

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to begin with a little two-question survey. First, how many of you have known or know someone whose name is Judas? Like you, I know no Judas's. Second, how many of you have known or know someone whose name is Peter? Like you, I know many Peter's.

But why is that? Why are there no Judas's but many Peter's? It's simple really. It's because Judas got down and gave up and Peter got up and went on and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn in your Bibles to the passage I read - Matthew 26:69-27:5.

FABULOUS FAILURES

Let's start with Judas Iscariot. Judas had the special privilege of being one of the original 12 disciples. His name is synonymous with betrayal though just like Benedict Arnold's is. For 30 pieces of silver, He betrayed Jesus by leading the chief priests and elders to Him.

Then there's Peter. He too was one of the original 12 disciples but was even more privileged than Judas was. Along with James and John, he formed the inner circle of friends with whom Jesus was the most intimate. Yet, according to 26:69-75, he also betrayed Him. He denied being a disciple of His three times. The third time, in verse 74, he cursed and swore and declared, *"I don't even know the man."*

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what Judas and Peter had in common. They both failed and failed miserably.

And so do we. All of us fail many times in many different ways. We sometimes fail to live up to God's expectations and commands. We sin in other words, which is the greatest failure of all. But not all of our failures are sins. Some are defeats. We fail to accomplish something. Others are mistakes. We fail to do something correctly.

I know a pastor, for instance, who had two weddings on the same day and got the names mixed up in the second of those. He married the man in the second wedding with the woman in the first.

We can't really deny it can we? All of us have failed and will continue to fail until the day that we die. That means that the real issue in life isn't "will we fail?" because we will. The real issue is "what will we do after we fail?" Each of us has two options in that regard.

GET DOWN AND GIVE UP

The first option is to get down and give up. That, according to 27:3-5, is what Judas did. Deeply regretting what he had done and thinking it unforgivable, he hanged himself. He got down and gave up, in other words, and that's what a lot of people do when they fail.

Getting down is a matter of perception. It means that people think incorrectly about two things – their failure and themselves. They think about their failure that it's final, fatal, or unredeemable. They think about themselves that they're failures. They get down.

Giving up is a matter of response. It means that people act incorrectly. Perception leads to response. Because they get down, they give up. They throw in the towel and stop trying. They call it quits and drop out. They turn their backs on what they need to do. They give up.

How many of you know the name Wrong Way Roy Riggles? It was New Year's Day 1929 and UCLA was playing Georgia Tech in the Rose Bowl. In the first half, Georgia Tech suddenly fumbled the football. UCLA's Roy Riggles picked it up and excitedly ran with it 65 yards – the wrong way. One of his teammates raced after him and finally tackled him, on their own two-yard line. Pinned against its own end zone, UCLA eventually had to punt. And wouldn't you know it, Tech blocked the punt and scored a safety. And wouldn't you know it, that safety proved to be the winning margin of Tech's victory in the game.

Anyway, at halftime, Riggles sat down in the corner of the locker room and cried like a baby. Halftime ended but he wouldn't go back out on the field when it did. He told his coach: *"I can't do it! I've ruined you, the University of California, and myself! I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life!"*

Notice what Riggles did. He got down. He thought incorrectly that his failure had ruined his university, his coach, and himself. That perception led to a response. He gave up and refused to play. That illustrates the first option we have when we fail. Get down and give up.

A person with whom I went to law school, David, wanted to be an attorney but failed the bar exam. He got down. He believed that failing it was fatal. He also gave up. He decided not to take it again.

You can see that this first option is a bad one. Getting down and giving up always diminishes and sometimes destroys our person and life.

GET UP AND GO ON

So don't get down and give up! Get up and go on instead. That's the second option we have when we fail. Get up and go on.

That's what Peter did. Do you realize that Peter's sin was just as grave as Judas's. In his book about the disciples, William McBirnie writes: *"Peter sinned as grievously as did Judas. Judas sold Jesus. Peter cursed Him. There is no essential difference except that Peter repented and Judas did not."* He's absolutely right about that.

Here's some food for thought. Suppose that Judas had repented and gone on to serve and die for Jesus. Also suppose that Peter had gone out and hanged himself. If they had, all of us would know many Judas's and no Peter's. The only difference between Judas and Peter, and it was a monumental one, was this. Judas didn't repent and Peter did. Judas got down and gave up. Peter got up and went on.

And so did Wrong Way Roy Riggles. When he said that he wasn't going back onto the field, his coach, Nibbs Price, put his hand on his shoulder and said: *"Roy, get up and go on; the game's only half over."* Well, that's exactly what Roy needed to hear. He went back out onto the field and played like he never played before. The UCLA players said that they had never seen anyone play with the intensity that he did.

