

# Peter Fails, Jesus Succeeds

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, well, we're moving forward in the story of Jesus, as told by John. Last Sunday, we heard about how Jesus and his disciples were met by a large group of armed men in the darkness of Gethsemane.

And we saw Jesus intentionally steer the conversation in order to protect his disciples and then willingly surrender himself to the soldiers and the guards.

Let's pick up the story here in John chapter 18, verse 12. Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus.

They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. So they tied Jesus up, even though he surrendered himself willingly.

And this large group of armed men leads Jesus in the night to Annas. Who's Annas? John tells us that Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas.

[ 1 : 10 ] And Caiaphas was the current high priest. Now, why take Jesus to Annas? Well, history has it that Annas was himself the high priest of the Jews for nine years.

But then in the year 15 AD, this was 18 years earlier, the Roman governor removed Annas from his position. And the Roman governor appointed one of his sons to be high priest.

The Roman governors, I guess, had made a practice of meddling with who got this official position. So not long after that, they removed Annas' son from the position.

And they appointed Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, as high priest. But all this meddling of the Romans wasn't really appreciated by many of the Jews.

According to the Mosaic law, a high priest was to be the high priest for life. And so some of the Jews still considered Annas to be the real high priest, even though it was his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was officially in the position and had the title and carried out the duties.

[ 2 : 21 ] So Annas, in the eyes of the Jews, would have been the highest-ranking, most experienced authority in the high priestly family. And that's likely why they take Jesus to him first.

Verse 15. Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. So even though Jesus' disciples were scattered and ran from the garden, John tells us that at least two of his disciples didn't run very far.

They followed from a distance, watching to see what was going to happen to Jesus. Where were they going to take him? Picture this in your mind.

It's pitch black outside. Dark. Dark. And this large group of soldiers and guards is marching down the road, many of them carrying torches.

And here's Peter and another disciple sneaking along in the darkness, following them. So Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus.

[ 3 : 28 ] Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. But Peter had to wait outside at the door.

The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there, and brought Peter in. So who is this other disciple with Peter?

Well, we don't know 100% for sure. But here's what people have suggested. Tradition has it that this other disciple is John, the one who wrote this gospel account.

The beloved disciple. And this fits and makes sense because there's a number of other places in the gospel where John seems to refer to himself just kind of very discreetly, not mentioning his name.

Also, if it is John, then it would make sense how we're going to have the details of the conversation that happened right there in the room between Jesus and Annas. And that John would have been a witness.

[ 4 : 34 ] Others suggest that this is some other disciple of Jesus. Perhaps one from Jerusalem. Because maybe it seems a little unlikely that a fisherman from Galilee would have been known to the high priest in Jerusalem.

Perhaps the reason John left the name out was to protect the follower. Who was still very much in danger by some of the religious leaders at the time.

Perhaps it was Nicodemus. Perhaps it was Joseph of Arimathea. Whatever the case, Peter and this other disciple arrive at the house of Annas. And the other disciple, it seems, just walks right in. He's able to do that because of his relationship with Annas. But Peter was not. He was stuck outside the gate or the door. And then at some point, this other disciple comes back to the entrance of the courtyard and speaks to the servant girl at the door.

Asks her to let Peter in. And at this moment, the servant girl asks a question. You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?

[ 5 : 46 ] She's referring to Jesus, of course. And she's asking Peter if he's a disciple of Jesus. Now this is certainly a loaded question. But we're not certain about what this question is loaded with.

Is this servant girl at the door asking in order to decide whether she should let him in? Like, hold on a second. You aren't one of Jesus' disciples also, are you?

Because if you're not, I have orders not to... If you are, I have orders not to let you in. Or is this the servant girl making a statement of surprise or disdain? Like, you aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?

You haven't fallen prey to this guy's influence as well, have you? Or, the most popular guess, is the servant girl letting on that she's pretty sure she knows that Peter is.

A follower of Jesus. Like, are you not one of this man's disciples also? In other words, I think you are.

[ 6 : 57 ] Peter replied, I'm not. Let the full force of those three words sink in. This is Peter.

One of the inner circle of three. Closest of Jesus' twelve disciples. One of the apostles. This is Peter, the one who was asked in Jesus, by Jesus in private, who he thought Jesus was on another occasion.

And answered with, you are the Messiah. The son of the living God. This is Peter, who watched others turn away from Jesus. And when asked if he too was going to leave, said, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You alone have the words of eternal life. We've come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. This is Peter. This is Peter who rejoiced with the other apostles.

That he had been given authority and power to heal the sick and cast out demons in Jesus' name. This is Peter. This is Peter who earlier this same evening said, Lord, why can't I follow you now?

