

BOOKLET SERMON No. 2

By: Ray Ewart

FAILINGS

(WE ALL HAVE FAILINGS, WHETHER THEY ARE INHERENT WEAKNESSES OR TIMES WHEN WE FAIL TO DO THE RIGHT THING. WE CAN LEARN VALUABLE LESSONS BY STUDYING THE SCRIPTURE RECORDS OF OTHER PEOPLES' FAILINGS. KNOWLEDGE OF THESE FAILINGS, AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES, CAN HELP MOTIVATE US TO AVOID SIMILAR FAILINGS IN OUR OWN LIVES)

- Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Scripture are from the New King James Version.
- All my comments and opinions are given from my viewpoint as a Christian who believes that the text of the Holy Bible, as originally given, is the Word of God . My opinions are based on my understanding of God's opinion as expressed in the Bible and I offer them with good intention without any will to cause offense to anyone holding a different opinion. They are offered in the hope of shedding light and providing help to anyone open to receive it.

FAILINGS

This may seem like a strange subject to study. It may seem, at first, to be a rather negative area in which to involve ourselves. Why not rather look at SUCCESSES? There are, however, a few compelling reasons why we should look carefully at this subject. For example:

- No one (except Jesus Christ) has lived a life without failings of some sort (Romans 3.23 tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”). You and I are involved in the subject. We will all have to meet with, and recover from, failings.
- Failing at some time, or in some aspect, of your life does not mean that your life, overall, is a failure. We can recover from failings and go on to be a success in life (Moses had his failings, but his life was resounding success. More than 3,000 years after his death he is still quoted and spoken about, on a daily basis, in the nation he so ably led during his lifetime).
- We can learn valuable lessons from other peoples’ experience in this area.
- Perhaps most importantly, we will discover that A NUMBER OF BIBLICAL CHARACTERS FAILED IN THE STRONGEST AREA OF THEIR CHARACTER. This gives deep meaning to the warning in 1 Corinthians 10.12 “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” Undue self-confidence can make us vulnerable. The world, the flesh and the devil present formidable areas of temptation.

In looking at the subject we will examine the record of Scripture relating to instances in the lives of several important people, as follows:

MOSES

A good place to begin is to read Deuteronomy chapter 34. There are some amazing things recorded in these 12 verses. Moses was in amazing condition for his age (see v.7). HE WAS AMAZINGLY HEALTHY WHEN HE DIED! He had an amazing funeral (v.6 – GOD BURIED HIM!). He gets an amazingly good epitaph (vs.10-12) and there is amazing secrecy about his place of burial (v.6).

Moses was an extremely interesting person. It has been said of him that he spent:

- 40 Years of his life in Pharaoh's household LEARNING TO BE SOMETHING
- 40 Years in Jethro's household LEARNING TO BE NOTHING, and
- 40 years in the wilderness LEARNING THAT GOD IS EVERYTHING

However, in each of these phases of his life he had his FAILINGS. Each failing had its consequences, but God, in His love, grace and sovereign providential control, shaped his life to make it serve His purposes for the nation of Israel, the coming of the Messiah and the plan of redemption for all believers:

- Moses' time in Pharaoh's household was brought to an end by his failure to control his anger at the unjust treatment, by an Egyptian, of one of his Hebrew brethren (Exodus 2.11-15). It is enlightening to read in Acts 7.23-25 that Moses knew, at this early stage in his life, that God intended to use him in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It is possible to have the inner conviction that God has a work for you to do, yet, despite having that knowledge, you do things that hinder your ability to do that work effectively. However, despite Moses failing, God used the time in Pharaoh's household to prepare Moses for the important dealings he would have with Pharaoh later in his life (Acts 7.22).
- At the end of Moses' time in Jethro's household another of Moses' failings came to light. Moses, responding to God's instructions, is travelling back to Egypt with his wife, Zipporah, and their sons when God confronts him with a serious failing. So serious is his failing that God threatened to end his life (Exodus 4.19-26). He had failed to keep the covenant of circumcision in the case of his own sons (Genesis 17.1-14). I am sure we can all relate to the danger of complacency, particularly when we are away from our home (or church) environment. Moses was away from everyday contact with the Hebrew people. Constant fellowship with the Lord's people is an immense help in avoiding complacency (Hebrews 10. 23-25).

