

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(April 1, 2012)

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: BREATHLESS**

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

### **For Those Who Have Failed**

(Mark 14:43-72)

Study #30

#### **Introduction: A timely word...**

Before I met Kathy I had never read a book about marriage or male/female relationships. I've now read a number of them.

Before we had children, I'd never read a book about parenting, listened to radio programs about child-rearing, or paid much attention to the role of a father in the life of his children. I've paid lots of attention to those themes over the past twenty eight years.

I started reading Runner's World magazine when I began to run. I listen to a weekly gardening show because I like to get dirty growing vegetables. I watch videos of certain exercises because I want to improve my fitness.

I am interested in learning about the subjects that touch my life. Same for you, I would guess.

Every day each one of us is bombarded with an avalanche of information about a dizzying array of subjects: politics, economics, entertainment, sports, family, faith - you name it.

Much of this information overload is thrown into the "*Blah, blah, blah*" category because it is knowledge without a context. We don't need it, so we don't value it.

But we listen carefully to something that relates to our NOW.

If you are planning on a home remodel, you're probably going to want to learn as much as possible about how-to's, do-it-yourself tips, and things-to-avoid. The same will be true if you are planning a vacation, looking at a car repair, making a major purchase, or starting a new hobby.

With that thought in mind, what follows in our time in the Bible this morning is crucial to your NOW if you have ever wrestled with failure.

What do you do when you fail? Of course, there are lots of ways to fail, so let me be more specific.

- What do you do when your behavior has contradicted what you say you sincerely believe?
- What do you do when you have violated your conscience?
- What do you do when you have betrayed your faith in Jesus with ugly words or an impure act?
- What do you do when your commitment to Christ is called into question by the way you have lived?

Many of us who are here today have failed. In fact, failing is what has driven many of us to be here today. (It's a big club.)

So, I'll invite you to consider today's time in God's Word crucial truth for dealing with failure in the past and crucial equipment for the day in the future when you fail.

First, let's briefly review what we saw last Sunday.

*Review...*

Mark walked us through a scene in the Garden of Gethsemane where we saw Jesus' towering courage. He resolutely stayed the course to go to the cross and to even endure the wrath of God, trusting that the cup of God's wrath would pass from Him after He drank it.

He won His battle in the Garden of Gethsemane, while Peter, James, and John lost, sleeping rather than "watching and praying" as Jesus had asked them to do.

At the end of our time together last week, we saw Jesus and these three walk back to where the other eight were waiting, still in the Garden.

While Jesus was speaking to them the quiet of that late night was broken, the silence shattered by the storm of a crowd, come to arrest Jesus.

### **Jesus: Betrayed and Arrested (14:43-52)**

#### **The KISS of Betrayal (!?) (vv. 43-46)**

*[43] Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.*

The main character in this multitude was Judas Iscariot. We know that he is one of the twelve, having been identified before on numerous occasions.

So why does Mark point it out here? Without a doubt it was to draw attention to the ugliness of what Judas is doing. He is one of the twelve, for goodness' sake, and he is betraying Jesus!

Judas had been traveling around with Jesus for the better part of three years and was the trusted treasurer for the apostolic band.

And he is the one turning Jesus over to those who will eventually be condemning Him to death. Unconscionable.

The crowd Judas was leading into the Garden was not a mob. It was an officially sanctioned arresting party. The soldiers mentioned here would have been Jewish temple guards, not Roman soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

And the role Judas played was crucial on this night. In the dark he was the only one familiar enough with Jesus - His looks, His mannerisms - to be able to identify Him for those who wanted Him dead.

Mark tells us what happened.

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<sup>1</sup> As yet, there was no reason for the Romans to be involved. That will soon change.

*[44] Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard."*

The Greek word for "kiss" is a variation on the theme of one of the words we translate "love," specifically the love of a friend.

In other cultures today a kiss between men is a friendly form of greeting. I've been kissed by good men in Uruguay and in Russia.