[ 8 : 13 ] I will lay down my life for you. And here Peter's asked by a servant girl at the door whether he's a disciple of Jesus.

And he says, I'm not. Now all of us have told a lie at some time or another. You know that feeling, don't you?

You're being asked about something and you feel embarrassed or ashamed of the truth. Or maybe you're afraid of the consequence that may come if you're honest.

And so you open your mouth and you lie. But at that moment inside, you feel that nagging at your conscience.

Knowing that what you've done is wrong. Why didn't Peter just tell the truth? No doubt he was experiencing similar kinds of feelings.

[ 9 : 19 ] Similar emotions. Fear at what might happen to him if he makes it known that he's with Jesus. The one who's just been arrested.

Perhaps he felt ashamed or embarrassed. That, yeah, I am one of the disciples of this man who's being charged with all these things.

And right now is tied up and under guard like a criminal. And we have to know that as bad as lying is, and it is, this is worse than a lie.

It's not just deceiving the girl. It's also an act of disloyalty. A betrayal of a loved one.

It's a lie told to cover up his close friendship and association with Jesus. The most wonderful, awesome person that Peter has ever known.

[ 10 : 14 ] His very best of friends. And now Peter betrays all of that in a moment. I'm not one of his disciples.

It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. So he doesn't go right into the house.

That could have some consequences. Keep in mind that Jesus and his disciples had come down to Jerusalem multiple times a year for all these festivals.

So people would have recognized Peter, probably. Instead, he goes to stand over by the fire in the courtyard. Near enough to be able to find out what's going to happen this night.

But far enough away that he might avoid being recognized. Verse 19. Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

[ 11 : 26 ] I have spoken openly to the world, Jesus replied. I always taught in synagogues or at the temple where all the Jews come together.

I said nothing in secret. In the context, the high priest here is Annas, as we'll see down in verse 24. This has some of the feeling of a religious trial.

Annas is asking questions of Jesus. He is the high priest. Specifically, he's asking questions about Jesus' disciples and about Jesus' teachings.

But though it feels like a religious trial in one sense, what kind of trial happens in the private home of the judge? What kind of trial happens late at night when everybody else is sleeping?

Not to mention that the official high priest, Caiaphas, is not here, as we'll see in verse 24. And what does Annas ask about? He wants to drill into Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

[ 12 : 36 ] In response, Jesus declares, I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues or at the temple where all the Jews come together.

I said nothing in secret. If we sort of read between the lines, perhaps Annas is wondering how Jesus has come to have such a large and loyal following.

Perhaps he suspects or is accusing Jesus of saying one thing publicly, but then saying another thing privately. How is it that you've hoodwinked all of these gullible people into following you?

Maybe that's what he's wondering. We don't know. Or are there people in the room even now that are accusing Jesus of some of the things that they said that he said? Things that were false.

Well, Annas is trying to get something with these questions. And Jesus' response is really hard to argue with or dispute. Basically, Jesus says, My ministry has been as public as can be.

[ 13 : 44 ] The things that I said, I said openly to the world. Everybody's had access. Everybody's had opportunity to hear me. I didn't teach in ways that subverted the local synagogues or the temple here in Jerusalem.

I taught in the synagogues all over Israel. And right here in the temple at Jerusalem. In other words, everybody knows what I've been teaching.

Now, when Jesus says he spoke nothing in secret, it doesn't mean that he didn't ever teach his disciples in private.

We know from the other gospels, all the gospels really, that Jesus did teach his disciples in private when the crowds were not present. But I think the point here is that he had one consistent message.

One teaching. I said nothing different in secret. Nothing seditious or malicious. I liked how D.A. Carson put it in his commentary.

[ 14 : 47 ] He said what Jesus said to his disciples in private was of a piece with what he said in public. He did not maintain one message for public consumption and another more dangerous one for a secret group of initiates.

His private discourses further unpacked what he said in public or extrapolated his message a little farther. Jesus then goes a step further and shines the light on the dubiousness of this whole thing.

All these questions, this interrogation. Verse 21. Why question me? Ask those who heard me.

Surely they know what I said. Or quite literally, look, behold. They know what I said. Jesus basically says, questioning me about my teaching and my followers is pointless.

Why do it? Ask the witnesses themselves. All the people who heard what I said and taught, they know what I said. In other words, and I think if we read between the lines and look at some of the other accounts here, you can try and twist my words all you want.

[ 16 : 13 ] You can try to dig something up that I said that was wrong, that was false. But it's going to be obvious that you're doing it. Because people all over the nation have already heard publicly what I taught.

All my teachings on record with the ears of thousands, men and women who came to the synagogues and heard me speak in every town in Israel. Most of the nation comes here to Jerusalem multiple times a year for the festivals and heard me teach, saying the same things publicly at the temple.