Allegorically, you and I are Wrong Way Roy Riggles and God is our coach. When we sin, suffer a defeat, or make a mistake, God comes to

us, puts His hand on our shoulder, and says, *"Get up and go on. The game's only half over."* When He does, be like Peter not Judas. Don't get down and give up. Get up and go on instead.

Another person with whom I went to law school, Edward, also failed the bar exam. But unlike David, he got up. He believed failing it wasn't fatal. He also went on. He took it again, passed it, and ended up getting a good position in one of Akron's largest law firms.

So be like Peter, not Judas. Don't get down and give up when you fail. Get up and go on instead. Let me explain that to you.

GET UP

Getting up is about perception. It means that we think correctly or straight about two things – our failure and ourselves.

First, we think correctly about failure. We see it for what it really is and is not. John Maxwell lists six things that failure is and is not. #1 – Failure is not avoidable. That's essentially the first point I made today. All of have failed and will continue to. #2 – Failure is a process not an event. No one event can define us as a failure. If it could, no one would be named Peter today. #3 – Failure is subjective not objective. What determines if what we did is a failure isn't the size of the problem it creates, the amount of money it costs, or the amount of criticism it generates. It is our perception of and response to it. #4 – Failure isn't our enemy. The fact is that succeeding usually requires failing. As Musicologist Eloise Ristad says, *"When we give ourselves permission to fail, we give ourselves permission to excel."* #5 – Failure isn't irreversible. Texans say it this way, *"It doesn't matter how much milk you spill as long as you don't lose the cow."* Every failure is one step in the process of living. And #6 – Failure isn't a stigma. Failing doesn't ruin our reputation. Getting down and giving up does.

To understand and believe those six things is to think correctly about failure and that is the first thing that getting up is about.

Getting up is about a second thing – thinking straight about our

selves. Never take failure too personally! Just because we've failed doesn't make us failures. We must believe that in order to succeed.

Erma Bombeck, one of the most influential women in America, often claimed that her failures not her successes made her that. She'd then say this: *"What you have to tell yourself is, 'I'm not a failure. I failed at doing something.' There's a big difference."*

She's right. There's a big difference between failing and being a failure. Think correctly about yourself this way. #1 – Failing doesn't mean that I'm a loser. It just means that I haven't won yet. #2 – It doesn't mean that I'm a fool. It does mean that I have a lot of faith. #3 – It doesn't mean that I don't have it. It does mean that I have to do it differently. #4 – It doesn't mean that I'll never make it. It does mean that it's going to take longer. And finally #5 – It doesn't mean that God has abandoned me. It does mean that He wants to help me grow.

That's what it means to think correctly about our selves. We don't take our failures too personally. We believe that just because we've failed doesn't make us failures.

So that's the first thing that we should do when we fail. We should get up. We should think correctly about our failure and ourselves.

GO ON

The second thing that we should do is go on. Going on is about response. We act correctly. Our failure has knocked us down. But we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and like Roy Riggles, get back in the game. We do what we have to do to overcome or correct our failure.

That doesn't mean though that all we have to do is to keep on trying. All of you know the old motto, *"Try and try again."* But that isn't very good advice. The better motto is, *"Try, then stop and think, and try again."* It usually isn't enough to pick our selves up and just work harder and faster. We usually have to change directions. If we do what we've always done, we'll get what we've always gotten. So, we do what we haven't done. We keep on trying but in a different way.

My friend who failed and then passed the bar exam did just that. He thought about how he had prepared for it and realized that he needed to prepare differently and did. He tried again in the right way.

Now, we need to go on, as I just defined it, in everything, especially our relationship with Jesus. Many followers of His continue failing. They continue committing the same sins over and over again. Because they're sincere followers of His, they don't want to but do.

One I know, for instance, struggled with criticism. He'd get very angry and resentful whenever anyone criticized him. He always felt guilty though after he did and repented. He then redouble his efforts doing the things people told him to do – read the Bible, pray, and go to church.

It wasn't working though and here's why. He kept on trying but wasn't trying in the right way. It's a proven fact that just reading the Bible, praying, and going to church don't make us like Jesus. They're necessary but not enough and that's what I told him. Do what you've always done and you'll get what you've always gotten.

So I told him to do what he hadn't done. I explained to him some of the things I explained to you in our *First Things First Campaign*, like practicing the presence of God and practicing the spiritual disciplines. He then began doing those things and it's working. He isn't completely there yet but the Holy Spirit is in the process of transforming him. He doesn't have nearly the problem with criticism that he used to have.

He illustrates what you and I need to do as followers of Jesus. When we sin, get up. Think correctly about our sin and ourselves and ask God to forgive us. Also go on. Act correctly. Learn what we have to do to conquer our sin and do it. The Holy Spirit will then transform us and enable us to do just that – conquer it.

CONCLUSION

I close this morning with a question. What are you? Are you a Judas or a Peter? Don't be a Judas. Don't get down and give up! Be a Peter instead. Get up and go on!