

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" ³² But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." ³³ Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ³⁵ Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples. ³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." ³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." ⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak." ⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." ⁴³ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are *you* still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand." ⁴⁷ And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him." ⁴⁹ Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. ⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. ⁵¹ And suddenly, one of those *who were* with Jesus stretched out *his* hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. ⁵² But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" ⁵⁵ In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. ⁵⁶ But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

Introduction

We are now about to embark on the second message in my Easter series.

Last week we covered some preparations for the death of Jesus.

These included the anointing of His body with a very expensive perfume.

The betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot and finally the last "Passover" that Jesus spent with His disciples.

In this "Passover" meal Jesus identified Himself with the Passover lamb.

He also connected the bread and the wine with His body and blood.

Jesus was connected with what John said in John 1: v. 29 ..."Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus was just about to fulfil all that John had said about Him.

We are now moving to the next section in our Easter series.

There are three events taking place in this section.

1. Jesus predicts Peter's Denial – v. 31-35.
2. Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane – v. 36-45.
3. Jesus arrested and betrayed by Judas Iscariot – v. 47-56.

1. Jesus predicts Peter's Denial – v. 31-35.

If I was to ask you a difficult question today, I wonder what your answer might be?

The difficult question is this, would you ever deny that you knew Jesus Christ personally?

I expect everybody would say, Oh NO we would never deny Jesus.

However, my next question is more specific.

Imagine that you found yourself in N. Korea and you were arrested for being a “Missionary” You had two choices. If you denied that you were a Christian then you could be freed, but if you admitted to being a Christian then you would be killed.

I think that many of us would need to stop and think for a moment. What would I really do in these circumstances?

Many Christians feel that they are strong enough to follow Jesus whatever the cost, until they are faced with a very difficult situation.

Following Jesus in those difficult decisions becomes much harder.

Last week we discovered from the parable of the sower that many professing Christians can fall away when faced with difficult trials.

The main reason that many Christians fall away during trials is the same reason why Peter denied Jesus in his time of trial.

Peter denied Jesus because he was not yet “filled” with God’s Holy Spirit. He did not have the power of God’s Holy Spirit living inside him. He was only trusting in his flesh and his own human resources.

If we trust in ourselves and our own human resources, then we will always fail in the tests and trials of life.

Without God’s Holy Spirit empowering our lives, we would all fail in the challenges of the Christian life and ministry for Jesus.

There are two things in this passage that we need to open up a little.

a) Jesus’ Omniscience. V. 31-32.

(His ability to know all things)

Jesus predicted in v. 31 that ALL of the disciples would fall away that very night. It was not just Peter who would fall away, all of the disciples would desert Jesus.

The Greek word which is translated in English “fall away” is a word that literally means setting a trap, or a stumbling block.

Jesus predicted that very soon that evening the disciples would meet a stumbling block and fall away from their loyalty to Him.

In order to support this prediction about the disciples who were soon to fall away, Jesus quoted from Zechariah Chapter 13: v. 7.

⁷ “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion,” Says the LORD of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones.

Although Jesus didn’t quote the whole verse, the reason that He quoted this part was to reveal to the disciples that this was part of the eternal plan of God.

God knew that it would happen. It was not a surprise to God and it was not a surprise to Jesus.

Without an explanation of the Zechariah prophecy by Jesus, His disciples couldn’t understand the meaning.

Reading Zechariah Chapter 13 you discover that he is talking about idolatrous false prophets whom the Lord would remove among His people.

Then suddenly in v. 7 the attention turns suddenly and abruptly to a man that God calls “My Shepherd”

In Hebrew it actually says, “the mighty man who is equal to Me.”

This clearly indicates Jesus. It is against this “Divine Shepherd” that God commanded the sword to be struck.

This prophecy is about 450 years before this event.

It is amazing how often God interrupts minor and major prophets in the Old Testament to show us something that points to situation surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This affirms that the whole Bible is all about Jesus and His redemptive work concerning our Salvation.

After Jesus made this difficult announcement, He sought to encourage the disciples with these words.

“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee”

(N.I.V)

Jesus faced His death with courage because He knew that He had the power over death.

This is why every believer can face death with confidence because Jesus has gone before and been raised from the dead.

The disciples were still afraid of death and certainly couldn't accept that it was time for Jesus to die.

Jesus had told the disciples many times that they should not fear death.

John 11: v. 25-26.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

In v. 32 Jesus predicted His resurrection in order to support the disciples.

b) The disciples' confidence in the flesh – v. 33-35.

It is clear that Peter wasn't listening to all that Jesus had spoken. Peter was very concerned to assert his loyalty to Jesus. He was very genuine in his desire to never forsake Jesus, but he didn't fully understand that he had no power in the flesh to overcome the disappointment of Jesus being arrested.

In v. 33 Peter put himself above all the other disciples.

He said that the other disciples might desert Jesus, but He NEVER would.

Jesus put Peter firmly in his place.

Jesus predicted the exact circumstances where Peter would deny Him.

Jesus said that before the “cock” (“rooster”) crows, Peter would deny Jesus three times.

