

“DOWN BUT NOT OUT”
John 21:15-22

By Pastor YAU
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INTRODUCTION:

1) Stumbled and stay down: A little boy came home from kindergarten and handed his Mom his school work: A drawing project with a “black-pig” stamp on top of the project that indicated “failed.” (A red rabbit stamp is for good job.) So, Mom gave him some words of consolation, then encouraged her little boy to do better next time. At the dinner table, Mom asked her son: “What will you do at school tomorrow?” expecting a positive answer. The little boy answered his mom with no hesitation: “I am not going to school tomorrow.” That poor boy couldn't take the shame of failure, chose to take the easy way out: Stay away from school. We don't know what his Mom had done to get her little boy to go to school again the next day. No parent will leave their child stay out of school just because he failed some school work.

2) Stumbled but stand up: In the Bible, we have an adult, not a child, and his name is Peter. He failed much worse than that little boy. He used to be one of the closest to his Lord Jesus, and was recognized as the spokesman of the disciple group. At one time, he was even ready to die with Jesus. (Luke 22:33) Everyone had high regard of him and expected a lot from him. But he failed in all categories anyone could imagine: He denied his relationship with Jesus. He vowed he had nothing to do with Jesus. He was the first person to disown Jesus, not just once but three times, it means

repeatedly under many circumstances. As one of the most respected by his peers, the most beloved by Jesus, his failure is beyond description. But that isn't the end of the story. Although we didn't know what the boy's Mom might do to her son, we know what the Lord did to bring Peter back, not just back to the relationship, to his inner circle, but to be the most effective messenger of the gospel to begin the First Christian Church in Jerusalem with 3,000 chartered members.

ON THE ISSUE OF FAILURE: Let us explore the issue of failure in general, and the restoration of Peter in particular from the Bible so we may have a better grip to handle similar situation in our life and time.

1) There is NO saint in this world: When God inspired Paul to write in Rom. 3:10 “There is no one righteous, not even one,” He meant every human being ever was born and lived on this planet. Although the Catholic Pope may give the title “saint” to significant individuals in the Catholic Church, there is no biblical ground to do so. The Bible clearly stated: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23) With our right hand on our chest, we are human: No one in history may claim he/she had never failed. We can confess and affirm the truth of the Bible: We all are sinners, failures, beyond redemption without Jesus. We all are truly “A basket of deplorable,” using a now famous quote in the election year. So, to fail, to sin, is being human.

2) We all are in good company: I want to say this not to make us feel better when we fall, fail or stumble, but to bring us to the facts of the Bible. From the very first person, Adam, in

Genesis, to the last person of the Bible, John, in Revelation, we have a cloud of great people, people of great faith, people who had given so much to the Lord, achieved so much for the Lord, but at the same time, they all have failed, some failed worse than others. Great example like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, King David, The wisest man of the world Solomon, great warrior Elijah, prophet Isaiah, Jonah, of course Peter and Paul, and rest of the Christian history. I am not writing this to vindicate anyone of anything, but to point out a fact: We all have failed, sinned, like all people in the Bible and in the world. This brings us to the next step: If God can raise these failures and restored them into useful vessels, He can do the same to all of us, if we are willing to be restored.

ON THE ISSUE OF RESTORATION: Restoration is a central theme of the Bible, particularly in salvation, redemption and dedication. God is in business of restoration of nations, societies, churches, families and individuals to make the worst to become the best. God did this for many reasons, and the first one is He is our Creator and He knows us inside out, and He still loves us. Let us explore the steps Jesus took to restore Peter:

1) Jesus came for this very purpose: In response to criticism on his generosity to Zacchaeus, Jesus explained the purpose of his coming to this world: “The Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.” (Luke 19:10) Jesus didn't come to enjoy the company of good, perfect people, but he came for sinners like us. It is because of the sins of the world, God sent

His Son as a sacrifice for all the sins of all men. If you have failed, sinned, stumbled badly, you are the one Jesus is seeking to save and to restore.

