

Presumptuous Failures of Peter

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[Matt 26:31-35] Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' 32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." 33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." 34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples.

May you and your family be safe and healthy as the COVID-19 pandemic has been harassing the entire world for over two years.

The above dialogue was the last one Lord Jesus and His disciples had just before they moved out to the Garden of Gethsemane at the end of their Passover dinner. Here, Jesus told the disciples to scatter and go to the designated location in Galilee while He would be arrested, suffer, and die; there they were to wait for Him after His resurrection. This was a very specific instruction to them. However, Peter neglected this instruction totally and boasted that he would never betray his Lord. Jesus then warned Peter that he would deny Him three times before the cock crows twice. Again, Peter ignored this warning from his Lord and confronted Him with an insistent expression of his determination and resolve to never betray his Lord. Peter's attitude affected other disciples. As we can read from the scriptures, Peter came to deny the Lord three times as He predicted and came to weep bitterly for his failures.

The reason why I characterize Peter's failures as 'presumptuous' is because he chose to forcibly move ahead with his determined plan of action despite the multiple, specific warnings from his Lord on how to avoid the failures. In God's eyes, Peter's failures resulted from his presumptuous attitude. The expression 'presumptuous sin' appears twice in the Bible. First, presumptuous sinners, who violate God's commandment willfully, were condemned in the Mosaic law:

[Numbers 15: 30-31] But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his [h]guilt shall be upon him.

The second instance is about King David, who took Bathsheba, the wife of a military man fighting for his country out in the front lines, and had him killed in a battle willfully. It was a willful, presumptuous sin before God. David must have known that he was condemned by God for this willful sin according to the Mosaic law. But he must have justified himself as not guilty because he was the king. After repenting of this sin, David prayed to God to help remove presumptuous sins from his life so that he could stand upright before God.

[Psalm 19:13] Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

So, what can we learn from Peter's failures in Passover night to gain wisdom for our souls? The core of the lesson here is that the Lord saw Peter's failures in advance, prayed that he not fail, and showed him clearly how to avoid the failures in multiple ways. Instead of following his own emotion and gut feelings about what he would do as his Lord and Master would be arrested, stand trial, and face crucifixion, if he had simply followed his Lord's instructions, he would not have failed so miserably.

The first clear instruction that Jesus gave to His disciples was to simply scatter as the prophecy had foretold regarding the very night's situation, which was to unfurl in a few hours. Scattering and going to Galilee was the thing to do, although Peter and John must have felt it was a shame to desert their Lord and Master. When Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, nine disciples ran away and scattered, but Peter and John maneuvered to enter the official residence of the high priest. And there Peter was recognized and confronted by two female servants and one man, whereupon he ended up denying knowing Jesus three times.

Secondly, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to a place of prayer within Gethsemane, where He prayed and told them to also pray so that they fall not into temptation. However, these three were sleeping while their Lord was praying three times in great agony. When they were supposed to be praying, they were sleeping, perhaps due to the heavy Passover dinner that evening. That was a major cause of Peter's failures.

Thirdly, Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest who was one of the arresting party. Had Jesus not healed Malchus' ear quickly, Peter could also have been arrested and crucified next to his Lord on Calvary the next day. Peter made this egregious error because he failed to understand the ultimate mission of his Lord Jesus. Instead, he was about to turn Jesus' mission into a military revolt against the authorities. And he simply could not accept the rightness of simply leaving the scene of the arrest and going to Galilee without putting up a fight of some sort using his limited intelligence and physical bravado.

Fourthly, when Peter denied knowing Lord Jesus, the cock crowed the first time. It seemed to cry out to Peter, "Leave, leave!" Yet, Peter did not perceive the warning coming from this animal when it was sounding an alarm cry to Peter to avoid denying the Lord another time. Peter ignored this sign and denied the Lord, this time roughly with a curse. Then the cock crowed the second time and Peter remembered what the Lord had told him about his failures before the cock crowed twice [Mark 14:72]. He went out and wept bitterly over his miserable failures [Matt 26:75].

After He rose from death, Lord Jesus showed empathy and mercy by restoring Peter in a private meeting. In our Christian journey, we can also commit similar presumptuous failures when we follow our self-confident, arrogant attitude instead of carefully discerning the guidance and instructions of wisdom from God. When our insistent bull-doggish plans go contrary to God's instructions and wisdom, we can also commit such presumptuous failures, which bring disappointments and heartaches to God instead of joy and honor.

Our God's mercy extends far beyond our failures, however. When our hearts are broken and bleeding because of our foolish failures, He binds our wounds and restores our souls. However, let us not blindly rely on His mercies. Instead, when we avoid following our instincts and arrogant plans that we know are contrary to God's thoughts and principles, we can certainly avoid making presumptuous failures and stand upright before Him, walking together with our Lord Jesus in joy and harmony. Amen.