

Matthew 26:30-35

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[0 : 00] Amen. Amen. You know and I know what it is for our words not to get through.! For our words not to be understood for them not to penetrate.

And Jesus knew that as well. In the passage that Joanna just read to us, he's told his disciples that they will fall away on account of me. The word fall away is maybe not the best translation.

It's the word for trip up. Or the word for stumble. And this passage teaches us that it's very possible for a true disciple of the Lord Jesus to fail miserably.

And that is what the Lord Jesus is trying to get across to his disciples. But it's not getting through. I want to see four things this morning.

I want to see first of all the source of Jesus' knowledge. The source of Jesus' knowledge. How did Jesus know that all of them, his disciples, were going to fall away, were going to trip up on account of him?

[1 : 11] And he knew this because of scripture. Do you know what he says in verse 31? Can you see that? In verse 31, he says, You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written.

I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. And Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament, from the book of Zechariah, and from chapter 13 in verse 7.

And in that passage, it has to do with the one that the Lord calls his shepherd. He says, So whoever this shepherd is, he is one who, as it were, is equal with God himself.

It's a man who stands next to me, says the Lord. So this shepherd has a special dignity. And yet, this shepherd is going to undergo grievous suffering.

Strike the shepherd, he is going to die. And it has to do with something that is done under divine direction. It's not something that's out of control. God is saying, I will strike the shepherd.

[2 : 23] The Lord says, Awake, O sword, against the shepherd, in Zechariah 13. Zechariah 13. And so that is something that is going to happen in some way under God's will.

And it is going to put God's true people to a refining test. And you see that in Zechariah 13, verses 8 and 9. So Jesus has the source of this knowledge, that his disciples are going to fall away.

They are going to stumble, for it is written. Because the scriptures say it will happen. The shepherd will be struck. The sheep will be scattered. And you notice how one thing is utterly certain with Jesus.

That he is saying what the scripture says will come to pass. Pass. God's word will not fail. Just come with me to verse 54.

And we see that even more clearly. Where Jesus says, doesn't he? He says in verse 54. At that hour, Jesus said, but then.

[3 : 33] Sorry. Verse 4. But how then should the scripture be fulfilled? That it must be so. At that hour, Jesus said to the crowds. Have you come out against me as a robber with swords and clubs to capture me?

Day after day, I sat in the temple teaching. And you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

It must take place in this way. Because the Bible says so. So what the scripture says must come to pass. There is a certainty about the Bible's teaching.

And that is the source of Jesus' knowledge. It's from the passage of the suffering shepherd in Zechariah 13 and verse 7 and following. But do you notice Peter has a very different view?

Look at verse 33. He says, though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away. So here you have Jesus who has this certain view of the certainty of scripture.

[4 : 39] And then you have Peter with his feelings of his own about this. And I think that's important for us to realize that that's a choice, isn't it?

Whether we go by what God's word says or we go by the basis of our feelings. Peter had very warm, devout feelings towards Jesus.

And he expresses those. And I am certain that Peter was sincere. But in doing that, he was contradicting, wasn't he, what the Bible said. Explicitly said.

And I think that has value for how you and I live the Christian life. That we don't live the Christian life on the basis of our feelings. But on the basis of what God's word says. Because our feelings can lead us astray sometimes.

Feelings can let you down. Feelings can lie to you. I'm not saying don't have feelings. Don't misunderstand me on that. I'm not saying don't have feelings. But I am definitely saying beware of your feelings.

[5 : 45] You go, you live by what the Bible declares. Not what your feelings may be at a certain time. And I think most of us know this. Most of us sense that that is necessary.

Because if we lived on the basis of our feelings, we would be in the pits, wouldn't we? For a great deal of our Christian experience. Feelings just don't cut it.

But especially be aware of pitting your feelings against what the word of God declares. As Peter did. That's the source of Jesus' knowledge. Secondly, let's see the notice.

Sorry, let's notice the weakness of Jesus' disciples. Look at verses 33 to 35. The weakness of Jesus' disciples. Not only did Peter in verse 33 contradict what Jesus said in Zechariah.

But then when Jesus himself says it in verse 34. He says, I tell you the truth, Peter. This very night, before the rooster crows, before early next morning, you will deny me three times.

[6 : 49] And then Peter contradicts him and says to him, even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. It's very, very strong. It's emphatic. And all the disciples say the same thing.

Jesus is saying, before early morning, you will deny me three times. And Peter emphatically denies that. And I think we see here a note of caution, don't we?

You and I, we know where the story goes with Peter and the rest of his disciples. And that note is this. It's don't be too overconfident. Don't be too overconfident about your own strength.

And your own resources. And your own fervor. And your own devotion to Christ. I'm saying this morning, have a holy caution.

About the steadfastness of your affections for Jesus. And your ability to hold out in faithfulness. At least in your own strength. You see, Peter had none of that caution.

[7 : 56] And you and I need to be aware of that. We must watch a certain cockiness that says, I would never do that.