But there has never been a kiss that was such a distortion of a kiss' purpose as the kiss Judas gave Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

*[45] After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, "Rabbi!" and kissed Him. [46] They laid hands on Him and seized Him.*

That kiss was the ultimate in contemptuous deceit.

After this act, Judas fades from the scene and we don't see him again in Mark's Gospel. But we do continue to watch Jesus.

The act of betrayal and the arrest of Jesus prompted another act - this act from yet another of His disciples.

#### **Garden Wrongs (vv. 47-50)**

*A blundering defense (vv. 47-49)*

*[47] But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.*

Mark doesn't tell us which of the disciples took this strong action, but John does. It was Simon Peter.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As Ray Stedman has written, "I do not think that there is anything in all the annals of treachery more contemptuous than this kiss of Judas - a deliberate, prolonged, apparently loving act, done with the cold determination to accomplish his own purpose." (from a commentary on Mark 8-16, *The Ruler Who Serves*)

<sup>3</sup> And we've got to believe that this action on Peter's part would have been terribly disappointing to Jesus. He is coming to the end of His time of training the disciples - in fact, the training is now over. He taught them the way of peace. He taught that

We see Peter as his impetuous best and worst here. Without much thinking he pulled out a sword and (as Luke tells us) cut off the right ear of the High Priest's slave.

You and I can wonder at what prompted his act. It could have been a combination of loyalty, panic, love for Jesus, and hatred of Jesus' enemies.

In another of the Gospels, we read of Jesus' rebuke of Peter. Mark tells us only of His words to those who have come to arrest Him.

*A withering rebuke (vv. 48-49)*

***[48] And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber?"<sup>4</sup> [49] "Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures."***

Jesus' words do not have any impact. Jesus no doubt knew they wouldn't have any effect on the guards. But they do have an effect on the disciples who now understand perfectly well that Jesus plans no resistance.

So the soldiers took no chances with Jesus. They bound Him and led Him on a short, forced march to the home of the High Priest, Caiaphas.

And the disciples? Mark's economy of style in telling us what the disciples did next makes their act all the more striking.

*The disciples ALL left Jesus (v. 50)*

***[50] And they all left Him and fled.***

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them His kingdom was not of this world. And what does the chief apostle do? He responds to a threat with physical violence.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus speaks against the military character of the arresting party, suitable for the arrest of a common criminal, or a fugitive, neither of which Jesus was. But later, in a wonderful irony, He was crucified between two "robbers" showing Him the true friend of sinners while He was treated exactly as if He was one.

Who can explain all the dynamics at work in the hearts of eleven men who had been pledging allegiance only hours earlier, and now flee into the darkness at the first sign of danger?

We know that they must have been shaken to the core by seeing Jesus, the One in whom they had placed their trust, bound and helpless. They had been convinced that He was the Messiah.

The fact that He didn't resist arrest, didn't attempt to defend Himself, didn't call them all "to arms" became in their minds proof positive that He was NOT what He had claimed to be. He was not the Messiah.

And with Jesus exposed as powerless, it became, "*every man for himself*" - and they fled.

You'll find a couple of verses following the flight of the apostles that may appear curious.

**Parenthetical:** A young man escapes naked (vv. 51-52)

***[51] A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. [52] But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.***

I think that there is good reason to believe that the young man was Mark, writing himself into a minor role in the narrative to establish himself as an eye-witness (like Alfred Hitchcock did in the past or M. Night Shamalyan has done in some of his own movies.)

But beyond trying to identify who this guy is who flees into the night naked, the main idea is to highlight Jesus' utter abandonment by everyone - friend and casual acquaintance - to His enemies.

Now, let's review. So far on this Thursday night we have a betrayal by one disciple, irresponsible violence by another, and flight from all the rest. Jesus' suffering has begun in earnest. And it goes downhill from here.

The ordeal continued in the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest, as Jesus was placed on trial before His countrymen.