One or the other

- It was another of Moses' failings that brought the premature end of his leadership of Israel (Numbers 20.1-12). Again, as in the time he killed the Egyptian, Moses failed to control his anger. Not only that, but he directly disobeyed God. God told him to "speak to the rock" (verse 8), but he "struck the rock" (verse 11). Not content with that, he struck the rock "twice". He had really lost control! Nor did his fit of temper end there, for he uses very strong language as he addresses the people ("Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"), and, in the course of doing so he attributes to Aaron and himself powers that belong to God alone. Neither Aaron nor Moses had ability, of themselves, to bring water out of the rock.

Moses lived to regret this failing (Deuteronomy 3.23-28). He prayed that God would forgive him and let him complete his calling by crossing the Jordan and bringing the nation into the promised land, but it was not to be!

The three instances cited above were not the sum total of Moses' failings, but the loss of control at the rock was the worst. GOD saw it as a lapse of faith and a failure to honour and glorify HIM (compare

Deuteronomy 20.12 and Leviticus 10.3). God knows our hearts and is unerring in His judgements. These were serious faults and could not be overlooked.

AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT LESSON

In all the lessons we can learn from Moses' failings let us learn this. MOSES FAILED IN THE AREA IN WHICH HE WAS STRONGEST. In the remarkable happenings recorded in Numbers 12 God tells us, "the man Moses was very HUMBLE, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (verse 3). This humility showed when God appeared to him as he was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. God called him to go to Pharaoh to bring Israel out of Egypt but Moses said, "Who am I that I should go..." (Exodus 3.11).

Even though humility was his strongest characteristic Moses, at the rock, berates the people, exalts himself, and fails to honour and glorify God!

It is worth repeating the warning of 1 Corinthians 10.12, "Therefore let him who THINKS HE STANDS take heed lest he fall." Even in the areas of our lives in which we think ourselves to be strongest, the world, the flesh or the devil can take us down, but:

ALL IS NOT LOST

Never think that failings (which we all have) mean that our lives, overall, will be a failure. We see this in the life of Moses. Moses was a man of faith. We have a wonderful summary of his life in Hebrews 11.23-28. HE MADE A GREAT CHOICE! He chose to, "suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he looked to the reward." THIS IS THE GREATEST CHOICE ANYONE CAN MAKE!!! Turning your back on sin, accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, following Him regardless of the cost.....this is what leads to the ULTIMATE REWARD of eternity in heaven with Christ.

For Moses this choice:

- Stood him well in LIFE, for he "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king" (Hebrews 11 27)
- Stood him well in DEATH, for "God buried him" (Deuteronomy 34.6) – what a remarkable funeral!
- Stood him well in ETERNITY, for he appeared "with Christ" on the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17.1-3)

AND IT WILL DO THE SAME FOR YOU!

The life of Moses was a success, regardless of his failings. God saw to that!

A lovely footnote on the life of Moses that highlights the grace of God, and the completeness of our forgiveness by His grace, is seen on the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17.1-3) where Moses is seen, with Jesus Christ. Moses failing, when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it, resulted in him being forbidden to enter the promised land, but here he is seen forgiven as he appears, with Christ, IN THE PROMISED LAND!

NOAH

Let's start our very brief comments on Noah with what we learn in Genesis 6.1-10. He is renowned for his RIGHTEOUSNESS. Verse 9 of our reading says, "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God."

So pleased was God with Noah that He later said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it: I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it and cut off man and beast from it. Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Ezekiel 14.13-14).

Noah's righteousness is seen in his efforts to bring others to a righteous manner of life, for he was "a preacher of RIGHTEOUSNESS" (2Pet 2.4-5). As a righteous person Noah "moved with godly fear" in building the ark and, in doing so, "became heir of the RIGHTEOUSNESS which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11.7).

Despite all of this, he severely blotted his copybook when he became drunk (Genesis 9.20-27). Fleshly desires led him to suffer a very UNRIGHTEOUS indignity. HE HAD FAILED ON THE STRONGEST TRAIT OF HIS CHARACTER.