Peter had to learn the hard way that in our flesh, dwells no good thing.

Romans Chapter 7: v. 17 (N.K.J.)

¹⁷ But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

It is a hard thing to learn that we have a sinful nature and nothing done in the flesh, in that sinful nature, can please God.

Isaiah Chapter 64: v. 6 . (N.K.J.)

⁶ But we are all like an unclean *thing*,

And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;

We all fade as a leaf,

And our iniquities, like the wind,

Have taken us away.

It was not just Peter who had a problem with declaring his faithfulness to Jesus, whatever the circumstances, it was all of the disciples too.

2. Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane – v. 36-45.

We now move on to a very challenging part of scripture. We are given a little window into the humanity of Jesus at the deepest point of His need.

Jesus was truly God, but He was also truly human.

He suffered in the same way as us but without sin.

He had human emotions like us and He felt physical and emotional pain.

In this passage we note three things about the experience of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

a) Sorrow – v. 36-38.

The name “gethsemane” means olive press. It was in this place that Jesus often went for prayer with His disciples.

(John 18: v. 2)

The garden probably belonged to a believer and was used as a place of retreat and prayer.

It was likely that this garden had a fence around it with an entrance gate.

Jesus asked His disciples to wait at the entrance.

Jesus only allowed Peter, James and John to enter the garden with Him.

Perhaps Jesus took these three disciples to teach them further about the agony of the soul in difficult circumstances.

Peter, James and John needed to learn that both humility and the poverty of spirit is necessary before God can effectively use His people. (see Mathew 5: v. 3)

I expect that Jesus also was teaching Peter, James and John a lesson in total dependence upon God.

There are times when we really need the support of other Christians. This is important and we must do our best to support one another.

However, there are times when only God can help us.

These are the times when our soul is in deep anguish.

We are hurting so much that only God's Holy Spirit can help us.

I don't know if you have ever been through those times, I have. I hope that God's Holy Spirit helped you when nobody else could.

In v. 38 Jesus opened up His heart to these three disciples.

He told them that His heart was deeply grieved, actually to the point of death.

The Greek word that is used here for the emotions of Jesus is so strong that you could actually die from this condition.

Often you hear about people who die from a broken heart. There is actually a medical condition of complete sorrow that can cause death.

The shock or sorrow can cause a condition that affects the heart and as a result people can have heart failure.

The situation that Jesus was going through here was a similar situation to the agony and shock that people may feel after a sudden death of a deeply loved person.

Like a husband or wife or child, or even Mother or Father.

This was the most intense struggle that Jesus had with Satan.

Q. The question we need to ask is why was Jesus going through this intense struggle here.?

The answer is quite simple. Jesus was deeply grieved to the point of death because very soon He would have to become "sin".

This was the unbearable prospect that made Jesus sweat drops of blood.

100% Holiness is totally repulsed by sin.

The prophet Habakkuk tells us that God's eyes can't look upon evil and sin. (Habakkuk 1: v. 13)

b) Prayer – v. 39-45.

The second experience that Jesus went through in the garden of Gethsemane was intense prayer with God.

On two occasions Jesus asked God if it was possible for "this cup" to be taken away from Him.

What Jesus was saying to God was, is there any other way in your will that you can provide Salvation for men and women, apart from Me becoming "sin" on the cross and dying a death for mankind?

Jesus was not trying to get out of the responsibility of doing God's will, He was just asking God if this was the only way to save mankind.

We are not told in the passage what God's reply to Jesus was, however we do know from subsequent events that God must have said to Jesus.

I am sorry but this is the only way to save mankind.

Here in this passage Jesus taught us a very valuable lesson in prayer.

The lesson is that our prayers must always be in submission to the Father's will.

When we pray, we usually know what we want from God, but most of the time, we don't know what God's will is in the matter of our prayer.

We sometimes think that we know what is the best for us, but quite often we can be wrong.

We don't know what God knows and if we did, sometimes our prayers might be quite different if we did.

The key to a productive prayer life is to discover God's will and to be willing to submit to it.

Most of what we need to know is already contained in the Bible and careful search of it often will reveal God's will to us on lots of life issues.

c) The experience of receiving God's strength – v. 45-46.

After a time of prayer, Jesus got up and proceeded to get on with God's will.

Jesus accepted that there was no other way to save mankind from the consequences of their sins and so He just wanted to get on with the task of going forward in God's will. God gave Jesus the strength to get on with the job in hand.

Jesus spent 3 years preparing His disciples for this moment.

Now God has prepared Jesus fully for the important task of saving and redeeming mankind from their sins.

When God guides us clearly into a situation or task, then He always gives us the strength to carry out that particular job or task.

The impossible becomes the possible, when God is guiding and directing the situation.

In the Old Testament in 2 Kings Chapter 6 there is a wonderful story about the unseen army of God that protected God's servant Elishah.

