
Alright. Well, happy Easter to everybody. I want to welcome everybody joining us across all of our physical locations and anybody tuning in online. I know we have a number of people who are on spring break right now, and we are trying to think happy thoughts about you. We are really super thankful that technology connects us together.

Man, can I just say that this is the fullest this room has been in a long time. It's just pretty amazing. And I just want to thank you for being here today, especially if this is your first time. We are thrilled that you are here.

I want to encourage you, if you have a Bible, or maybe a device with a Bible on it to find John 21. John, chapter 21 is where we are going to spend our time together today.

I think that most of you would probably agree with me when I say that not all words in the English language carry the same amount of emotional weight. That's why, when you're talking to somebody you really love and care about, maybe you're in a really meaningful conversation, you choose your words carefully, because some words carry more emotional weight than others.

And so it's with that in mind that I am kind of curious today if there is some sort of strong emotional response that this word invokes for you. It's the word:

FAILURE

I just want to know—is there maybe a memory, an experience, is there an emotion, maybe even a sensation that is connected to that word?

Now, as I was preparing for this message, I googled failure and I was just trying to find out as much as I could about this word. And I found one of these graphs—no this is not an increase of cases and variance, alright? We're sick of that. This is actually a graph about the usage of the word failure dating all the way back to 1800.

I don't know what it is, but I just find this stuff fascinating. You can see, since 1800 just a steady increase of the usage of the word failure to it's peak and then about 20 or 30 years ago we started to use it less and less. I just find that interesting.

I can understand why. Failure is not really a fun word. It's not really a word that any of us want to be associated with our or described as. I mean, just the sound of it—failure—sounds so final.

When I was 16—my 16th birthday was on a Friday. And I invited a bunch of friends over to my house that night. We were going to have some pizza, watch some movies, spend the night. And I was going to go get my driver's test the day I turned 16. I don't know how many of you were like me, but I couldn't wait to get it.

I not only invited all of my friends over that night, I told them, "Hey, once I get my driver's license, I'll come pick all of you up. You know where this story is going, don't you?"

I did pretty well on the driver's test. I even nailed the parallel parking, which I was really, really nervous about. What tripped me up though, was when we came to a red light and the instructor very calmly told me to turn left. And for the life of me, I could not remember if you could make a left turn after a stop at a red light or if it was supposed to be a right turn. I couldn't remember.

So, I gambled. He made it sound like he wanted me to go. There was nobody coming. I looked left. I looked right. I was like, "Well, okay. Here we go." So I ventured out into the intersection and I turned left. And his head kind of popped up and he was like, "Was that a red light?" I so badly wanted to lie. But I didn't. I told him the truth. And he said, "That's what I thought."

He made a little mark on his clip board and then he proceeded to give me some more directions. And pretty soon I realized that he was guiding us back to the DMV, which was so annoying, right? "Just go ahead and tell me, man." But he didn't.

He took us back to the DMV. We pulled into the parking lot and he looked at me and he said the words that just kind of struck me right to my 16-year-old soul—failed. It just felt so final. I had to wait all weekend to go retest. I had to call all of my friends. I was like, "Hey, I can't come and pick you up."

Now, it's one thing to experience failure like that—in fact, I would say that many of us would probably go... And in my google search of failure I saw this all over the place, all kinds of inspirational quotes around failure. You want to know who was at the top? Michael Jordan.

He was like, "I have missed almost 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and I've missed. I have failed over and over and over..." Don't you feel so sorry for him? And he goes, "But that is why I have succeeded."

Oh, man. That is so inspirational. And yet, why is it at times when we experience failure it doesn't feel all that inspirational?

Many of you listening to this right now who have a little bit of age and experience under your belt, you might even go as far to say, "Failure is not a bad thing. Failure is when we learn and grow and mature the most. We've got to fail forward." And I would agree with you. In fact, I'd be suspicious of anybody who hasn't experienced very much failure in their life, because failure is the way that you grow, for sure.

Let's just keep that out on the table.

But I think all of us would agree that there is a very real difference between experiencing failure and feeling like one. That's a different thing. Here's the confusing thing in the culture in which we live. If we slip and fail, the culture pounces. If you slip up and fail, maybe other people around you they say things that just feel so condemning to your soul. All of us are going to fail. Nobody should feel like a failure.

