

Baggage Claim – God’s Story Runs through Our Scars
Week 2: The Baggage of Failure

I. Maybe this isn’t a good thing to admit, but one of my favorite parts of College Game Day (Saturday mornings, ESPN) is the segment called:

[Slide]: #YouHadOneJobToDo!

A. I’m not sure what’s so refreshing about watching other people fail miserably on national TV, but every week I can’t turn away. These high-level college athletes that are far more capable than I, make these massive blunders and there’s just something about it that reminds us failure is a natural part of the human existence. It’s one thing to have an epic failure on the football field or basketball court. Maybe even to have an epic failure on a project at work. But those failures are usually overcome quickly and might even be something we can look back on and laugh. Other failures, though, are like baggage that we can’t seem to let go. There’s likely a failure or two in all of our past that if left unchecked has a way of eating at our soul and can hinder us from moving forward. But God doesn’t look at past failures; God looks at future potential and today we’re going to see God reclaim and redeem a heavy baggage of failure and unleash this person to be a force for the gospel.

B. The Disciple Peter has a nasty scar from his baggage of failure. And again, we’re going to see that Jesus loves Peter so much that Jesus will not let Peter be defined by this failure. But Jesus also loves Peter enough to not allow him to suppress or stuff the failure either. Remember the big idea of what this sermon series is all about:

[Slide]: God’s story runs through the scars!

1. God isn’t in the shaming business. Satan is in that business. Shame is intended to drive a wedge between us and a gracious God. So maybe today even the mention of the word “failure” makes us tense up in our spirit and makes us feel thoughts of unworthiness. Please, please, please, know that isn’t from God. God is in the restoration business. Sometimes, like we talked about last week, God loves us enough to break us down, but it’s always with the aim of building us back anew.

C. Just to give us a little context, Peter is one of the 12 disciples. Jesus is the Rabbi or teacher, but out of the 12 disciples Peter is the ringleader. He’s the first one to speak and the first one to act. Peter suffers from the condition we’d call today,

[Slide]: Lacking a filter.

1. Maybe you’ve met someone before that speaks first and thinks second? If you’ve never met someone like that before, then...hum... just saying! If you’re like that, you’re in good company today. Peter is that kind of guy. We’re going to be in John 21 today, but before we get there consider these verses from John 13:

John 13:36-38 (CSB) [Slide]: 36 “Lord,” Simon Peter said to him, “where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow later.” 37 “Lord,” Peter asked, “why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” 38 Jesus replied, “Will you lay down your life for me Truly I tell you, a rooster will not crow until you have denied me three times.”

2. Peter is writing a really big check pledging his loyalty to Jesus even to the point of death. What’s remarkable about this however is that Jesus already knows how the entire process is going to unfold and he still pursues Peter! “Peter, you can’t follow me now, but one day you will follow.” Jesus already sees the faithful follower that lies beyond the failure. How powerful is that! Our hearts are prone to be pulled into the past, but Jesus is inviting us to follow him into the future. Let’s pause here for a moment today. That baggage of failure that we’re trying to suppress or that scar of failure we’re trying to cover up with addiction or religious performance, let’s please be open to see the character of God. We can’t

hide anything from him past, present, or future. He sees our valleys and our victories and through it all his eyes are locked on us! Pursing us and calling us into relationship.