Three things, in the record of what happened, point to it being more than just an unfortunate visual encounter, namely:

- the Hebrew word for "nakedness" in verse 22 (erwah) means "shameful nakedness" and, according to the notes by Spiros Zodhiates in his Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible, it is often used to describe immoral behaviour
- connecting Canaan, a son of Ham, with what Ham saw (v.22) and making Canaan the main object of the curse (vs.25-27) suggests that Canaan was involved in whatever happened, and,
- referring to what happened as what was "done" to Noah (v.24) strongly suggests that what happened was more than "seeing".

JOB

Job is presented to us as a superb example of PATIENCE. In the 5th chapter of the epistle of James the writer, in commending patience as a valuable characteristic to possess, tells us (in verse 10) that “the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord” are “an example of suffering and patience”. In verse 11 he says that these people were “blessed”, then he cites Job as an outstanding example as he remarks, “You have heard of the PATIENCE of Job” (King James Version). I have often heard people say, when facing a testing situation, “You would need the patience of Job”.

When you read the first chapter of the book of Job and see what he suffered (the loss of his seven sons and three daughters in the collapse of the house they were in, the murder of his servants and the theft of his livestock in violent raids) all in the course of one day, and you see how he takes it: “Then Job arose and rent his robe and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground and worshipped and said, ‘Naked (without possessions) came I (into this world) from my mother’s womb, and naked (without possessions) shall I depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed (praised and magnified in worship) be the name of the Lord!’ In all this Job sinned not nor charged God foolishly.” (Amplified Version), you cannot help but be impressed. How would you or I have reacted under those circumstances?

As you continue to read the book you find that there were more trials for Job to face. The intensity and duration of his adversity led him to curse the day of his birth (Job 2.11 – 3.11). He was reduced to a state where he just wanted to die (Job 6.8-9) AND HE LOST PATIENCE WITH HIS THREE “FRIENDS”:

- he sarcastically says to them, “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you! (12.2)
- he says to Eliphaz, “Miserable comforters are you all” (16.2)
- to Bildad he says, “How long will you torment my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have reproached me; you are not ashamed that you have wronged me” (19.2-3) and
- to Zophar’s comments he says, “Bear with me that I may speak, and after I have spoken, keep mocking” (21.3).

But which one of us would condemn Job?

God does see fit to rebuke Job (38.1-3 and 40.1-2) and Job repentantly accepts the rebukes (40.3-5 and 42.1-5), but we see in Job’s case, as was true in the case of Moses, that:

- we can fail in those areas where we think we are strongest, but
- having FAILINGS does not mean that our life, overall, is A FAILURE.

JOB'S LIFE, like the life of Moses, WAS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS (Job 42.7-17)

SAUL

Saul, the first king of Israel is presented to us as an example of ATTRACTIVENESS (1 Samuel 9.1-10). He is attractive:

- in appearance (v.2, "a choice and handsome son")
- in obedience (vs. 3-4, responding to his father's request)
- in consideration for his father's feelings (v.5, lest he be "worried" about him), and,
- in manners (vs. 7-10, not wishing to consult Samuel without taking him a gift).

Had we been present when he was proclaimed king (1 Samuel 10. 20-27) I think we would have admired this man who was, "taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward" (v.23). I would have admired:

- his apparent humility, for, at this significant time, when he was the centre of attraction, "he could not be found (v.21) for he was, "hidden among the equipment" (v.22)
- his patience, for there were some "rebels", who "despised him", but Saul "held his peace" (v.27).

All seemed well as he was identified as the person chosen to be king, for Samuel announced him as "him whom the Lord has chosen" (v.24), the people shouted "Long live the king!" (v.24) and as Saul went to his home "valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched" (v.26).

He started off well. Chapters 10 and 11 of 1 Samuel paint the picture:

- Samuel anointed him (10.1)
- God touched his heart (10.9)
- He prophesied (10.10)
- he was publically acknowledged (10.20-27)
- he rallied the nation and delivered the men of Jabesh Gilead (11.1-11)
- "all the people" made him king and "rejoiced greatly" (10.15), and
- he showed mercy on the men who had despised him (10.12-15).

What could go wrong? But things did go wrong, very quickly and very badly! Within two years of his becoming king he was in decline (I Samuel 13.1-14). Contravening an arrangement with Samuel he rashly and presumptuously offered a sacrifice, causing Samuel to say to him "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart" (vs.13-14).