And I think that's been one of the things that has been so challenging about this past year. All of us, I really do believe, are giving it our best. We're trying as hard as we can. And yet, we just have this feeling of failure, like, "I'm giving all of this effort and it doesn't feel like I'm accomplishing what I want to accomplish."

And it's not like you don't care. You care. You love that person. You love your job. You love what's happening, but you're putting in all of this effort and it doesn't feel like you're getting anywhere.

So, I'm just wondering if there is anybody who feels a little bit like I have over the past year, maybe you just feel like a failure at work, you feel like a failure as a husband, you feel like a failure as a wife, you feel like you're failing your kids. And it's just this dark cloud of discouragement that is hanging over you.

Can I just go ahead and get it on the table? You are not alone. You are in good company with a bunch of other people who are in the same struggle. And we can really relate to the guy who I want to talk about today, who Jesus has a conversation with at a beach right after resurrection Sunday. His name is Peter.

Now, I love Peter because Peter wears his emotions on his sleeve. Peter is bold. Peter would be an eight on the enneagram. He is a bold kind of a guy. He's like, "Calling shotgun." That's the kind of Peter we're talking about. He's the kind of guy that we have.

Peter was a fisherman. And Jesus called him out of that profession to follow him full time. And Peter was always the first one to volunteer, which is why it sort of knocked him off balance when Jesus gathers the disciples and Peter around him the night before his arrest and crucifixion. And he tells them that all of them are going to betray him. They are all going to bail on him. And Peter would have none of it.

In fact, listen to how Mark records it:

"Peter said to him, 'Jesus you need to know, 'Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will.' And you know what? I think Peter meant it. I think Peter thought that was true. Like, 'Man, there is no way. I can't even imagine the scenario, that even if everyone else bails, I never will.'"

And: “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me.’” And in typical Peter fashion, he would have none of it. Emphatically he said: “No!... Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!”

Now, John tells us that right after this, in the Garden of Gethsemane that the Roman soldiers come to arrest Jesus and that’s when Peter would have been on guard. Peter was like, “Well, this has to be the scenario where if I’m going to deny him, this would be it.” These guys have shown up in force. So Peter over-reacts and there is a Roman soldier by the name of Malcus who steps forward to arrest Jesus, and maybe some of you remember the story. Peter draws his sword and swings at him, and, in my opinion, I think he missed. I don’t think he was aiming for his ear. I think he was probably aiming for something a little more vital. But he misses and he hits the ear.

And instead of a chest bump and an atta-a-boy from Jesus, Jesus is annoyed with him and he’s like, “Peter, don’t do that. Stop. Put your sword away.” And he reaches down, takes the ear and slaps it on Malcus’ head like a lego block. Just imagine if you’re Malcus, he’s got to arrest Jesus after that.

And I think that knocked Peter off balance. We come to verse 15 of John, chapter 18 and it says:

“Simon Peter followed Jesus,” so he’s been arrested, “as did another of the disciples.” This would be John, by the way. John had this habit of talking about himself in the third person, it’s hilarious. And he’s got a competitive thing going on with Peter. You’ll see it in the passage. It says:

“That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest’s courtyard with Jesus. Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest...” that would be John, he knows the bouncer, alright? He, “...spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in.”

So Peter comes into the courtyard and then this woman asked him this question, “You’re not one of that man’s disciples, are you?”

Now, just the way that this question is phrased, it makes it impossible to say yes. It’s kind of like, “You’re not going to eat all of that, are you?”

“Well, I was till you asked the question that way.”

“You’re not going to watch that whole series on Netflix and sit on the couch all day, are you?”

“Well, it crossed my mind.”

And the woman says, “*You’re not one of his disciples, are you?*” The woman didn’t have a sword. She wasn’t coming at him. It was a very innocent question. And Peter says: “*No...I am not.*”

And then John goes on to explain this scene. And I want you to visualize it with me. They are in the courtyard, it's after dark. And it says:

"Because it was cold, the household servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire. They stood around it, warming themselves, and Peter stood with them, warming himself."

Now, you need to understand that Jesus has been ushered away. He's being tried, unfairly. And John says that while all of that is happening:

"Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, 'You're not one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it," number two. "...saying, 'No, I am not.'"

"But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Didn't I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?'" I love that. The guy's like, "I mean, I never forget a face, especially the face of the guy who cut off my cousin's ear." "Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed."