3. You might be familiar with how Peter's story unfolds. His confident declaration to lay down his life for Jesus falls flat. Not just once but three times Peter denies Jesus even to the point of denying his association to Jesus in a conversation with a young child. Luke's gospel tells us that after Peter's third denial, Peter sees Jesus being carried away and their eyes meet. We don't get a lot of details about the look on Jesus's face, but it must have been one filled with compassion for Peter because Mark's gospel tells us Peter broke down and wept. This confident, quick-tempered man found himself broken down and weeping at the sight of his Lord.
4. Thankfully this isn't the end of the story! Jesus is crucified, and the only human undeserving of death, died as a substitution for you and me. Substitutionary atonement is the fancy way to say that Jesus died in our place so that in Him we might be reconciled to God. Not only did Jesus die in our place, death had no claim over his life because death is a punishment for sin. Death couldn't keep Him because it held no power over Him. Not only did Jesus die in our place; He has made a way in Him for us to experience eternal life in the presence of God!
5. Peter doesn't have 2000 years of history like we do though, and he's processing these events as they unfold. Peter experiences as an eyewitness the empty tomb and he may have even experienced seeing the resurrected Lord prior to the event we're diving in deep to today, but one thing is clear. Peter is processing and he's having a difficult time dealing with his baggage of failure. Even though Jesus has made good on his promise to die and be resurrected, Peter is undoubtedly having a hard time moving past his failure. Here's how we know:

John 21:1-3 (CSB) [Slide]: 1 After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called "Twin"), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples were together. 3 "I'm going fishing," Simon Peter said to them. "We're coming with you," they told him. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

- a. We're all going to experience failure at some point, but there's failing forward and there's failing backward. At this point Peter is failing backward and he's bringing others along with him. Failure is disorienting and our natural inclination is to grab on to something secure. For Peter that's returning to his old way of life. Peter's seen the empty tomb, but he's jumped to the conclusion that his failure (and perhaps the failure of the other disciples) means they've been disqualified for future service.
- b. The way these next events unfold is nothing short of extraordinary! Remember Jesus's response to Peter back in John 13? Remember how we said that Jesus sees the victories and the valleys of our entire lives. Do we think Jesus made a mistake three years prior to these events when he chose his disciples? That's what Peter and some of the others are thinking at this very moment! We failed therefore Jesus must have made a mistake in our calling. Nope!!!

John 21:4-6 (CSB) [Slide]: 4 When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. 5 "Friends," Jesus called to them, "you don't have any fish, do you?" "No," they answered. 6 "Cast the net on the right side of the boat," he told them, "and you'll find some." So they did, and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish. 7 The disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

- c. These events are so significant because Jesus is meeting these men in their failure and hits them with the ultimate déjà vu experience! What were these men doing when Jesus called them three years ago? They were fishing! Jesus is coming in with a little humor and light jab by asking them a rhetorical question about not having any fish. These guys have been fishing all night, they're hungry, tired, and frustrated and their physical condition is probably representative of their spiritual and emotional state. Jesus reminds them of the one thing fisherman never like to admit that they've failed to catch anything. Before my grandfather died, I'd call and check in and most of the time he'd

be fishing. The one question he never wanted me to ask was, “have you caught anything?” Just the very question was insulting to my grandfather, and he’d quickly reply every time, “boy, if I went fishing in a bathtub, I’d catch something!”

d. Jesus meets them in their failure, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually by taking them back to the moment of their calling! He instructs them to drop their nets on the right side and just like years before they bring in the catch of a lifetime. Peter recognizes that it’s the Lord, but he also recognizes the significance of the events! The Lord is taking him back to the moment of his calling to remind Peter that he’s seen the valleys and victories all along and he didn’t make a mistake. God doesn’t define us by past failures but by future potential.

6. For Peter though the scar runs a bit deeper. He was the leader of the disciples and had looked Jesus in the eyes and promised to stay by his side. At the darkest hour, Peter failed to make good on his promise and denied the Lord. Not only was Jesus taking them back to the moment of their calling, for Peter he had to confront the failure to move forward. Peter had sinned in his denial and when it comes to God’s story through our scars, we can never treat sin as inconsequential. Jesus certainly doesn’t and has his own personal scars to prove it! Jesus is going to press into Peter’s baggage because it’s the only way to move forward.

