

JOHN — WEEK 25

THE BIG FAILURE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is *Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)* by Caravaggio

Peter has the ultimate off-night, even though it's Jesus who get betrayed and arrested. Jesus is in control while Peter is anything but.

Peter's thrice denial of Jesus caps off the night.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at www.ailbe.org and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

All the individual weekly study guides are available for download here:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/itemlist/category/91-deep-studies>

John, Week 25 — The Big Failure
Copyright 2021 F. Michael Slay
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 John 18:1–6

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, “Whom are you seeking?”

They answered Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Jesus said to them, “I am He.” And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

Why did they draw back and fall to the ground? They’re the ones who came in force—with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Did Jesus blast them with some kind of supernatural weapon?

No, it was Jesus’s words that sent them reeling. In Greek, He said, “Ego eimi,” (Εγω εμι) which just means, “I am,” (not “I am He”—the “He” is in the English translation for clarity, but it’s not in the Greek.) Moreover, “ego eimi” isn’t the normal way to say “I am.” That would just be “eimi” by itself. “Ego eimi” is the, “I AM,” of Exodus 3:14.

Note: “ego eimi” is, itself, a translation. Jesus wasn’t speaking in Greek; He was speaking in Aramaic. Presumably, He actually said something like, “ehyeh” (אֶהְיֶה). That’s the special way God said, “I AM” to Moses from the burning bush.

Jesus is telling them they’re about to arrest God.

I’d fall back too.

This didn’t just happen in a vacuum. The *detachment of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees* had to be aware of the rumor that Jesus is the Messiah. Now they show up with the lanterns and torches you’d use to search out someone who’s hiding.

Instead, Jesus walks right up to them and asks, “*Whom are you seeking?*” When they say, “*Jesus of Nazareth,*” Jesus says He’s their guy.

That makes His claim to deity credible. They’re a very intimidating force, which would make anyone want to run and hide. Yet this guy just comes up and announces that He’s the one they’re looking for—and uses the divine personal pronoun to say it.

“I’m not intimidated by you because I’m your creator.”

Just sayin’.

2 John 18:7–12

Then He asked them again, “Whom are you seeking?”

And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Jesus answered, “I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,” that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, “Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.”

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus.

So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”

Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

The hunter has become the hunted. The “*detachment of troops and officers*” gets up off the ground, having fallen down in shock from Jesus’s previous comment. Now Jesus is asking the questions and they’re on the spot for answers.

Again. Same question; same answer. At least this time they can stand. So Jesus makes a demand, in the form of a logical deduction. *Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way.*

These guys are in no mood to try to argue with God, but Peter jumps in to spoil the moment. Way to go Peter! Jesus had just convinced the soldiers to not arrest anyone else, and Peter commits a crime worthy of arrest. It’s a miracle that they didn’t kill Peter on the spot.

So, Jesus has to get Peter, and his sword, back in their respective sheaths. Luke notes that Jesus even healed Malchus’s ear. *But Jesus answered and said, “Permit even this.” And He touched his ear and healed him. — Luke 22:51*

Despite the distraction, Jesus gets His way. Only He is arrested.

It’s interesting that the Bible never again mentions Malchus. You have to figure he was converted. Having your ear cut off by a sword is pretty serious stuff. Somehow Jesus stabilized the situation and fixed everything. That’s mind blowing.

And all this happened right on the heels of them falling down in shock from Jesus claiming to be the great I AM. Then He pretty much confirmed it right before their eyes.

The soldiers apparently aren’t all converted on the spot, but some mighty big seeds were planted that day.

3 John 18:15–18

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?”

He said, “I am not.”

Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

John’s account includes a detail the other three gospels do not—Peter’s first denial of Jesus was somewhat earlier than the other two.

But there’s a detail in this passage that makes it all the more shocking. It’s the word, “also” (**καὶ** “kai” in Greek). The servant girl’s use of the word “also” implies that the other disciple, who *was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard*, had told her that he was *one of this Man’s disciples*.

Remember, Jesus convinced the *detachment of troops and officers* to not arrest anyone besides himself. This held even after Peter’s outrageous crime of cutting off someone’s ear. So, the disciple who *was known to the high priest* felt no need to conceal his identity.