2 Kings Chapter 6: v. 8-17. (N.K.J.)

⁸ Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp *will be* in such and such a place." ⁹ And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." ¹⁰ Then the king of Israel sent *someone* to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice. ¹¹ Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us *is* for the king of Israel?" ¹² And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who *is* in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." ¹³ So he said, "Go and see where he *is*, that I may send and get him." And it was told him, saying, "Surely *he is* in Dothan." ¹⁴ Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵ And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" ¹⁶ So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them." ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

So always remember if you are following in God's will for God's purposes and not your own, then you can be assured that God has unseen forces that will protect you and provide for what you need.

If Jesus needed God's help, how much more do we need it?

Isaiah 40 : v. 28-31.

²⁸ Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the LORD,

The Creator of the ends of the earth,

Neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ He gives power to the weak,

And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.

³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

³¹ But those who wait on the LORD

Shall renew *their* strength;

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

3. Jesus is betrayed through a Traitor's Kiss – v. 47-56.

We now come to our final section which is Matthew's account of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. There are three things that I would like to focus upon in these verses.

Firstly, Peter fighting against God's will – v. 50-53.

We are told that a great multitude with clubs and swords came to arrest Jesus. It was a great overkill of the situation.

After Judas had betrayed Jesus with a kiss, He was then arrested.

Peter decided to take out his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest.

This was Peter acting very presumptuously in the situation. Peter was fighting against God's will.

In fact, Jesus said to Peter that He could call on twelve legions of Angels to rescue Him if He wanted to.

Jesus had the resources to do what Peter could never accomplish.

Fighting against God's will in any situation is like Peter on his own against hundreds of armed men. It is a hopeless situation.

There is a verse in the Bible that tells us that fighting against God will result in failure.

2 Chronicles Chapter 13: v. 12b. (N.I.V.)

¹² God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you. People of Israel, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your ancestors, for you will not succeed."

There is a true story behind this verse that is very precious to me. Perhaps I will share it today for your encouragement.

In 1984, 33 years ago I went up to Edinburg in Scotland for a four- day interview at the Faith Mission Bible College.

I felt God calling me to give up my job and my home and go in faith to serve Him.

Both Wendy and myself had to sleep in the college guest room.

I awoke on the first morning after a good night's sleep to discover a young lady kneeling in prayer at the end of our double bed.

I didn't quite know what to say.

After I spoke, the young lady looked up and was shocked to see my wife and I in the bed.

Nobody had told her that the guest room was being used.

The young lady usually used that room for her morning prayers and devotions.

About 15 minutes later a letter appeared under the door which said that she was very sorry to have come into our room by mistake.

She also said that during her prayer time God had very clearly impressed upon her heart and mind the verse in 2 Chronicles Chapter 13: v. 12.

When I looked up the verse, I was deeply convicted that God not only knew my heart, but He has used this situation to tell me clearly that I was not to fight God's will in coming to this Bible College to train for the ministry that God had for me and for Wendy.

At the time, the good job I had with a nice company car and my own home was holding me back and I was fighting against God's will to give it all up.

I am so glad that the young lady made a mistake and came into our room.

God's word was right, it was no good for me and my future to fight against God's will.

Yes, there have been sacrifices over the last 33 years, but I can honestly say that following God's will has been much better for me and for Wendy than if I had decided to go my own way.

It has also been better for our children too.

So if you only take away one thing from this sermon today, take away the fact that God's will for your life is a much better thing for you than anything you could do for yourself.

Do not fight against the Lord your God, you will not succeed.

The second thing we discover in the passage is that we are told in v. 54 that this incident is a fulfilment of prophecy.

God had prophesied the plan of redemption and Salvation for mankind.

God's honour is always at stake when a clear prophecy of scripture is made in the old Testament.

In order for God to be honoured, His word must be fulfilled.

On at least 3 occasions Jesus had said to His disciples that it was necessary that He must suffer and die, and be raised from the dead. (Matt. 16:21, 17: v. 22-23, 20: v. 18-19)

In the old Testament in Psalm 41 and 55 David had predicted that a close and trusted friend would betray the Messiah. (Psalm 41: v. 9, 55: v. 12-14)

Also in Isaiah chapter 53 there are many prophecies about the death of Jesus in very detailed ways.

Jesus had to assure Peter that what was happening was part of God's perfect plan.

It is never easy to understand how negative things in our lives or in the lives of other people can possibly be in line with God's plan.

However, it is at those time when we need to trust God even more.

The third thing we discover in this section is that ALL of the disciples forsook Jesus and ran away.

The disciples couldn't cope with the fact that this arrest and betrayal of Jesus by Judas was part of God's plan.

Jesus had predicted earlier in the evening in v. 31 that after the great Shepherd was arrested, the disciples would be scattered.

Jesus was right, He knew the hearts, minds and weaknesses of the disciples.

The thinking of the disciples was based upon the emotions of the moment.

They did not think through the situation carefully.

The disciples took the easy route and ran away.

It is clear from what we have read today that the disciples had paid very little attention to the teaching of Jesus and had neglected their prayer life.

These actions made them vulnerable to the challenges of the moment.

If we want to avoid making impulsive decisions about our life and ministry with Jesus we need to make sure that we are saturated with God's word and soaked in prayer with Jesus.

If we do this, we are less likely to go against God's will and fall prey to the devil's plan to divert and distract us from following Jesus.

Amen.