

**Text: John 21:1-22**

**Title: “Jesus and our Failures”**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Three weeks ago at the Miss Universe beauty pageant, the host was comedian Steve Harvey. At the climactic moment when the winner was to be announced Steve Harvey made a mistake. Instead of reading off of the card the name of the true winner, he read the name of Miss Columbia, the first runner up. She walked to the center stage to have the crown placed upon her head when Steve Harvey realized he had made a mistake. He said, “I have to apologize...” and he went on to announce that the true winner was actually Miss Philippines. It was an incredibly embarrassing moment for Steve Harvey. He failed on prime time television. And people will be replaying his mistake over and over again for years to come.

Open your Bibles to John 21. Steve Harvey goofed up on prime time TV. But he’s not the first. The main man that Jesus chose to lead His followers and His church was a man who also messed up in prime time. I want us to read about an episode in Peter’s life at the very end of the John’s Gospel. **Read John 21:1-12.**

Now this episode will mean the most to us if we understand the backstory. Peter is a guy we can all identify with ... not necessarily the Apostle Peter in the book of Acts who healed people or preached powerful sermons, but the Simon Peter of the Gospels. He was impulsive and fickle. He often spoke before thinking, and his answers and his reactions were often wrong. He sometimes got into trouble because his faith was weak. And, as we’ll see in a moment, he failed Jesus in prime time.

**PHOTO #1 - SEA OF GALILEE** - We just returned from Israel and we had the opportunity to visit many of the sites associated with Jesus’ relationship with Peter. For example we stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus walked one day when He saw two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, who were fishermen. Jesus said to them...

**Matthew 4:19-20** - “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

For the next three years Peter walked with Jesus and served Him. He sat at the feet of Jesus and heard the amazing wisdom that He taught. I’m sure Peter couldn’t envision living a single day without being close to Jesus. He witnessed Jesus’ power to perform miracles, and one was particularly personal for Peter.

**PHOTO #2 - CAPERNAUM** – We visited the site in Capernaum where they have uncovered the foundation of the synagogue where Jesus taught. Nearby is a house where they believe Peter’s mother-in-law lived. Matthew 8:14 says she had a fever and Peter watched as Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law.

**PHOTO #3 - SEA OF GALILEE** – We took a cold, windy boat ride out on the Sea of Galilee where Peter and the disciples had one of the most frightening experiences of their lives. A fierce

storm arose and they thought they were going to die. It says in Matthew 14:25 that suddenly Jesus came to them walking on the water and the disciples were terrified. But Peter asked the Lord, "If it's you tell me to walk to you on the water." At the command of Jesus Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water. He did great until he saw the waves around him. His faith failed him, he began to sink and Jesus had to rescue him.

**PHOTO #4 - CAESAREA PHILIPPI** – But Jesus didn't give up on Peter. A short time after that Jesus took His disciples on a retreat to an area in the northern Galilee called Caesarea Philippi. We visited this beautiful place where Jesus asked His disciples the question, "Who do men say that I am?" And Peter gave that great confession recorded in Matthew 16:16...

**Matthew 16:16 - "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

**Matthew 16:17 - Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."**

**Matthew 16:18 - And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**

**PHOTO #5 - CAVE**– In Caesarea Philippi there was a well-known cave. In ancient times pagans believed that caves were the gates to the underworld ... the gates of hell. Jesus used this cave as a backdrop to his statement that the very gates of hell will not stop His church that is built on the foundation of the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

This statement is all the more amazing in light of what happens a few verses later. Here we see Peter's flaws showing once again. When Jesus explained that He must suffer and die on the Cross...

**Matthew 16:22b - Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"**

**Matthew 16:23 - Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

Peter went from praising Jesus, "You are the Christ," to rebuking Jesus, "Never, Lord!" And Jesus had to go from saying, "Way to go Peter!" to "Get behind Me, Satan." That's the way it was for Peter.

**PHOTO #6 - THE UPPER ROOM** - Fast forward to the night when Jesus gathered in the Upper Room with His disciples on the night before He was crucified. We visited the traditional site of the Upper Room, though the real one lies buried several feet below the current building. Here Jesus told the disciples that He was about to be crucified and that all of them would desert Him. In Matthew 26:33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."

**Matthew 26:34** - “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

**PHOTO #7 – THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE** – Remember that. After that Jesus took His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. We were there during the day, but Jesus was there in the night. Remember that it was here that Jesus prayed, “Father, if there is any way this cup can pass from me, may it be so. Nevertheless, not my will but your will be done.”

**Matthew 26:40** - Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch (keep praying) with me for one hour?” he asked Peter.