So it's pointless to ask me all these questions, to look for fault with my teaching. Ask the people what I said. They'll tell you.

When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. Is this the way you answer the high priest?

He demanded. If I said something wrong, Jesus replied, testify as to what is wrong.

[17:22] But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me? So one of these officials slaps Jesus in the face.

He asks this question. Is this the way you answer the high priest? I'm not sure just what the official was thinking here. Maybe he thought it was rude for Jesus to offer advice to the high priest, the guy who usually is giving advice to other people because of his position.

But Jesus doesn't accept this official's rebuke. Immediately after bearing this blow to his face, Jesus challenges the official to state what he has done or said that is wrong.

And further, if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me? He says. It falls to you to account for your actions if you can't find fault with what I just said.

And of course, John records no answer from the official. Jesus was right. This questioning, this attempt to find fault with him and his teaching was futile.

[18:39] Verse 24. Then Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas, the high priest. So at this point, Annas, I think, realizes he's just not getting what he's hoping to from Jesus.

He isn't finding anything to pin on him. He's simply exposing or being exposed more and more by Jesus. So Annas, it seems, is done with Jesus.

Send him to Caiaphas. He's the official high priest. Let him preside over things from here. Peter. Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself.

So the sense we get here is that while all this was going on in the house, Peter was having an interaction out at the fire. He was still there warming himself.

And at some point, the attention comes to rest on Peter. Peter. They asked Peter, you aren't one of his disciples too, are you?

[19:52] He denied it, saying, I am not. The wording here is almost identical to the first time Peter was asked. And so the same nuances are possible, but probably they just suspected that he was.

Are you not also one of his disciples? No, I am not, said Peter. One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, did I not see you with him in the garden?

Now Peter is busted. This servant had been there at Gethsemane. Yes, it was a little hard to see in the dark by the light of the torches, but this man for sure recognized Peter.

He was a relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter had cut off. You can bet that he'd made note of the face of the man who did this to his relative.

His question is rhetorical, but it's a pretty clear statement. Did I not see you with him in the garden? I saw you.

[21:12] You were there. You were with him in the garden. Again, Peter denied it. And at that moment, a rooster began to crow.

This rooster crow is significant. First of all, let's quickly look back to the conversation earlier this evening that Jesus had with Peter back in John chapter 13, verse 36.

Jesus had been talking about going away and Simon asked him, where are you going? And Jesus said, where I'm going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later. And Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now?

I will lay down my life for you. And Jesus answered, will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

So Jesus had prophesied that this would happen. Matthew tells us that the conversation even went beyond that. Peter actually had another response.

[22:20] Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you, said Peter. Jesus had been right. Not only did he know Peter, what was in his heart, Jesus knew the future because he's the son of God.

It's a pretty specific prediction or prophecy. You will deny me, you will say you don't know me three times before the rooster crows. And the rooster crowing, it's the sign that morning is near. Basically, Jesus is saying, you will deny knowing me three times before the night is over. And here John tells us that immediately after Peter said it, the rooster crowed. Luke actually tells us that in this moment, Jesus turns and looks straight at Peter. Probably Jesus was at this very moment being led out of Annas' house through the courtyard to go to Caiaphas. Can you imagine the piercing gaze of Jesus? This time as Peter lies and says he doesn't know him, it's like all of a sudden, out of nowhere, there's Jesus looking right at him. [ 23 : 49 ] The very one he's disowning. We can only imagine just how utterly exposed and ashamed Peter felt in that moment. I've betrayed my best friend.

Worse, the Messiah. I thought he wouldn't see it or know about it, but he's right there looking at me. John doesn't tell us here, but Luke tells us that at this point, Peter leaves the courtyard and breaks down in tears. He weeps bitterly. What a night this has been for Jesus and his disciples, and yet this is just the beginning of what's coming with the break of day. We're going to continue on with the story next Sunday, but let's pause and reflect for a moment here. What can we take from all of this? I don't know about you, but I can't help but see myself when I look at Peter.

It's so easy to talk the Christian talk. To say, yes, I believe you are the Messiah, you are the Son of God. Especially for those of us who have been followers of Jesus for a long time or have grew up in the church.

[ 25 : 11 ] But are we walking the Christian walk? Do our actions match what we profess?

It's often easy to do the right thing when everything's going well, but then when the trials come, when the troubles of life enclose, when things come that test our patience, do our actions and words match what we profess?

Peter struggled with this. I struggle with this. Today's a day that we reflect on parenthood, specifically mothers.

But for us fathers, our day is coming too. Let me share with you parents a familiar example which I read the other day in a book and I've modified it a little bit for us, but you'll get the feeling.