Not long after, as Saul hunted David (seeking to kill him) Saul passed judgement on his own life saying, "Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly" (1 Samuel 26:21). HE BECAME ONE OF THE MOST UNATTRACTIVE PEOPLE YOU COULD IMAGINE. I find it amazing that, even though Saul showed himself to be unworthy of the office he held, God permitted him to continue in that role for forty years (Acts 13:21). However, his list of FAILINGS is quite staggering:

- His capacity to make rational decisions deteriorated. On an exhausting day of battle with the Philistines Saul placed his army under a foolish oath to eat no food until evening (1 Samuel 14:24). The chapter reveals that Jonathan, Saul's son, had been engaged in a brave move that was fundamental to success in the battle and had not heard about the oath. As Saul's army came across some honey Jonathan ate some, and when Saul heard about it he tried to have Jonathan killed. Only the intervention of the people saved Jonathan (vs.43-45) but the chapter shows how far Saul had moved from rational thinking.
- The next chapter (1 Samuel 15) records Saul's deliberate disobedience of God's instructions regarding the Amalekites, his denial of guilt and his attempts to blame others for his actions. It draws the well known words from Samuel, "to obey is better than sacrifice" (v.22) as he accuses Saul of disobedience, rebellion and stubbornness and says, "because you have rejected the Word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (v.23).
- Chapters 16 to 24 of 1 Samuel record Saul's interaction with David. They reveal Saul's continuing decline as he:
 - deteriorates spiritually (16.14)
 - becomes so jealous of David that he tries to kill him (18.5-12)
 - speaks openly of his plans to kill David (19.1)
 - turns his daughter Michal against himself in his attempts to kill David (19.11-12)
 - turns his son, Jonathan, against himself in his attempts to kill David (20.1-4 + 27-34)
 - kills Ahimelech the priest together with all the priests (85 in number)(only one son, Abiathar, escaped) and destroys their city killing all inhabitants, men, women and children because Ahimelech gave assistance to David (22.11-23)
- In the closing stages of his life he is a man devoid of pity, love and friends. God has ceased to communicate with him and, in desperation, he turns to a medium (1 Samuel 28.5-25).

Saul stands out as a warning to all who let the desires of the flesh rob them of all the bright prospects life offers. He is a pathetic sight as he learns his fate (1 Samuel 28.20)

In the cases of Moses, Noah and Job THEY HAD FAILINGS, but, overall THEIR LIVES WERE A SUCCESS. Sadly, this cannot be said for Saul.

DAVID

David, the successor to Saul, is presented to us as an example of GODLINESS. As Saul is rejected Samuel tells Saul, "Your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself A MAN AFTER HIS OWN HEART" (1 Samuel 13.14) and this is exactly how David is presented to us (Acts 13.13-23).

David was “the anointed of God” and “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23.1). He was the writer of Psalm 23 and so many other deeply spiritual Psalms. He could say “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Samuel 23.2). He was the one who forgave Saul for all the ways he had misjudged and mistreated him (lamenting with the amazing eulogy of 2 Samuel 1.17-27). He was the father who was broken-hearted when he heard of the death of his wicked son, Absalom, weeping and saying, “O my son Absalom – my son, my son Absalom – if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18.33).

HOW COULD THIS GODLY MAN BECOME an ADULTERER and a MURDERER?.....but the whole sordid tale is told in 2 Samuel 11:

- he neglects his duties and responsibilities (v.1)
- he indulges in the lust of the eyes (v.2 and 1 John 2.16)
- he takes unfair advantage of his position (vs.3-4) and that in full knowledge that Bathsheba is the wife of Uriah, one of his most faithful soldiers!
- he tries to cover his sin by sending Uriah to be at home with his wife (vs.5-9)
- when his first attempt to cover his sin fails he tries to get Uriah to spend time with his wife through drunkenness (vs.10-13)
- when the attempted cover-up fails he arranges to have Uriah killed (vs.14-27).

What a warning it is to each of us to avoid slackness, carelessness, laziness and temptation, and what a confirmation it is of Jeremiah 17.9 which tells us that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

SOLOMON

Solomon is presented to us as an example of WISDOM (1 Kings 3.5-28). As this passage of Scripture explains, he received his wisdom through an encounter with God in a dream, but the wisdom was real! His wisdom was legendary (1 Kings 4.30-34 and 2 Chronicles 9.1-8 + 22-23).