Now the way that John kind of describes the three denials makes it sound somewhat casual. Kind of a casual question, "Don't you know him?" "No, I don't." That's somewhat passive, but the way that Mark describes all of this, Mark says that Peter gets so flustered and so emotional that he curses at his denial. In other words, it's almost a way for him to say, "Would a disciple of Jesus talk this?" And it says right after that third denial and the rooster crowed:

"Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind:" in quotes, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me." And this is the moment I want you to feel, Peter, "...broke down and wept."

That's the moment. Not only had he failed, he felt like a failure. And I'm just wondering if there is anybody listening to this and you can resonate. Now, you haven't denied Jesus three times, but maybe you denied him by the way that live. Maybe you denied him by your words and your actions.

Maybe you've been trying really hard, but things have fallen apart. Maybe that thing that you've been trying to keep hidden has eventually come to the surface. Maybe your marriage is falling apart. Maybe that addiction that you thought you had beat has raised its ugly head once again.

Regardless of what ever your failure is, it's not really all that important. The question is: what do you do with it? What do you do with your failures in life? You ever wonder, "How am I going to come back from this? My reputation is ruined. I don't know that I can show my face with that group of people. I don't know that anybody..."

"I broke the trust of my spouse. I don't know how I'm ever going to get that back."

Do you know what I think the interaction or the conversation that Peter thought about in this moment was one recorded in Matthew 16 where Jesus gathers Peter and the other disciples around him and he says, "Who do people say that I am?" and they say, "Well, some say John the Baptist. Some say Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." And Jesus says, "Well, who do you say that I am?"

And Peter is the first one to answer. He says, "Oh, man. You're the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus looks at him and he says: Peter, you're a rock:

“and upon this rock I will build my church,” meaning you go to the book of Acts, Peter is all over it. Jesus uses Peter in an incredible way to establish the church. He preaches the paint off of the walls in Acts and 3,000 people responded to Jesus. That’s what Jesus is referring to.

I think that immediately Peter looked at John and said, “Hey, did you hear what he said about me? You’re the disciple Jesus loves. I’m the rock. I’ll take it.” And I think he walked with a little bit of a swag in his step after that.

Here’s what I think went down when the rooster crowed. Peter thought about that conversation and he thought, “Some rock I am. I don’t know that I’ll ever be able to show my face in Jerusalem ever again. I’ll never preach another sermon ever again. I guess I’ll just go back to fishing.”

Church history tells us that every time a rooster would crow, Peter would tear up, because it had a strong emotional connection to him. It reminded him of his failure.

The question is: how do you come back from that? The question is: what do you do with that—with that inner critic, those words of condemnation. People who won’t ever let you live your past down?

Well, in John, chapter 20 he tells us that the tomb is empty, Jesus has resurrected, this is what Easter is all about. And afterward Jesus appears to the disciples. But you’ve got to know that Jesus and Peter are going to come face to face once again.

Luke tells us that they made eye contact across the flames of that charcoal fire in the courtyard. The question is, when they make eye contact once again how is that conversation going to go down? I mean, are they just going to bump in to each other on the streets of Jerusalem after the resurrection? That would be kind of awkward. “Hey, Pete. How’s it going?”

“Hey, JC.”

See, that’s not how it went down. Peter wasn’t actually anywhere near Jerusalem. He couldn’t show his face there. You want to know where he was, he was at the Sea of Galilee.

John tells us this. Later Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. Well, the Sea of Galilee was 70 miles away. If you were to go there today, travel from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee, it would be a two-and-a-half-hour bus ride, which tells me that Jesus didn’t just casually bump into Peter afterward, Jesus pursued him. Jesus went out of his way to have a conversation with Peter.

And Peter had gone back to fishing. He and the disciples are out, they are fishing through the night. They hadn’t caught anything. If you read the passage yourself, it will tell you that Jesus shows up and says, “Hey, man. Cast your nets on the other side.” And they catch a whole bunch of fish. That’s reminiscent of when Jesus called Peter into ministry to begin with.

I want to pick this up in verse 7:

“Then the disciple Jesus loved,” that’s John, “said to Peter, ‘It’s the Lord!’” They are in the boat. “‘It’s the Lord!’” They recognized him. He’s on the shore. “When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work),” he didn’t want to get his clothes wet, “jumped into the water, and headed to shore. The others stayed with the boat and pulled the loaded net to the shore, for they were only about a hundred yards from shore.”

