter reflected Satan’s desires and aspirations, he had become his spokesman, and reflected Satan’s great hope, that Jesus would not go to the cross, that he wouldn’t suffer...for the sins of the world. It was a major letdown for Christ at the hands of His friend Peter.

Add this moment to the countless others and you might be able to begin to grasp the frustration Jesus must have felt. Who could forget the Garden of Gethsemane where Peter along with James and John would once again let their friend down because they couldn’t even stay up with him when Jesus needed them most. “**Then He returned and found the disciples asleep. Notice who** Jesus picks on first by the way... “**Simon!**” **he said to Peter. “Are you asleep? Couldn’t you stay awake and watch with me even one hour? Keep alert and pray.”**

If this wasn’t bad enough we are told this whole process repeats itself, again Jesus leaves to pray, and again he returns only to find them sleeping. In fact when the soldiers arrive on the scene shortly after this, it is Jesus who alerts them all to their arrival...talk about pathetic; especially since we are told it was the third time Jesus returned to find them sleeping. Talk about a “let down.” Had this been the military at that time this would be an offense punishable by death – being asleep at your post. Wasn’t it earlier where Peter had sworn to Jesus he would follow Jesus to prison and even to death itself, now he couldn’t find it in himself to stay awake to keep watch for his agonizing friend. Jesus was being so transparent in the garden! His fears were blatantly made public, he prayed loud enough to be heard and recorded, and he begged his community of friends to pray with him...and they choose to sleep!

We are told by the gospel writer Mark that Peter and the others did not know what to say, they were simply speechless, a state in which I myself have been many times. What more can be said after another letdown, a failure, what further excuse can be made, sometimes silence is the only appropriate response in light of failure!

It would be in the excitement that follows when 200 men show up that Peter reaches for a sword and takes off the ear of one individual, only to once again be told by Jesus, no, Peter...wrong again...put the sword away...you just don’t get it. Talk about failed expectations, but here’s something I want you to consider as well this morning...Jesus wasn’t the only one being let down!

Think about this...Jesus had profoundly failed to meet Peter's expectations! Now not because there was anything wrong with Jesus, but after three years together, Peter still failed to understand what Jesus meant when He called himself the Messiah. Everything Peter believed Jesus to be had vanished like the morning mist, because in the back of his mind he had been hoping, like the others, for a throne in Jerusalem.

Had not the transfiguration confirmed this, was it simply a hallucination? One author concludes, *"Peter's concept of the Messiah could be summed up this way: The Messiah will never submit, surrender or serve."* And yet Jesus had done all three in a matter of a few hours, and Peter and the others were like deer in a headlight, bewildered, confused, terrified, and I'm sure even angry!

And then they came...three in a row...three strikes...three denials...***"I do not know the man."*** Denials that would break Peter in the best sense of the word and leave Peter feeling utterly alone! It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote, *"Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy...he who is alone with his sins is utterly alone."*

Peter's despair would go deep, in fact the despair that settles over his heart will be so complete that even when he sees the empty tomb and the grave clothes lying in their folds, Peter will walk away, ***"wondering what had happened"*** (Luke 24:12) At this point his despair would not allow him to trust Christ's own words that he would arise on the third day.

We are told by only Luke's account that upon the third denial Jesus turned and looked at Simon across the courtyard. As their eyes met, Peter remembered Jesus' prediction that he would deny him. It was, I believe, this look that broke Peter's heart. Luke's uses a specific word for Jesus' glance, the same word John used to describe their very first encounter. It meant to see with your mind, to understand.

I do not believe the look was one of disdain or condemnation. I believe the only look that could have broken the heart of Peter as it did, was one of love and forgiveness. Let's face it, Jesus knew who he was dealing with after their very first encounter, Jesus knew all there was to know about Simon bar-Jonah, and that is why he gave him a new name, a new title a new life. And right now, seeing Peter at his worst, Jesus is willing to turn and go to the cross for Peter, just as He did for you and me.

After all, He sees us just the same way as he first saw Peter. He gazes at us with that understanding stare and sees all our potential, all our frailties, all our faults, and yet He is willing, even while we were still sinners, to take up that cross for us.

You know we hear it all the time, we sing about it constantly ...Gods forgiveness, and how He freely gives it, and as wonderful as that is, often that information alone is not enough to enable us to grow in the experience of God's liberating forgiveness. We

struggle, not so much with understanding the message of forgiveness, but with living in the reality of it. Too many of us live with our sins utterly alone, we let sin dictate our state of mind, our attitude, our ambitions, and we live defeated lives...fear filled lives!