Once again Peter failed in prime time. Most of us have fallen asleep trying to pray, but I would dare say that it wasn't captured on video that went viral on YouTube. But it gets worse. Later that evening Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested by armed guards who took Jesus to the house of the high priest, Caiaphas. Peter followed along, and he sat outside in the courtyard to see what would happen. Three times someone asked him if he knew Jesus and three times Peter did exactly what Jesus predicted he would do ...he denied that he knew Jesus. Then the rooster crowed and it dawned on Peter. That's exactly what Jesus said would happen. And Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

**PHOTO #8 – CAIAPHAS' HOUSE** –Today over the ruins of what they believe was the house of Caiaphas there is a sculpture commemorating what Peter did that night. Now we may not have outright denied that we knew Jesus, but certainly there have been times when we were ashamed to speak up for Him. What if every time we were ashamed of Jesus someone made a monument of it? Peter probably never imagined that he would end up denying his Lord.

Jesus was crucified the next day. He died, suffering the wrath of God for your sins and for my sins ... and for Peter's sins. But you know the story doesn't end there.

**PHOTO 9 – EMPTY TOMB** – On the third day Jesus arose from the dead. Today, many believe that this tomb is the empty tomb of Jesus in what is called Gordon's Calvary. Early that first Easter Sunday morning Mary Magdalene went to the tomb only to find that it was empty. Jesus' burial clothes were lying there. Mary is startled by the presence of an angel. But the angel said...

**Mark 16:6** - “Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

**Mark 16:7** - But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ”

Interesting! Why was Mary to go tell Jesus' disciples “*and Peter*” Maybe Jesus still has plans for the man who failed Him so miserably. Maybe there is hope that he can recover from this huge failure. Maybe there's grace for people like us who sin every day. Our culture today likes

to hammer people like Peter and Steve Harvey who fail in prime time. But with Jesus it's different.

**PHOTO #10 – NORTHERN SHORE OF SEA OF GALILEE** – Back to the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The risen Savior had appeared to Peter and the other disciples, but they're still not sure what to do with themselves, particularly since they had all deserted Jesus. So they returned to their old way of life as fishermen. As we read at the beginning in John 21, one morning after the disciples had spent an exhausting, unproductive night of fishing, Jesus met them on the shore of their failure and disappointments. When the disciples recognized it was Jesus they quickly came ashore and found that He had prepared breakfast for them.

Put yourselves in Peter's sandals for a moment. After this terrible failure in his life, maybe Peter didn't know what to do with himself, or with Jesus. Maybe you've sinned and failed. You used to feel close to Him, but now you're not sure where you stand with Him, or if His plans any longer include you. But you need to know today that Jesus is still reaching to you.

**John 21:15 - When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."**

Jesus repeated this two more times. So Peter denied Jesus three times and three times Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to make it right ... to once again confess his love for Jesus for as many times as he denied Jesus.

You see, this is how the cross of Jesus changed everything. Now forgiveness is possible because Jesus took our sins upon Himself, no matter how terrible they are. "He became sin who knew no sin that we might become His righteousness."

There are several things in this story that amaze me about Jesus. I'm amazed at how ...

## **1. JESUS COMES TO US IN OUR FAILURES.**

Many of us think that Jesus only cares about people who have their spiritual act together. No, He comes to us as we are. Jesus still shows up in the midst of our messy lives. In the confusion and the failure of our lives Jesus wants to be with us.

## **OUTLINE – Jesus loves us even when we have failed Him.**

And here's something else that amazes me about the Lord:

## **2. WITH JESUS NO FAILURE HAS TO BE FINAL.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Do you watch hockey? I don't understand the game or the rules. Half the time I can't even find the puck. One thing I understand is the penalty box. Commit a certain

kind of foul and you get put in the penalty box for a certain number of minutes. In the meantime, your team is playing short-handed. God doesn't keep us in the penalty box forever. You may never forget that embarrassing moment in your life. But...

**OUTLINE – Your failures don't have to define you for the rest of your life. They can refine you for the best of your life.**

Just a few weeks later Peter would stand before throngs who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had fallen on the disciples. Whom did Jesus choose as the spokesman? It was Peter. That's the outrageous nature of the grace of God.

There's something else in this story that amazes me about Jesus.

### **3. WITH JESUS THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY BACK FROM HERE.**

**OUTLINE – The way it is now doesn't have to be the way it will always be.**

**John 21:19b - Then he said to him, "Follow me!"**

**PHOTO #12 – STATUE OF PETER AND JESUS** – Jesus spoke those words to Peter very near the place where three years before Jesus spoke the same words to Peter. "Follow Me and I will make you to fish for men." And so here they are again, perhaps at the very same spot where Peter first responded to the call of Jesus. But now things are different. Peter had failed miserably, but now he hears Jesus say to him, "Follow me ... again." The face of Jesus is the face of grace. So our failures don't have to be final and our mistakes don't have to be fatal.