I love this. Peter, in typical Peter fashion jumps into the water to swim to Jesus. It's only a 100-yard swim. Verse 9:

"When they got there," I love this scene, "they found breakfast waiting for them—fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread. 'Bring some of the fish you've just caught,'" Jesus said. Now, the word for charcoal is only used twice in the New Testament. This word for charcoal is mentioned by the fire that they made in the courtyard, in the darkness of that evil night when Peter denied Jesus three times, and now it is mentioned again in the new morning of brand-new possibilities. The first is marked by failure, the second is marked by grace.

What's happening here? Jesus is recreating the moment to bring Peter back from failure. And it says:

"After breakfast," on the beach, "Jesus asked Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' Peter replied, 'you know I love you.' 'Then feed my lambs,'" translation, you'll be a rock again. "Jesus repeated the question: 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' 'Yes, Lord...you know I love you.'"

"Then take care of my sheep'... A third time he asked him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, 'Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Then feed my sheep.'"

What's going on here? Well, I think maybe the obvious connection is that there were three questions at denial and now there are three questions of reinstatement. Jesus is going one by one through these and he's giving Peter an opportunity to come back from failure.

It says that Peter was hurt? Well, why would he be hurt? One interesting thing that is sort of lost on us in the English translation is that we just have one word for love. "Peter, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? But in the original language Jesus is using a different word for love than what Peter responds with.

So the original language, Jesus says to Peter, "Peter, do you agapao me?" And agapao was a love defined by reason and intellect. It's like the noblest kind of love. And Peter responds with, "Well, I phileo you." Which means a love of just feeling. It was a lesser form of love. So in other words he's like, "Hey, Peter do you agapao me?" "Well, I phileo you."

It's kind of like this. Guys, how many of you have ever worked up the nerve to tell that special girl that you love her for the first time. You're all nervous. Your palms are sweaty. You're in the car and you're like, "I love you." And she responds, "Thank you." It's kind of like that. Not exactly the response you were looking for.

And I think the reason why Peter responds this way is because he felt like he couldn't respond with agapao. It was like, "I don't deserve to. Jesus, clearly, I denied you three times. I don't know that I'm worthy to agapao you." I think that is what he is saying. And Jesus is drawing it out of him. Jesus is bringing him back from his failure over a charcoal fire.

Now, I don't know what it is about a fire that just stimulates great conversation. Wouldn't you agree with that? We have people come over to our house and oftentimes, after dinner or whatever, we'll say, "Hey, you want to go out to the back yard and sit around the fire?"

I've been with groups of men where we'll just sit around the fire and guys who will oftentimes clam up and not share any emotions, they'll just spill it around a camp fire.

So, I'm wondering if it was very intentional that Jesus built a fire on the beach. And it's one of my favorite interactions that Jesus has because of this reason. It shows the heart of our Heavenly Father.

I don't know if any of you feel like me, but there are times... I've grown up in church and I've been a Christ follower for as long as I can remember and yet, even then, there are these moments when I know that God loves me, I'm just not sure if he likes me, because I've failed so many times, I've made so many commitments that I have broken. I just keep falling short over and over again.

And there are so many people who feel like the Bible is a rule book with all of these rules and regulations. If you can just get your act cleaned up and cross all of your t's and dot all of your i's then maybe God might receive you.

But the heart of our Heavenly Father is a God who goes 70 miles outside of his way to build a fire on the beach to make breakfast for a man who betrayed him, who could do nothing for him in return, but he wanted to bring him back from his failure.

So if Peter was sitting around a fire with us today, what do you think he would say? How do you think he would encourage us? Well, I think most definitely he would encourage us. I think he might say a couple of things. We know this because he wrote a little, tiny letter at the end of the New Testament called 1 Peter. And in 1 Peter, chapter 5 he writes these words. He says, "Stay alert." I think he would encourage us with that.

I think one of the reasons why this last year has been so hard is that it has shown all of us that we have a very real enemy coming after our marriages, our relationships, our mental health, our emotions—he wants to wreck our lives. And Peter, I think, would say, "Hey, man. Stay alert. If you think you can't fail, think again. We are all just one or two decisions away from stupid." I think he would also say, "Stand firm."

Any of you ever teach a little kid, maybe it's your own child or maybe your grandchild to walk and they are just bobbling around, and they fall down? How many of you respond with, "Just stay down."? No, what's the initial reaction, "Come on. Get back up. You can do it again."