Dinner is prepared. The table is set. The kids are finally at the table. Everything's nearly ready. But the happiness is interrupted when little Johnny does something overly rambunctious at the table and knocks the pitcher of juice over, spilling all of it into the pulled pork.

[ 26 : 34 ] After a momentary out-of-body experience in which you hover above your world gone awry, you look, as old Mr. Wodehouse would say, like a tomato struggling for self-expression.

Little Johnny quickly regrets his wild antics, not because he's made a mess of dinner, but because you, his parent, have suddenly transformed into a fire-breathing dragon.

You've got flaming eyes and steaming ears. As your lid flips, you find your tongue. Your volcanic rant spews on blaming, shaming, and defaming in raw, molten anger.

And with each passing second, the little guy puddles further into fear and shame. And then all of a sudden, your phone rings. And it's the call you've been waiting for from a friend at church.

You all know how this plays out, right? Imagine little Johnny's awe when before his eyes you instantly transform from a dragon to a lamb. And with an artificially sweetened tone, you pick up the phone and offer the nicest, kindest, gentlest, most welcoming hello in the whole world.

[ 27 : 52 ] When things that test our patience happen, do our actions and words match our profession of faith in Jesus? Maybe parenting is not the thing that's the struggle for you, but maybe it's some other difficult relationship with someone.

It just brings out things inside. Maybe it's another trial. Maybe it's pressures. Maybe finances are a factor. Vehicles, health, you name it.

All of these kinds of things have the potential to bring out the worst in us. Maybe it's not anger for you, but perhaps like Peter, maybe it's fear. Maybe it's cowardice.

Maybe you care so much about what people think that it's crippling you. It's keeping you from opening up and speaking the truth.

Maybe like Peter, you've simply given into temptation and compromised. And you know a follower of his shouldn't do such things. And yet here you are doing it anyway.

[ 29 : 05 ] Do you see yourself when you look at Peter in this story? Half of this story is Peter's failure.

Peter's sin. Peter's betrayal of Jesus, which calls to mind our own failures and sins. The many moments that we've not lived as a disciple of Jesus ought to.

But the other half of this story is Jesus' success. Jesus' willingness to suffer for us. Jesus' righteousness.

What a contrast. Peter lies, but Jesus speaks the truth to Annas. In fact, he says, you won't catch me speaking lies, Annas, because I've been the same man with the same message in private as in public here in Jerusalem and in every synagogue throughout the nation.

Think about the kind of integrity you would have to have to say that. Jesus could say it. What a contrast. Peter was a coward.

[ 30 : 18 ] He was afraid to tell the truth to the servant girl at the door. But Jesus was as bold as a lion. He told Annas, one of the most powerful and revered men in the nation, you're wasting your time.

What a contrast. Peter has a friend with him and yet he lies. He's embarrassed. He won't speak the truth. Jesus is all alone with no help from any man, no support, and yet he refuses to compromise to save his own skin.

one of the other gospels actually tells how Peter in one of the moments of denial started calling down curses. In contrast, we see Jesus taking a slap across the face and he does not retaliate or curse.

Rather, he invites the man to point out what he has done or said that's wrong. And if there's nothing, explain why you struck me.

As we'll see, Jesus' successes go on and on and continue all the way to the cross where he lays down his life to atone for Peter and for you and for me for the world.

[ 31 : 45 ] So yes, as we read this story, we're reminded of our failures and sins as we look at Peter. We're reminded of how he blew it big time and like him, we've all blown it big time in all kinds of ways.

But the good news is that we have a champion, a greater high priest, one who never blew it even when things became exceedingly difficult.

The pressure is unbelievable. Yet he endured in perfect righteousness and he gave his life to secure our forgiveness, our pardon to wipe all our guilt away.

This is the good news of Jesus. So if today on Mother's Day, whether you're a mother or a father, you're aware of your own sins and failures and shortcomings, look to Peter but quick, get your eyes off him and look to Jesus.

He is our righteous champion. By his mercy, we can all be forgiven of all of our sins, every failure if we come to him humbly, believing and ask.

[ 33 : 09 ] Let's pray. Father in heaven, it's, this story is heavy but it's the truth, it's the story of what happened.

It was part of your plan even though it's hard and it's heavy, it exposes us. We thank you that in the midst of it we see your sun shining brightly, working towards our redemption and we thank you that that gift has been given and paid for with Jesus' blood.

I pray that we would all place our trust firmly in that. and that you would make us a powerful witness to our children, to our parents, to our unsaved loved ones, to our friends, our family, our co-workers, neighbors of the grace that you have given us in Christ.

We say thank you for that in his name. Amen. Amen.