## **Jesus: Condemned By the Jews (14:55-65)**

### **Badly Coached Witnesses Testify Against Jesus (vv. 55-59)**

*[55] Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. [56] For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. [57] Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, [58] “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” [59] Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent.*

This is Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of first century Israel. The Sanhedrin was presided over by the High Priest, and composed of the most revered priests and rabbis of the day.

Yet this elite group of highly placed, well thought of religious rulers violated every rule in the book by their sham of a trial against Jesus.

- It was ILLEGAL in that the trial was held at night (all trials, by law, had to be conducted in the daylight).
- It was ILLEGAL in that it was convened in the wrong place (all trials were to be held in the hall set aside for that purpose).
- It was ILLEGAL in that the verdict was reached on the same day as the trial was held (Jewish law required at least one night’s deliberation before handing down a verdict).<sup>5</sup>

The proceedings were a farce, and the outcome was determined long before the trial was even convened.

Testimony against Jesus was brought by paid liars. But their stories contained so many discrepancies it was obvious they were telling lies.

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<sup>5</sup> There are other illegalities associated with Jesus’ trial. For further reading, I would suggest Josh McDowell’s *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Alfred Edersheim’s *The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah*, or any of the better commentaries on the Gospels.

They were the best witnesses money could buy, and yet well into the trial, the case was on the verge of falling apart.

The prosecution and the members of the Sanhedrin were beginning to fear that they wouldn’t be able to find a legal ground on which to ensure Jesus’ death, because the witnesses couldn’t agree on important details.<sup>6</sup>

So, taking the matter into his own hands, the High Priest interviewed Jesus personally.

### **The High Priest Railroads Jesus’ Into Self-Incrimination (vv. 60-65)**

*[60] The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” [61a] But He kept silent and did not answer.*

The first thing we notice is Jesus’ silence. He didn’t utter a word when the witnesses were testifying against Him. Perhaps their accusations were so demonstrably weak that He refused to dignify them with an answer.

Or, maybe he was recalling prophetic words from Isaiah 53, *“Like a lamb that is silent before its shearers, and like a sheep that is led to slaughter, so He did not open His mouth.”*

But, by His silence Jesus gave the prosecution no opportunity to convict Him. And this impasse prompted the High Priest to do something positively illegal - under both the American and ancient Jewish legal systems. He put Jesus under oath to testify against Himself.

*[61b]...Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”*

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<sup>6</sup> Their lie, which asserted that Jesus had threatened to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem, contained a fraction of the truth. Early in His ministry, Jesus’ first cleansing of the Temple had been accompanied by these words, *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”* (John 2:19). But He had been referencing the destruction of the Temple of His Body, as would have been clear to anyone listening carefully to Him speak.

Now, this was a trap, clearly. Jesus never fell into a trap laid for Him. But the High Priest's demand gave Jesus an open door to, once and for all, declare to everyone exactly who He was.

He knew it was exactly the right time to make that declaration. And so, in response to this straight-forward question, Jesus replied.

***[62] And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."***

THAT was just what Caiaphas had been waiting for. He feigned moral outrage.

***[63] Tearing his clothes, the high priest \*said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? [64] "You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.***

At the passing of the verdict against Jesus, all the self-restraint that these priests and scribes and elders seemed to have possessed was lifted, and they again committed wholly illegal acts, and gave freedom to the soldiers to do the same.

***[65] Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.***

They insulted Him, spat upon Him, blindfolded and beat Him, and turning Him over to the officers (militia), allowed unprincipled soldiers to assault Him.<sup>7</sup>

Now, the Sanhedrin couldn't actually condemn Jesus to death because the Jews, being a subject people, didn't have the power of capital punishment in the first century.

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah had predicted this kind of abuse in his prophecy, ***"I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting."*** (Isaiah 50:6)

But their verdict wasn't totally without teeth, because they could certainly take their verdict to the Roman governor and ask Him to carry out the sentence, which is exactly what they did.

This morning, though, we are not going to walk with Jesus from the home of the High Priest to watch Him stand trial before Pontius Pilate.