2) Jesus understood they had needs: “I am going out to fish, Simon Peter told them, and they said: We'll go with you. So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing...He called out to them: Friends, haven't you any fish? No, they answered.” (21:3, 5) I am sure, they were tired and hungry after labored all night for nothing. Then Jesus directed them where to throw their net and they caught a huge number of fish. Jesus used his power to meet the needs of the hungry fishermen. Some people have difficulty to understand why did Jesus care to meet their physical needs when they went back to their old trade, fishing. I am thankful to Jesus because he understands we are human and we have immediate needs. God did the same thing for Elijah when he ran away from Jezebel by providing him bread and water. God also provided Jonah a gourd vine to grow overnight to protect him from the scorching sun. God knows what we need and provides for us. This is the first thing Jesus did to restore Peter and his friends.

3) Jesus sees potential than failure: “Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time: Do you love me? He said: Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.” (21:17) Most of us can only see the outside of a person, his words, his actions, his attitude, etc. And we make our judgment on them by their outward expressions. But God sees us much deeper. God told prophet Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height...The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at

the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7) Even Peter had failed Jesus 3 times, but Jesus knew his heart. So, three times, Jesus helped Peter to see his inside: He loved the Lord. I thank God for giving me an optimistic outlook on life. I believe all God's children have good spiritual potential to become strong and effective witnesses for Christ. But sometimes, circumstance and physical needs or temptations push us away from the Lord. So, I believe that Jesus sees deeper in our heart, and he can and will bring that quality out to restore our commitment to him like he did for Peter.

4) Jesus has a much better plan for Peter: We know that Peter was sorrowful after he denied Jesus three times. He might think that this is the end of his relationship with Jesus, so he went to his old job, fishing. But Jesus had a much better and bigger plan for Peter's life. After the Lord restored his inner life, Peter became the most powerful speaker of the gospel for the very first time, and 3,000 souls were saved. Jesus wanted him to be the pastor of his sheep, he began to bring the gospel to the Gentile before Paul did, and he was even revered as the first Pope of the Catholic Church with an estimated membership of 1.2 billion people, not include another one billion Protestants. So, don't underestimate what God can do with you life if you are willing to be restored.

5) Jesus wants you just to follow Him: “Peter turned and saw that disciple whom Jesus loved was following them, he asked: Lord, what about him? Jesus answered: “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” (21: 20-22) Just like many of us, Peter wanted to

compare his future with that of another disciple, John. But Jesus stopped him from doing that. He wanted Peter just to follow Him, not John or anyone else. Some of us are curious about how God deals with other people, their life, their future, their call and commitment, and many other things. Jesus stopped Peter from doing that. God has plans for each one of us and all we need to do is being faithful to follow Jesus, not anyone else. What and how Jesus deals with others has nothing to do with our personal commitment to Jesus. There is no need of any busybodies.

6) Jesus wants you to be a restorer: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31, 32) The fact Jesus call 12 disciples is this: he wants to see group interaction and mutual support among his people. Jesus has a high expectation on Peter, not just to restored him to be useful, powerful and fruitful, He also wanted Peter to help others in their spiritual struggles. This is one thing we all need to know and do so all the ligaments may support and fit with one another for the building up of the Church Jesus died to build. Remember: We are family.

THINGS WE CAN DO:

1) God isn't done with you: If you had failed in your relationship with God, had back slid in your devotion and fruit bearing or even have sin in your life, you are not alone. Jesus is waiting for you to call for help and he is ready to bring you back to him so he can restore you to become

powerful and fruitful.

Don't give up or stay down. Jesus can make you a new creation again.

2) Don't count anyone out: If you see any brother or sister who may be in a bad shape in spiritual condition, do not count him out. Jesus can restore him to his full capacity in time like He did with Peter. You may be an instrument to help your brother to stand up again. God never saves junk. We all can be useful in God's kingdom and his church. Like Peter, God may want you to help your brother, to restore his faith, to include him in your prayer and care. We all can be our

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