I think there are so many of us who have fallen, and the world says, "Stay down!" And we even think to ourselves, that's what God wants us to do. He wants us to stay down. Jesus, by his Spirit, beckons us to stand up. Somebody needs to hear this today, "Get up!" Get up. Your failure doesn't define you.

I think another thing Peter would encourage us with is that he would say, "Hey, listen. The way that you fail forward is by recognizing that in the midst of failure, it reveals some things. In fact, it's a test of sorts. It reveals where you've been putting your trust all along."

Here's the thing. I think when Jesus said, "Peter, you're going to deny me three times." And he said, "No, I won't. I'll die with you before that happens." I think that he meant it.

The challenge was that he was trusting too much in his own will power. He was trusting too much in his own identity. And that got stripped from him and he realized, "I've been putting my trust in the wrong things."

So, when things get tested it reveals, really, the substance of where you've been putting your trust all along.

I was reading an article this last week about a dating website and on their form, as you go on there to fill it out, they have this question. And the question is: Are you a genius? Imagine that. And five out of 10 people of a certain gender, men, answered and said, "Yes. Well, now that you bring it up, I do happen to be a genius."

You know, statistically only one out of 1,000 of us can say that. Do you know what that means? That means that five out of 10 men genuinely believe that they are one out of 1,000.

Now, why would they say that? I think it's because they've never been tested, alright? And I think if there was a follow-up question on the form, "Are you a genius?" "Yes." "Well, what test have you taken?" And I think most of those men would say, "Well, you see, there's this triangle game at Cracker Barrel. And on a relatively consistent basis—two pegs. Two pegs. I think that tells you all you need to know."

See, when times of testing come, that's when things get revealed. That's what I think many of us have found for ourselves over this past pandemic year—that has been so hard. And maybe some of the things that we have previously been putting our trust or our confidence in, what's happened is that they have proven to be not so stable after all. And that is incredibly disorienting.

Maybe the things that we've put our identity in have fallen apart. And I think a natural reaction for any of us, when we fail or experience failure, is to feel ashamed or to feel shame and we don't know what to do with it, so we hide. And we think, "Well, if people really knew this about me, they would reject me." So you make sure nobody knows.

Or maybe it leaks, and people do know... Have you just noticed how mean we are to each other? Especially online. We just take these shots at each other and tell each other to stay down.

See, here's the thing that I want you to hear and to feel loud and clear today on this resurrection Sunday. It's that Jesus Christ came into this world to bring us back from our failure. That's why he came.

The Bible is not a story about God accepting good people. It's a story about God forgiving bad people. The Bible is not a story about God affirming where we are, but coming around us and saying, "Let me restore you to what you can be." We are as underserving as we could possibly be of his love and his grace and his mercy. But those things are exactly what he came to give us.

And Jesus knew exactly what he would find in the human heart. Jesus was not surprised at all at Peter's denial. He predicted it. You know what else he predicted? Peter's restoration. You can read about that in Luke. None of it surprised him.

Jesus didn't show up on earth 2,000 years ago and send a message back to God and say, "Whoa, it is way worse than we thought, send reinforcements." He knew exactly what he would find in the human heart. And that's precisely why he came.

I get heart-broken every time I read this comment online or every time I hear somebody say, “Well, the Bible is just a rule book designed to kind of keep us away from a God.” Or, “It’s just a bunch of holier than thou Christians who are just looking...” That just breaks my heart because that is not the message of God’s word at all.

The message of God’s word is, “Hey, listen. You are not too far gone.” And there is a God who has paid it all. He’s done all of the heavy lifting. You just need to respond.

Several years ago I read about this Bible translator in Papua New Guinea who was translating the Bible into the language of a remote village that had never had a Bible before. It was a monumental project, and this guy gets done translating the whole Bible.

And the day comes for them to pass out all of the Bibles to the villagers. Now these Bibles were printed on really thin pieces of paper. Most Bibles, the paper is very, very thin.

So as he is going to hand out these Bibles there was a man who comes up out of the crowd and it was very clear that he was smoking something or on something. And he said, through the translator, “I just want you to know that I’m really not interested in the Bible for what it says, I’m interested in the Bible for all of those pages, because they would make really good smoking paper. I can just line them with whatever I want to smoke and wrap it. And that’s why I want it.”