Its why as humans we are called to confess our sins, and on an ongoing basis to continue to examine our lives. On certain Sundays like today, we do this through the Lord's table – communion. We begin by placing ourselves into the care of the Holy Spirit and asking for help...asking Him to search our lives, to look for those things that may be hindering our progress in this relationship, to put a mark on that spot.

Clifton Fadiman tells a great story about Charles Steinmetz, a genius of an electrical engineer for General Electric in the early part of the twentieth century. On one occasion after his retirement, when the other engineers around GE were baffled by the breakdown of a complex of machines, they finally asked Steinmetz to come back to see if he could pinpoint the problem. Steinmetz spent several minutes walking around the machines, then took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and made a cross mark on one particular piece of one particular machine.

To their amazement, when the engineers disassembled that part of the machine, it turned out to be the precise location of the breakdown. A few days later, the engineers received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000 – a staggering sum in those days. This seemed exorbitant, so they returned it to him with a request that he itemize it. After a few more days they received a second, itemized bill: Making one cross mark \$1.00. Knowing where to put it, \$9,999.00

The hard part of self examination is knowing where to place the mark! We need to prepare by asking God to guide us, then we need time for self-examination...taking the time to reflect on our lives, our words, our deeds, and even acknowledging if we have sinned...in other words like Peter taking the responsibility for what we have done, asking the Holy Spirit to put the X where required!

Human behavior is a complex thing, but confession and self-examination allows us to see that somewhere in the mix were choices, and those choices were made by us, and it does not need to be excused or explained, the choices needs to be forgiven; dealt with and cleared!

The key in all this is that we cannot let sin remain and we cannot allow ourselves to be defeated by that which Jesus Christ already dealt with! We must move on!

Peter moved on, it wasn't easy, he was heart broken, but as we know God is about mending the broken hearted, if we are willing to be truthful, honest and intentional. We can't simply be about damage control, we need to be broken, and we need to at times repent, call out to God for forgiveness and move forward in God's grace.

There is a true story of a Duke named Raynald III, who lived during the fourteenth century. His sad life illustrates how giving in to our desires, our sins, ignoring the need of confession and overlooking our need to change, can lead us into our own constructed

prisons. Those very things we assume give us pleasure and we equate with freedom, actually robs us of freedom and true joy.

Raynald III had lived a life of indulgence and was extremely overweight. In fact, he was commonly called by his Latin nickname, Crassus, which means “fat.” After a violent quarrel, Raynald’s younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead he built a room around him in the Nieuwkerk Castle and promised him he would regain his freedom as soon as he was able to leave the room.

This wouldn’t have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size, and none was locked or barred. The problem was Raynald’s size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother, and each day he sent him a variety of delicious foods. Instead of dieting his way to freedom, Raynald grew bigger. He stayed in the room for ten years, till his brother died in battle. But by then his health was so ruined that he died within a year – a prisoner of his own appetite.

How many of us are prisoners to our own appetites or desires whatever those may entail? These temptations promise freedom, possibly from pain, from reality, from your circumstances, and I’m sure at times, for awhile, they do momentarily make you feel good, but the sad truth is with every bite...you only become more of a prisoner. Don’t indulge in a life of sin friends, a life that says whatever feels good – do it! Your freedom is false...you are a slave to sin – and Jesus Christ desires to set you free.

What did the disciple John say? (John 8:36) **“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** For Peter the progression from simple fisherman to struggling disciple to first confessor, from despairing denier to fearless leader, from ambitious go-getter to humble servant would take a lifetime. Yes...it is miraculous that Jesus chose someone like Peter, an individual each one of us can identify with in one way or another, a person who teaches us more through his weaknesses than his strengths.

Peter through his life humbly turns the title “Rock” which does eventually become his true name, into an invitation... for in his eyes we are all supposed to be “living stones.”

As Peter later would write in one of his letters, found in 1 Peter 2:4-6 **“As you come to Him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says, ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him, will never be put to shame.’”**

Jesus yearns for a relationship with you and me as he had with Peter and His first followers. A relationship that was yes, based on faith, that takes an ability to step out at times and like walking on water ignore the realities we observe around us and trust the Creator of all to come through. To recognize that this life of ours is not all there is to our existence, that another dimension exists, another reality exists, in fact a more important one...a spiritual existence.

An existence that uses a whole new standard of measurement, where we are not simply judged by our every action, that the basis of this reality is upon the love and mercy of a God who has stepped into our existence so that we could have the opportunity to live in His.

As we now come to the Lord's Table, as we examine our lives...I invite you to pay attention...to listen to what the Holy Spirit may ask of you?

And than I invite you to step out in faith...in obedience...and walk in a life that yes involves confession, but leads to transformation...and hope in Jesus Christ.

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