I am a Presbyterian. I am a Christian. I would never do that. I wouldn't do that. How do you know you won't? How do you know what you wouldn't do? There is not much that would surprise me that a Christian would do.

Given certain circumstances. And I hope this morning that you don't think that you're above certain things. Have a holy caution.

About the steadfastness of your own devotion to Jesus. Robert Murray McShane said, the seed of every known sin is in my heart.

I think that's very, very helpful indeed. The seed of every known sin is in my heart. Peter here has got a rabid self-confidence. Confidence. And even if all shall fall away, I will never fall away.

[9 : 05] That cocky sense of confidence. No, it couldn't be me. And yet he fails miserably. And when we look at that, don't be surprised how weak your devotion to Christ may really be.

Especially when it's tested at a certain time. And not only is there a note of caution, but also this area of weakness. Sometimes we look at what Peter says here. And then we know later what happens when he denies the Lord three times.

And we say, oh, he couldn't stand up under the pressure. It's sometimes preached in that. They forsook him. They all fled. When the heat was on, they couldn't handle it.

They were kind of wimps. That sort of thing. Maybe we don't put it that strongly. But what I've seen this week is it wasn't actually a lack of courage. That wasn't the area of weakness.

Because later in the chapter, in verse 51, Matthew tells us that one of them, actually in John's gospel, John tells us it was Peter. Peter takes his sword out when the soldiers come to arrest Jesus.

[10 : 10] And Peter takes off Malchus' ear, the slave of the high priest. He cuts off his ear. And Peter probably wanted to get his head off. But thankfully he missed.

And so for Peter, it wasn't a failure of courage. When he says in verse 35, Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.

He was ready to do that. Peter proved that. It was not a failure of nerve. The soldiers come to take Jesus. And Peter is willing to defend him to death.

It was no lack of guts. But it was a lack of wisdom. It was not a lack of courage. But it was a lack of insight. Put yourself in Peter's shoes for a moment.

When they come to arrest Jesus. And Jesus will not resist the arrest. He tells his disciples, Put your swords away. Jesus didn't want resistance.

[11:10] He didn't want them fighting. But what do you do? What do you do if you are ready to die for someone? And you are ready to defend them with your life? But they won't let you defend them.

He is going to give himself over. How do you handle a man like that? How do you serve a Lord like that? Who doesn't want you to use your courage and guts to defend him?

What do you do? Well you are not going to allow yourself here to be defenseless. So you get out of there I guess. You see it was in this area of insight.

That Peter and the disciples. Never heard those repeated warnings of Jesus. They just kind of edited them out. They didn't hear that he was going to suffer and die.

And be handed over. They had their own vision. Of what the saviour ought to be. And was going to be. And they didn't pick up that submission to suffering. Was part. Of his ministry.

[12:12] And because of that. They didn't understand. They didn't have the insight. To handle the situation. And so it was not a matter of strength. Our weakness.

Is not always in the area of strength. Our weakness. Maybe in the area of ignorance. Or lack of wisdom. And that is what it was for them.

Pull this together. Let's ask the question. Why has Matthew and the other gospel writers. Why have they included this incident here? Why have they put this in the middle of the passion narrative?

Why did the gospel writers include such a big chunk. Of the disciples failure and Peter's denial. And so on. Why is it here? And I think it's here.

Because other Christians. Before the first century was over. Were going to face this very issue. That would come in different circumstances. But similar pressure. And they must realise.

[13:14] And face up to the question. Will I be faithful to Christ. When I'm tempted. Or pressurised. To participate in emperor worship. Or whatever the pressure will be.

Will I be faithful to him. Or will I fail? What if I am unfaithful to Jesus? Well to show them by Peter. And the rest here. That it really is possible. To be a true disciple of Jesus. And miserably fail. On occasion. And that in a way.

I think can be a backhanded compliment. And comfort this morning. So that you will not utterly despair. So that later Christians.

Even in our own day. Can look at this. And say. Yes you can be. A true believer. And yet there are times. When you will miserably fail. And that doesn't put.

[14:12] An absolute question mark. Over your standing with Jesus. Again it just re-emphasises. That note of caution. Doesn't it? Don't place. Too much confidence.

In your own devotion. And the strength. Of your own devotion. To Jesus. The third point this morning. Is the assurance. Of Jesus promise. The assurance.

Of Jesus promise. Look at verse 32. Notice. He draws. On this passage. From Zechariah 13. And he says. And he says. That the shepherd. Will be stricken.

And the sheep. Will be scattered. And then he says this. But after I'm raised up. I will go before you. To Galilee. Do you notice how Jesus. Always tends. Intends. Always tends to. Add a note of encouragement. And comfort.

[15:10] With the warning. There is something. Of a warning here. But there is a great. Positive note. Isn't there? After I'm raised up. I will go before you.

To Galilee. In other words. The striking of the shepherd. And the scattering of the sheep. Are not the end of the story. I am going to. Be raised up.

And go before you. Into Galilee. And that little word there. Go before you. We can't be sure. But I think he's picking up. Isn't he? On the sheep. And the shepherd imagery.