This makes sense. The crowds following Jesus have numbered in the thousands. The chief priests and Pharisees don’t see them as the problem—only Jesus. Peter’s cowardice is completely uncalled for.

Peter will go on to make a great many mistakes that day. His first mistake was going into the courtyard. If he doesn’t want to be identified, he shouldn’t go where there are a lot of people.

And if he’s going to be with that many people, he should stay out of the light. Peter joins the group warming themselves by the fire. Campfires throw off a lot of light. Why is Peter even there? Did he enter the courtyard to get warm or to follow Jesus? What are his priorities?

Blame it on lack of sleep, but Peter is having an incredibly off night. The stage is set for his hitting rock bottom moment.

Hitting rock bottom is a painful, but valuable, part of growing up. No one starts out mature. We all do things we regret, and the pain of these things is a great teacher.

The Bible is full of examples of people learning painful lessons, because the Bible is full of people. We can learn a great deal by studying their mistakes, so that we don’t have to make the same mistakes ourselves.

More on this after Peter’s other two denials.

4 John 18:19–24

The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

Jesus answered him, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.”

And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?”

Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?”

Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest.

This is like the joke, “Rabbi, why do you always answer a question with a question?”

“Why do you want to know?”

Jesus gets slapped for the insolence of responding to the high priest with a question.

But what Jesus does is perfectly proper. He’s not insulting the high priest; He’s giving the most complete answer possible. His teaching is a matter of public record. Furthermore, the witness of others is always preferred to one’s own claims.

“If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true.” — John 5:31

So, Jesus is simply making a better case by noting the legally preferable witnesses.

Every stage of Jesus’s trial will involve Him speaking truth to power. This will throw His accusers for a loop. People normally grovel when they’re on trial for their life. They don’t want to die and they’re afraid. So, they act accordingly.

But none of this applies to Jesus. He’s in control. Plus, He knows more than His accusers do.

So, this isn’t just about attitude and confidence. Normally, defendants are at an information disadvantage; they don’t know what rabbits the prosecution will pull out of their hat next. (In the US legal system, there are numerous protections, such as discovery, to counter this natural disadvantage, but there was none of that back then.)

But Jesus’s trial flips all that on its head. Jesus has inside knowledge on every one of His accusers. He knows more about them than they know themselves. Yet He won’t use this to win, and He won’t come across as cocky.

He will teach. That’s what He always does.

5 John 18:25–27

Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, “You are not also one of His disciples, are you?”

He denied it and said, “I am not!”

One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

A rooster crowing is a traditional wake-up call and that’s exactly what happens to Peter here. The sound snaps Peter back into awareness of what He just did and how Jesus had predicted it.

The other three gospels record that Peter wept bitterly after this. He has only himself to blame, and that blame is unbearable.

Peter is on a long path to spiritual maturity. Here we see one of his greatest failures along that path.

But those failures aren’t setbacks; they’re set-forwards.

The memory of his failures will push Peter to higher and higher levels of maturity and commitment.

This should teach and encourage us. We all fail, but few of us fail our Lord as spectacularly as Peter did. So take heart; your failures are not fatal. In fact, they’re healthy.

There’s a deep lesson in this. We all have a tendency to want to forget negative things, especially our failures. That’s understandable, but that can keep us from learning the lessons our failures are designed to teach.

Without getting obsessive, we should make a point of remembering and analyzing our failures. If we ignore them, or otherwise push them away, we gain nothing and set the stage for making the same mistakes again.

Conversely, if we look for the lesson, even dig for it, we can uncover pearls of wisdom. Always stop and wonder if God might be trying to teach you something. He usually is.

By searching for God’s message in events, we open our eyes to spiritual things. This can be comforting, as we discover purpose and meaning in what was otherwise something we’d rather forget.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. — Romans 8:28

If we believe Romans 8:28, our approach to all things should be to work with them, not against them.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What, for you, makes Jesus's claim to deity credible?
2. What was the first seed planted in you that started you moving towards faith?
3. What was your worst hitting rock bottom moment?
4. Have you ever seen a real court trial?
5. Have you seen God's hand in a painful lesson?

Items for prayer: