

Why Did You Fail?

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the serious nature of faith failures and their impact on our relationship with Christ, others, and ourselves.

Scripture: Matthew 14:30

Topics: "Faith", "Witnessing for Christ"

Description

J.R. Miller addresses the painful reality of failing faith, emphasizing how it grieves Jesus when His followers doubt. He illustrates this through Peter's experience of walking on water, highlighting that doubt leads to failure, and that our actions have far-reaching consequences on others' faith. Miller encourages believers to remain steadfast in their witness for Christ, even in the mundane moments of life, as our failures can weaken the faith of those observing us. He reminds us that every moment is an opportunity to represent Christ faithfully, and that we must keep our eyes on Him to avoid sinking in our trials. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of the seriousness of our faith failures and the importance of sustained faith in overcoming life's challenges.

Transcript

It grieved Jesus to have his disciples fail in their faith. One reason was personal. The joy of being trusted is one of the holiest experiences that can come to any human heart. We do not understand the sweetest privilege of friendship, until in some hour of need or weakness or sorrow--our friend trusts us absolutely, leans upon us, as it were puts his very life into our hand. The opposite of this is the pain of not being trusted. It may not be through any lack of love, or lack of confidence in our character or strength, but only through fear; yet the failure of a friend to trust us, whatever the cause--hurts our heart.

Jesus was human, and these experiences of our own, help us to understand his feeling when his disciples did not trust him. He was deeply grieved. We have an illustration in the story of Peter's trying to walk on the water. For a time he walked calmly on the waves--and then he began to sink. Jesus reached out his hand and saved his disciple from drowning, and then chided him: "O you of little faith, wherefore did you doubt?" Peter need not have failed, in his venture of faith. If only he had not doubted--he would not have failed.

But who has not had like failures in his own experience? We all are given opportunities for doing noble things. They may not be conspicuous things, like walking on the sea; oftentimes they are things which must be done where no eye but God's can see us. Yet, nevertheless, they are things in which we must show

faith and courage, self-control and fidelity--or fail and disappoint our Master. Too often we fail.

A temptation comes into our life. It is not easy to resist it. But there is a wonderful promise which says that God will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able. For a time we resist the temptation, but the stress becomes sorer and sorer. It is a crisis hour. We take our eyes off the Master--and fail.

We are set to witness for Christ in a certain place. He has no other one to stand for him there. All around us are those who do not know him. It is our mission to show to them the power and the beauty of the Christian life. They will not read the Bible, nor enter the church. They only scoff when it is intimated to them, that they need Christ. Our lives are the only interpretations of Christ which they can be brought to see. We cannot preach to them, for our words would be trodden underfoot. All we can do is just to continue faithful, to be gentle, patient, unselfish, true, good-tempered, and holy--day after day, week after week, without faltering. But it is not easy to do this. The smallest failure will be noted, and boasted in as a failure of Christianity. If we lose our patience, speak unadvisedly, reveal even for a few moments a bitter or jealous spirit, speak an untruth, do an unjust thing - if in anything we act in a manner unfitting a Christian, we have failed Christ.

We then confess that we have sinned; but do we realize what the full consequences of our failure may be? We are standing for Christ, and the faith of others in Christ is weakened by our faltering.

We have no adequate conception of the far reaching influence of our acts and words. We do not live for ourselves alone, on any single day. Our smallest deeds touch other lives, and set in motion currents of moral impression which shall roll on forever. We do not know what it may mean to Christ's cause on the earth, and to other human souls, for us to be true and faithful any little hour. We do not know what eyes are upon us in the common life of the common days--watching us, not critically, not hoping to find some flaw in us--but with most eager desire to learn, if indeed there is grace in Christ to help a soul to be faithful.

Thousands who are thus watching us, will turn to Christ--or turn away from Christ, according as we stand the test or do not stand it. Our victory means for them a belief in Christ's power to help; but our defeat means the weakening, perhaps the dying, of faith and hope in them. We never know what may depend on our being faithful and firm, any little hour, or what may be lost if we fail. There is never a moment when it makes no difference, whether we are true or not. We need God's help in the common days, just as much as in what seem to us great days.