That he's just alluded to. And so he may be saying. You as my sheep. May be scattered. And so on. But I will go before you. Into Galilee.

Like a shepherd. Who leads the sheep. Like in John 10. Verse 4. I will go before you again. You sheep. Have been scattered. Some of you.

[16:04] Have abandoned me. And yet I will go before you again. You see. I think Jesus is saying. The sheep may be scattered sometimes.

But my sheep are never lost. Jesus will always go before you again. And it may be that some of us this morning. Need to hear that in a fresh way.

We don't know each other's insides really. We don't know the sense of failure. That we might carry. Maybe it's in the past.

Maybe it's in the present. And you think this morning. Christ could surely never call me back. No. Jesus went before these men again.

And that may be the very word that you need to hear this morning. Jesus saying. As it were to you. In your failure. And in your falling away from him.

[17:04] And in the coldness of your heart. I will go before you again. That's the assurance of Jesus' promise. Let's lastly look at the secret of Jesus' strength.

The secret of Jesus' strength. Now what is Jesus going to do? When he's totally abandoned by his disciples.

And he has to face alone. The mockery of a trial. Before Jewish leaders. He has to go before Pilate. The governor. He will be scourged.

He will go through the cross. And as he faces all of that. How is he going to manage? All human support has been taken away from him.

How will Jesus endure? In faithfulness to his father. What is the secret of Jesus' strength. And endurance.

[18:02] And resilience. What was it that he could draw upon? And I think the answer is in verse 30. Do you remember last week.

We saw the Passover. And how Jesus took the bread. And said this is my body. And how Jesus took the blood. And said this is my blood. Poured out for you. For the forgiveness of many.

And it's all in the context of Passover. Do you remember that? And verse 30. As they get up from the table. When they sung a hymn. They went out to the Mount of Olives.

And again. You've got to keep remembering. It's all in the context of Passover. And in the Passover. It was customary that the Halal was sung. A number of psalms were sung.

From Psalm 113. Or 115. Some say. To 118. And they would sing those hymns. As part of the Passover. Celebration.

[19:01] That is part of the hymn. That they would have sung. That night. As they left the table. Those psalms. And can you ponder. And can you think.

For the rest of this day. What it would have meant. For Jesus. To sing those psalms. As he left the Passover table. Psalm 116. Can you think. What it must have meant. To Jesus. As he knew.

What he was facing. When he sang that night. With his disciples. From Psalm 116. The chords of death. Entangle me. The anguish.

Of the grave. Has come upon me. I was overcome. By trouble. And sorrow. For you. O Lord. Have delivered. My soul. From death.

My eyes. From tears. My feet. From stumbling. I believed. Even when I said. I am greatly. Afflicted. Can you imagine. What it must have been.

[19:57] For Jesus. To sing those words. As he knew. What he was facing. From men. When he sang that part. Of Psalm 118. The Lord is with me. I will not be afraid.

Of what man can do to me. The Lord is with me. He is my helper. And I will look in triumph. Over my enemies. It is better. To take refuge. In the Lord.

Than to put trust. In men. It is better. To take refuge. In the Lord. Than put trust. In princes. I will not die. But live. And will proclaim.

What the Lord has done. Can you imagine. What those words. Did for the consciousness. Of Jesus. What it meant. For Jesus. As he sang them. And as he knew.

What he was about to face. I will not die. But live. And will proclaim. What the Lord has done. What man can do to me.

[20:52] And so on. What was the secret. Of Jesus. Of Jesus strength. And endurance. And resilience. You see.

The scriptures. Aren't just true. That was point one. But the scriptures. Are strong. That is point four. And that is what sustained.

The great shepherd of the sheep. That as he went. To lay down his life. For the sheep. It was. The living. Active. Word of God.

That sustained him. And has not. Proven true. In your experience. And my experience too. Andrew Bonner.

Great. 19th century. Man. Andrew Bonner's wife. Died. Very. Very. Suddenly. And. Unexpectedly. On the night of. Saturday.

[21 : 49] October the 15th. 1864. And Andrew Bonner. Records. Movingly. In his diary. That he had. Been reading. The Bible. As was his usual.

Custom. Between dinner. And tea. That very evening. His verse of the day. He said. Was number. Nahum. Chapter one. And verse seven.

Nahum. Chapter one. And verse seven. The Lord is good. And a stronghold. In the day of trouble. And he knows. Those who take refuge.

In him. And Bonner. Movingly. Writes. Oh little. Did I think. I would need. That verse. Just half an hour.

After. That's why the apostle. Paul says. In Romans. 15. Verse four. That everything. Was written. In the old testament.

[22 : 42] Scriptures. It was written. For our instruction. So that through. Endurance. And through the. Encouragement. Of these. Scriptures. We might have hope.

It is. Possible. For a genuine. Disciple. Of the Lord Jesus. To fail their Lord. Miserably. But it is. Also. Possible. For a disciple. Of the Lord Jesus. To become strong. In the storm. By feeding. On the same. Source. Of strength.

As his. Or her. Shepherd knew. In his. Great trial. Let's love. God's word. Let's pray.