However, at a close look, this wisest of men showed signs of folly:

- he was overly self-indulgent (Ecclesiastes 1.1-2.11)
- he over-spent his income and over-taxed the people (1 Kings 11.43-12.4)
- as the person in charge of national affairs he spent more time on his own house than he did on the house of God, that was so important to the nation’s wellbeing (1 Kings 6.1 + 6.38-7.1)

Through self-indulgence and lack of constraint THIS WISE MAN BECAME FOOLISH. This is particularly evident in his indulgence with a ridiculous bevy of wives (1 Kings 11.1-13) for he “loved many foreign women” (v.1), he “clung to these in love” (v. 2) and “his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not

loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David". It culminated in the judgement pronounced on him by God (vs.11-13).

Sadly, centuries later, he was still remembered for his folly (Nehemiah 13.23-26).

JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist stands out as A PERSON WHO HAD CERTAINTY ABOUT HIS MISSION IN LIFE (John 1.19-36). There was no doubt in his mind, "I am not the Christ" (v.20) he says. He knew he was Christ's forerunner and when he baptises Jesus and "sees the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove" (v.32) he declares, "Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" (v.29).

From our perspective we can see him clearly prophesied in Isaiah 40.3, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord"".

John was a remarkable man. Not only was he suspected of being "the Christ", but Jesus Christ was mistaken for being John (Matthew 14.1-2 + 16.13-14).

However, he had a difficult ministry (Matthew 3.1-12). His forthright preaching landed him in trouble (Luke 3.19-20). So great was the hatred Herodias had toward John that she moved Herod the tetrarch to kill him (Matthew 14.3-12).

John had rightly said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3.30). In prison, with his ministry in decline, having spent his energies so unreservedly, HE HAD DOUBTS! He sends to ask Jesus, "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

It might seem inconceivable to us that this man (of whom the prophets spoke so clearly, and who, when he came, knew his mission, and identified Jesus as the Christ with signs from heaven) should have these doubts. Nevertheless, it shows us again, the human capacity for failure.

It is lovely to hear how Jesus speaks ABOUT John at this low point in his life (Matthew 11.1-19). He says John was "more than a prophet"(v.9). He says, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen one greater than John the Baptist" (v.11). It is equally lovely to hear how He speaks TO John. There is no word of rebuke, but rather He says to the messengers John had sent, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." (v.5). John knew the Word of God. He knew this is what Isaiah said would accompany the coming of the Christ. John would have received Christ's words with rejoicing. He was among those who were "blessed" in not being "offended" in Christ. John's ministry had been successful. JOHN HAD FAILINGS, BUT HE WAS NOT A FAILURE! John finished his course (Acts 13.25).

LESSONS

So what lessons can we learn from this study? I believe there are several, for example:

- as we said at the outset, we all have failings (Romans 3.23 and 1 Corinthians 10.12)
- to have failings does not mean you will be a failure (Matthew 11.11)
- when you sense weakness look to God for help (1 Corinthians 10.13, Philippians 4.19 and Colossians 2.10)
- take swift action to remove yourself from danger (1 Corinthians 10.14-15)
- avoid inconsistency (1 Corinthians 10.21)
- rather than being judgemental, carefully help those who fall (Galatians 6.1-2)
- through diligence build yourself up in the faith (availing yourself of God's "exceedingly great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1.1-11)

as this is a BIG point I would be inclined to make it bold and/or underlined

- **we can fail, even in those areas where we are most strong. As we can see from the life of Moses**

character trait

- it can be in the area of a strong character trait, or in the case of Saul it can be across a series of traits, or, as in the case of John the Baptist, it can be in doubts relating to our mission in life.

In closing let me commend a matter to you for thought:

It is likely that if we could view our actions from God's perspective we would be more motivated to be obedient to God's will for our lives. Moses probably thought that when he struck the rock it was merely a momentary loss of temper (but God saw it as a lack of belief and failure to honour Him) (Numbers 20.12). Saul probably thought of his sparing of one man and the good possessions of the Amalekites as almost doing what God commanded (but God saw it as disobedience, stubbornness and rebellion) (1 Samuel 15.1-24).