One is called to a great trial of patience. It is a mother, and her home cares lay a sore strain upon her trembling nerves. There are a thousand things to try her. It is hard for her to keep always sweet and patient. Sometimes, in a moment of weakness and weariness, she loses her self-control, and speaks unadvisedly. It seems a little thing--to fail in temper. Nothing is more common. It is easy to soothe one's conscience, and allay the momentary feeling of shame, by thinking excusingly of one's tired nerves, and how hard it is to be always calm and collected. But meanwhile what has been the effect of the mother's harsh conduct on the tender lives of the children? Bad temper is usually unjust. Its hot, hasty words are unkind and hurtful, words which burn and pierce, words which should never have been spoken. Besides, the mother was standing for Christ before her children--and she has failed to show them the strength and peace and beauty of Christ.

Christ is very patient with our weakness--when he knows that we do what we can do; yet we should strive not to fail him in temper, even if the strain is great. It is in these pages of every day life that we must write our word or two--and we ought to write only what will truly interpret the spirit and life of our Master.

One is in deep sorrow. He wanted to be submissive to God's will. But in a moment of weakness and pain, he murmured. Or he was sick and shut away. It was hard to be quiet and still. There is a story of one, a godly man, who had frequent and violent paroxysms of most intense pain, which he could scarcely endure. He would lie on the floor in anguish, trying to bear it all sweetly and patiently. When the paroxysm was over he would ask his friends: "Did I complain? I did not want to complain." He was always grieved if he thought he had uttered a single word or groan of impatience.

Few of us think of such expressions of complaint, as being wrong. It is so common to give way to our feeling when we are suffering--that we come to regard it as an unavoidable consequence of our infirmity. But we need to remember that in all our experiences of pain, we are representing Christ; and it is quite as much our duty to be patient in suffering, as it is to be honest, truthful, and just in our dealings with our fellow men. A failure to be so, is a failure in most faithful witnessing for Christ. Nor do we know what may be the effect on the faith and trust of others, of our lack of quietness and confidence in suffering.

One who had seen a friend passing through a long season of intense pain with sustained joy, which often broke into song, said, "Now I know that there is a reality in the religion of Christ. My friend never could have endured her suffering as she did--if she had not been divinely helped." What would have been the effect on this same friend, if the sufferer had given way to fretting and complaining as so many Christians do in their experiences of pain?

Nor do we know how such failures - trivial, they seem to us - hurt our own life, and rob us of the deeper joy and the richer peace which might have been ours. We get so accustomed to chafing, worrying, complaining, irritation of temper, and impatience--that we rarely think of these things as being hurtful to our own souls. But there is not one of the failures of our infirmity which, besides its evil effect on those around us, does not also leave its marring or wounding on our own life, and hinder in some degree our growth and happiness as a Christian. There are acts of single moments, which cast a shadow over all life's after years. Moses was the meekest of men; but once, and just for a moment, in a great stress, and when tried by a most unreasonable people--he lost his patience, and spoke unadvised words. We know what that one minute's loss of meekness cost him. It prevented his entering into the land of promise, toward which for forty years he had been toiling.

How many such fateful minutes are there in the lives of the great masses of Christian, when, with the one thousandth part of the provocation of Moses, they fail far more sorely? We know not what sublime things we throw away--in our failures of patience, peace, and self control. "In your patience, you shall win your lives," said the Master. The losing of patience, therefore, may be the losing of all.

The lesson from all this, is that the failures of faith are far more serious, than we are apt to think them. They are sins against Christ, who is trusting us and testing us; sins against others, who are looking to see what Christ can do for a soul in stress or suffering, and whose faith is weakened, perhaps destroyed, by our faltering; and sins against our own life, leaving us maimed and hurt, and cutting us off from the full realization of the hopes of our life.

Peter began to sink because he took his eye off Christ, and let it fall on the waves around his feet. It was because his faith failed, that he sank. "Why did you doubt?" was the Master's pained question. The only secret of sustained victoriousness in living amid trials, temptations, and sufferings--is sustained faith. We need not be defeated. We may always overcome and be more than conquerors, but it can be only in him who loves us. He overcame the world--and in him we may have peace.

Shall we not then seek to be braver, truer, more steadfast in meeting these crucial hours of experience? They may come to us any day. We shall not know them by any special mark from the other hours. They will not announce themselves to us, nor call us to unusual watchfulness by any warning bell. They will come quietly, suddenly, unexpectedly. In the heart of your calmest, commonest day--there will be an hour when your life will be in peril. It may be a sore temptation; it may be in a surprise of joy; it may be in a keen disappointment; it may be in a bitter sorrow; or it may be in a pressure of duty or responsibility. To be ready for the experience, whatever it shall be, whenever it may come--you need to keep always near the Master, with your eye upon him. He walks the waters beside you--and you will never sink, unless your faith fails. Why should you fail?

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