So the Bible translator, being quick on his feet, said, “Well, I’d be happy to give you one of these Bibles. I’ll make you a deal.” He said, “Read a page before you smoke a page.”

Years later at a conference, this man walks up to the Bible translator and he says, “Hey, I don’t know if you remember me or not, but I’m the guy you gave that Bible to all those years ago. I’ve since given my life to Christ. I’m one of the leaders in the church in this village.”

And he said, “Man, tell me your story. What happened?” And he goes, “Well, I smoked Matthew. And then I smoked Mark. And then I smoked Luke.” And then he said this with tears in his eyes. He said, “When I got in to the gospel of John, and I read ‘For God so loved the world,’ I realized that it was written to me. For God so loved me. And I could smoke no longer.”

Listen, I don’t know why you are here today or why you tuned in. Easter typically is the highest attended week of the year. And I think a lot of that has to do—it’s a cultural holiday, you’re spending the day with family and maybe you’ll go have lunch together so—you thought you were going to Cracker Barrel, but you came here first. Maybe that is why you are here. I don’t know.

Maybe you’re not typically much of a church person, you’re not quite sure that you believe any of this. I just want you to know I totally get it. And I’m so glad that you are here. I just want you to know that for anyone who has ever experienced failure or felt failure or whoever came to church and felt like they didn’t belong, I just want you to know that there is the wonder of Easter.

And the wonder of Easter is simply this: Easter isn’t just the recognition of when Jesus was resurrected. It is the declaration that Jesus **is** resurrection. It’s a statement. He walked out of a tomb to give you hope. He emptied his grave so that you can lift your head.

What that means is that he brings dead things back to life. He brings restoration to things that were one time very, very broken. He turns mourning into dancing, Psalm, chapter 30 tells us. He turns hopelessness into fullness. He creates four-lane highways out of dead-end cul-de-sacs. He brings you and me and other people who feel unworthy of it back from failure.

Listen to me. There is a reason why our symbol of redemption and restoration and hope is a cross, not a ladder. Jesus didn't say, "Get to work." Jesus said, "It is finished." He did all of the heavy lifting on the cross.

And so, what do we do with our failure? Well, I love how John describes it in 1 John, chapter 1. He says:

"If we confess our sins," meaning we don't harbor them any longer. I like to think about it this way, I'm not going to work the spotlight. I'm going to step into the light. Many of us just work the spotlight. We just kind of put the light on the areas of our lives that we're okay letting other people see. John says, "No, no, no. Just step into the light and here's what will happen."

"God will be faithful and just to forgive and cleanse sins."

And then in chapter two he says, "Hey, I'm telling you all of this so that you won't sin, but if you do," I'm so glad he said that "if you do," because we will, "we have an advocate," that's the word that he uses to describe Jesus, "he's an advocate who pleads our case before the Father."

So, that means that every time you slip up, every time you fail, every time you sin—have you ever wondered that?

Maybe some of you were baptized in church camp as you were growing up as a kid. Or maybe you gave your life to Christ before you headed off to college. But since that day, your life has been a mess. And your kind of like, "Well, I don't know what to do with that anymore, because I've given my life to God, but I've continued to make a mess of things."

Here's what happens. Satan and your conscience are making claims of condemnation against you, but Jesus has continued to be your advocate in the courtroom of heaven pleading his case. The blood of Jesus is there every day crying out for the acquittal of those for whom he died.

So, every time you sin, Satan and your conscience, your inner critic, kind of rise up within you and say, "See, you're not worthy of this. You're a failure. You sinned again and sin deserves death."

And you know what happens? Jesus objects, "May I approach the bench? Yes, Aaron has failed, and he has sinned, and sin deserves death, but I already went to the cross and paid for that sin. When I was nailed to that cross, Aaron's sin was nailed there with me, so God, it wouldn't be just for you to punish the same sin twice. So, I'm not asking for mercy, I'm demanding justice. Aaron must be forgiven."

Listen to me. That happens every time you fail. That happens every time you sin. It's what it means to continue to put your trust in Jesus. It doesn't mean that you're not going to fall, it means, "Get up!" Get up. You have an advocate with God the Father.

And what we are trying to do as a church is, we are trying to take that same grace that is demonstrated in the court room of heaven and make it a felt reality here on earth.