We are going to stop off at the hallway of the High Priest's house and watch another drama unfold. This is where Simon Peter is.

Peter followed Jesus from the Garden to the hall and has been there throughout the trial. We know from John's Gospel that Peter had likely been watching and listening to the proceedings. What will become clear is that while Jesus has been on trial, Peter has been, too.

This is Peter, the rock. This is Peter, the one who assured Jesus in the Upper Room and on the Mount of Olives only hours before that even though all of these other guys (the other disciples) might fall away (*"I know them, Lord. You can't trust them!"*), he wouldn't fall away.

We are brought into Peter's part in the story all the way back at verse 53 as we watch him sitting with others on a chilly spring night, warming himself by a fire.<sup>8</sup>

### **Jesus: Denied By Simon Peter (14:53-54, 66-72)**

#### **Peter Finds Himself in the High Priest's Courtyard (vv. 53-54)**

***[53] They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. [54] Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers, and warming himself at the fire.<sup>9</sup>***

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<sup>8</sup> Was it Peter's determination to show himself faithful to Christ that had carried him into the courtyard of the High Priest in the first place? Was Peter determined to demonstrate that Jesus was wrong when He had said that Peter would deny Him?

<sup>9</sup> Peter was in the light (Mark doesn't say "fire")

This is all taking place in the home of the high priest, who would have had a good number of servants and slaves.

From where Peter sat, he could easily look at Jesus, as the Lord stood trial in the inner room. Jesus, for His part, could look out into the courtyard to see where Peter was even as His own trial was progressing.

The bravado and confidence Peter had demonstrated earlier in the evening at the Passover is tested by a casual question from a servant-girl.

### **Peter Loses Himself in the High Priest's Courtyard! (vv. 66-71)**

This young lady has no social significance to speak of. She's not of a high-ranking class. She's not wealthy and there is nothing about her that should have prompted fear in Peter.

But she has seen Peter with Jesus before, maybe in the Temple throughout the past week, maybe walking around Jerusalem, maybe on previous trips to Jerusalem.

She calls Peter out as having been with Jesus, the Nazarene.

*[66] As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, [67] and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene."*

That designation is important. She thinks of Jesus and His band of disciples as foreigners. They are outsiders.

Her reference to "the Nazarene" brings an emphasis to the foreignness of Jesus and His band to the Jerusalem scene.

And there may be a hint of sarcasm about her question, since Galileans (Nazareth was in Galilee) were thought of as backwater hicks.

When Jesus was questioned under heavy pressure by the High Priest, knowing what a straightforward answer would get Him, He courageously spoke the truth - "I AM..."

Listen to Peter's answer to this servant-girls' straightforward question.

*[68a] But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about."<sup>10</sup>*

We want to hear that again. We can hardly believe our ears. Just let his answer hang there for a minute.

He had been called to follow Jesus while fishing one day, and immediately left his nets to follow. He had walked the roads of Palestine for three years with Jesus, watched miracles and healings, listened to Him teach and had seen Him go toe-to-toe with Pharisees over and over again.

And he denies having been with Jesus.

Peter tried to disengage from this pesky maid, but she wouldn't be put off.

Mark tells us that Peter "...*went out onto the porch*" which, of course, would have been away from the fire/light. Significantly, perhaps, Peter is moving farther away from the light, deeper into the darkness.

As he stood on the porch, Mark tells us that "*a rooster crowed.*" Despite Jesus' warning, this first crowing of the rooster didn't seem to register in Peter's brain as anything noteworthy. But the re-appearance of the maid must have been annoying.

She followed Peter out on to the porch and positively identified Peter as one of "them" - and who likes to be called "them"?

*[69] The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!"*

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<sup>10</sup> Peter's denial may simply be seen as a contradiction of the maid's assertion. But against the backdrop of Jesus' prediction that Peter would "deny/disown" Him, it is hard to not see something darker here.