John 21:9-11 (CSB) [Slide]: 9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. 10 “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus told them. 11 So Simon Peter climbed up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish- 153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.

a. Jesus, you had to go there! Remember Jesus sees the valleys and the victories before we ever come into existence and Jesus is taking Peter back to the valley and transforming it into a victory. God’s story running through the scars! The last time Peter was around a charcoal fire was the night he denied Jesus. I love the vividness of God’s word in recreating this scene because we can almost put ourselves in Peter’s position as the smell and sounds of the crackling charcoal fire take him back to the events the prior week. But now he’s surrounded by Jesus and his fellow disciples and it’s important that Jesus reinstate his leader from his public denial by way of public confession.

John 21:15-17 (CSB) [Slide]: 15 When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.” “Feed my lambs,” he told him. 16 A second time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.” “Shepherd my sheep,” he told him. 17 “He asked him a third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said.

b. There’s so much going on in this exchange and we could probably take a whole sermon series just to look at the different perspectives on this passage. But remember the main emphasis of this exchange is to turn a valley in Peter’s life into a victory. Peter as the leader of the disciples plays a vital role and Jesus loves him too much for Peter to be overtaken by the baggage of failure. Jesus begins by asking Peter a question about love. We’ve got a lot of misconceptions about the content of love in our culture, but love in this passage isn’t far removed from the idea of:

[Slide]: Loyalty

c. The “these” in the passage isn’t clear but scholars are split on whether the “these” refers to fish or to the other disciples. I think the ambiguity is probably intentional but the public confession with the other disciples makes me lean more toward the “these” as representing Peter’s fellow disciples. Jesus is working through Peter’s scars to make him into the leader Jesus has seen all along. A Peter that’s a bit humbler and slower to speak. We know by the end of the passage that Peter is going to have a unique calling and his charge to follow will come at a great cost. One day Peter’s hands will be stretched out as his Lord’s were by way of crucifixion.

d. But what's really the key indicator that Jesus has worked through Peter's scars to reclaim and reframe this baggage of failure? Peter's response to Jesus's question is striking! Each time Peter responded in a similar way that was unpacking this deep-seated baggage and cleansing his soul. Listen again to how the dialogue ends:

John 21:17b (CSB) [Slide]: Peter said, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

e. Peter is no longer looking to his own merits and own justification to prove his loyalty to the Lord. He's also no longer comparing himself to anyone that is around him. His eyes are locked in on his Lord! The basis of Peter's loyalty is no longer based off his actions or inactions but on the loyal love that has been poured out on him by his Lord, Jesus Christ! That is the gamechanger! That can be a gamechanger for you today too!

D. One day we're all going to stand in the presence of God, and I believe he's just going to ask us one question. That question is this:

[Slide]: Do you know that I love you?

1. Jesus was asking Peter in this moment if Peter loved him, but Peter doesn't give an answer based off Peter's loyalty to Jesus. Peter gives an answer based on Jesus's loyalty to Peter! We must understand this, or we'll constantly be measuring ourselves against our successes and failures. And here's the little secret that none of us like to admit, we're all fickle human beings and none of us want to be judged based on our successes and failures because none of us add up. This is a grace party that none of us deserve to be at and I believe it was in this very moment by the seashore that it finally clicked for Peter. It took his baggage of failure and this great valley and turned it into his greatest victory. How awesome is our God!

2. After Jesus shared with Peter what road would lie ahead, Jesus looks at Peter and told him the same words he shared with him three years prior. Peter's calling wasn't a mistake. Past failures don't define us when we serve a God that's always looking at future potential. But here're the words that came out of Jesus's mouth that day and landed on the ears of Peter:

[Slide]: "Follow me." -Jesus

E. Peter had a decision to make just like we do. Will we be defined by the baggage of failure or will we accept the invitation of Jesus to, "follow me!" Will we hold on to past failure or will we recognize that we serve a loyal God, who is faithful to forgive, and invites us to follow. God saw the big picture while you were in your mother's womb, valleys and victories, and he's called you and chosen you to be his own. It's time to follow.