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. In other words, Jesus says, “I am not here for people who think they are doing pretty good. I’m here for those who know that they are not enough.” It’s called redemption and restoration. It’s one of my favorite things.

I was in college and I had a buddy who rebuilt wrecked cars as kind of a side gig. So what would happen is that he would fix up a car, drive it for several months and while he was driving it, he’d buy another wrecked car, fix that one up and then sell it. And he did that as kind of a part time job in college.

Every now and then I would go to the salvage yard and we would just walk through and look at all of these wrecked cars that would likely never see the road again. What would happen is, he would pick one out, he would take it, he would rebuild it. And I remember at times I’d be like, “I can’t even believe this is the same car.”

I don’t know what it is about restoration and redemption of things that have been broken, but I love those fixer upper shows, because I think that what is happening is that my soul is crying out for that. And yours is as well.

The wonder of Easter is that there is a God who loves you so much that he pursued you to earth, and he pursues you to your own Sea of Galilee, your own beach-side conversation.

Maybe some of you need to have that today with Jesus, because, figuratively speaking, he made you a charcoal fire on the beach. What business does he need to do with you today? What conversation would he have? What words of hope would he give?

I think he would look at us with tenderness and compassion and moistness in his eyes and he would say, “I love you so much. Don’t stay down. Get up.” So the way that we get up, the Bible teaches, is that we just simply stop trusting in ourselves and put our trust in him. It’s called believe. We believe that he is God’s Son. We believe that he died on the cross for our sins. We believe that he walked out of the grave.

We believe he’s advocating on our behalf. We confess our sins. We stop working the spotlight and step into the light. We repent, which means... All repentance is... All if my life I’ve said it this way, “Instead of making a slight, little detour, I’m doing an about face.”

And then the fourth thing is that we’re baptized. And baptism is an external picture of what’s happening to us internally. It’s our own death, burial, and resurrection. We’re identifying with Jesus in that way. We’re being lowered into the water as somebody who is an old creation, being resurrected as someone new.

I love the imagery of baptism. We’ve done thousands of baptisms over the years and every single time, it never gets old to look into somebody’s eyes—I was in that tank last night, we baptized like 20 some odd people last night—it’s real. And it’s kind of weird because you’re dunking a grown adult in front of other people.

I understand why you would push back against it because it's intimidating, and it feels awkward and weird. And I think the reason why God gave it to us is because we all need something tangible to point to and it confronts our pride.

Maybe today some of you need to do it. Maybe today before your internal attorney can talk you out of it, you just need to step out from where you are. And if you believe and if you're ready to confess, and if you're ready to do an about face from the direction your life is headed, then you're ready for baptism.

You're putting your trust, not in yourself, in your own identity and all of those things you were previously leaning your weight against, and you're putting it toward him. And you're taking Jesus up on his offer to come back from failure. Maybe today that's a step you need to take.

And listen to me. After your baptism, I hope that you won't sin. But when you do, you have an advocate with God the Father through Jesus Christ pleading your case who says, "There is nobody too far gone. There is nobody whose life is too wrecked. There is nobody who is too much of a failure for my grace not to reach.

So today some are going to step from darkness to light. And we're going to celebrate. And today some are going to step out of failure to new beginnings. We're going to cheer them on. Some are going to step from death to life—not because of anything that they do, it's not a ladder, it's a cross. Jesus has already done the work. They're just simply responding to the advocacy of our Heavenly Father.

We're just going to offer you a time to be baptized. We're going to celebrate. We're going to sing at all of our campuses. I'm going to pray, and I'll leave the logistics at each of the campuses to the campus pastor.

Let me pray for all of us right now.

Father, we come to you right now and I'm so thankful for charcoal fires on beaches and conversations in which you declare that failure does not have the final say in any of our lives.

This last year has been so hard and so difficult and many of us feel like a failure. It's not that we've failed, we feel like a failure. And I pray that the power of the resurrection would silence that inner critic and the voice of our enemy who wants us to stay down.

God, I pray that there would be some who would respond in faith today to the invitation to make Jesus their advocate before God the Father. This doesn't mean that they've got to have all of their questions answered, it doesn't mean that they've got to have their lives all cleaned up. That's not the way it works.

We come to Jesus with all of our questions, and he answers them as we walk with him. We come to Jesus with all of our mess, and he cleans us up as we trust in him.

So, God, today I pray that there would be some who would respond. And we're going to celebrate it. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.