She spoke loudly enough for others to hear. But Peter wasn't going to be outed. He denied again that he had ever been in any way associated with Jesus.

**[69] The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" [70a] But again he denied it.**

Well, it wasn't long before a small crowd took up the chant of the servant-girl.

**[70b]...And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too."**

If his first two responses were similar claims that he simply had no idea what she/they were talking about, this one was far worse.

First, it was, "Let's see... Jesus, Jesus. No, I don't think I've heard that name before."

Now his tone and his words change dramatically as he responds to this third questioning.

**[71] But he began to curse and swear<sup>11</sup>, "I do not know this man you are talking about!"**

That is strong! Does he just start cussing? Is he placing himself under a curse if he is lying?<sup>12</sup>

Sadly, we saw it coming. Peter's swaggering bluster, His insistence that He would hang tough with Jesus even though everybody else might fall away - even in the face of Jesus' prediction to the contrary.

But, it is still heart-breaking to see his heart failure. We couldn't, though, be any more disappointed in Peter than he was in himself when he realized what he had done.

<sup>11</sup> Mark seems to be careful to point out the contrast between Jesus speaking under oath in the inner courtroom and Peter's oath in the courtyard outside.

<sup>12</sup> At least one of my commentaries (R. T. France, a reliable scholar) suggests that Peter was actually cursing Jesus.

### **Three Denials, a Second Rooster, Deep Remorse (v. 72)**

**[72] Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep.**

Peter's bold denials give way to remorse as he realizes that he has fallen into precisely the trap Jesus had warned Him about.

When you have trouble in the water, the third time under is the last time under. In wrestling, when your shoulders are pinned to the mat through the referee's "three count" the match is over. In baseball, three strikes and you're out.

Peter has failed once, twice, three times. He has denied being a follower of Jesus after having promised that he would never do such a thing. He has denied ever even knowing Jesus after promising that he would die for Jesus.

So, is Peter "out" now that he is down?

### **Conclusion:**

The clear answer is, "No." Peter was definitely down, but he was not out!

Following this devastating failure and spiritual defeat, Peter became the church's premier spokesman. On the Day of Pentecost, less than two months after this series of denials he preached a sermon that saw thousands come to faith.

He went on to perform miracles in Jesus' Name, anchored the church in Jerusalem with teaching and prayer, lived a faithful life, and end up dying a martyr's death!

But the event we have seen today was indelibly etched on his soul. I'm confident God never wanted him to forget his denials and we can be confident that he never did forget.

Near the end of his life, when he was writing his first letter to suffering Christians, Peter harkened back to a time when Jesus showed the way to live for God.

***[1 Peter 2:21] For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, [22] WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; [23] and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously...***

Reading those words we can picture Peter warming himself by a fire, listening as Jesus was questioned by Caiaphas, watching Jesus courageously declare the truth, knowing that it would mean crucifixion for Him.

In that same passage in 1 Peter 2, he dredged up memories of his own denials of Jesus and his own repentance and the Lord's eventual restoration of him to usefulness. Listen.

***[25] For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.***

Peter's story is my story. My life with Jesus has been a long journey of faithfulness followed by faithlessness followed by repentance followed by restoration.

And it is your story, too.

There is scarcely a more apt story in the New Testament for us to turn to in the New Testament than that of Peter when we fail.

He warns us against thinking that we are too strong to fail. If Peter failed (the chief apostle denied Jesus!), surely none of us are above failing. So we are to always be on our guard, alert, awake, vigilant!

But he models for us, too, the truth that there is hope. For the child of God, failure - of whatever variety - is not fatal.

I am not immune to failure, and neither are you. But God doesn't cast off His sinning children. He retrieves us, recycles us, re-woos us.

He doesn't retire us, He refines us and then uses us in ways beyond anything we could ever imagine, the scars from past failings becoming keys to our future fruit for Him.

That is what He did with Peter, and that is what He longs to do with you and me when we stray. If you have strayed, the Shepherd and Guardian of your soul is inviting you to return - today.