

THE STORY of THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST**Lesson 8****Matthew 26.31-35, 56****THEY ALL FORSOOK HIM...AND FLED!**

We need to focus on this experience that the disciples went through that night when Jesus was betrayed.

When you think of it, every single human relation the Lord Jesus had with Him that night -- and every single human relation upon whom the Lord Jesus depended for help and support... utterly abandoned Him that night.

Judas Iscariot, of course, had betrayed Him into the hands of His enemies.

Simon Peter would later on deny that he had anything at all to do with Jesus...or even knew Him. And then, in the hour of His great need, **all the remaining eleven disciples** turned tail and ran to save themselves...and left Jesus to take care of Himself.

As they reflected upon it later, they wouldn't be able to believe they had done this. They certainly believed better things about themselves.

And yet, is there any one of us who has not at some time...in some way...caved under pressure and chose to distance ourselves from our association with the Lord Jesus -- or perhaps relax and renege on our commitments we should have been fulfilling -- rather than suffer some temporary inconvenience or personal loss of some kind?

We, too, look back on those experiences with a great deal of shame and regret -- and wish in the worst sort of way we could go back and do it over again.

But, what we need to do is to confess our personal weaknesses (and if we are not aware like we should be that we have them, then we need to listen to the Lord Jesus who knows us better than we know ourselves.)

And, we need to do for ourselves what Jesus told His disciples to do to prepare them for these times of personal temptation and testing: **WATCH** (be aware and focused on our responsibility) **AND PRAY**.

If we will pray like Jesus teaches us to pray, then we will be sensitized toward the approach of the Evil One against us ... and strengthened for his attacks and assaults against our love for the Lord.

What makes this mass defection so inexcusable was that **JESUS HAD REPEATEDLY WARNED THE DISCIPLES THAT THEY WOULD RUN AWAY FROM HIM**.

In fact, just this night -- before they left the upper room... or maybe even on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane where all of this happened -- **JESUS HAD WARNED THEM AGAIN THAT THEY WOULD ABANDON HIM TO SAVE THEMSELVES**.

Matthew 26.31-35

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.’

But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.”

Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”

And so said all the disciples.

Of course, you will recognize that this reference and quotation Jesus made was an Old Testament prophecy. ***Zechariah 13.6-7***

This is immediately after the prophecy that Messiah would be wounded **“in the house of my friends.”**

And one will say to him, ‘What are these wounds in your hands?’

Then he will answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’

“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.

God had recorded back in Zechariah’s time (c. 400 BC), that when Messiah came, He would assume the ministry and role of Shepherd of His people... and that He would be stricken...and that all His flock would run from Him.

But, look even here at the sovereign mercies and forgiveness of God!

THE SHEPHERD WOULD SUFFER THROUGH THE ABANDONMENT OF HIS FRIENDS...

HIS FRIENDS WOULD ALL FAIL HIM --

THE SHEEP WOULD ALL B E SCATTERED THROUGH THEIR OWN FEAR AND COWARDICE, BUT HE WOULD BRING THEM BACK TO GOD

THROUGH THE VERY WOUNDS HE SUFFERED DURING THEIR ABANDONMENT.

He was wounded in the house of His friends. That would be His own human countrymen and kinspeople. And yet, THEY WERE THE FIRST ONES HE WENT OUT TO RECLAIM AND BRING BACK!

1 Peter 2.24-25: ...Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

He was wounded and put to death -- not only FOR US but ALSO BY US.

But, then, after we had wounded and put Him to death, HE RETURNED TO RECONCILE US AND BRING US BACK TO GOD.

But, the fact that His abandonment and desertion by His friends was prophesied in the Old Testament, that does not in any way mitigate their personal human responsibility.

THEY DID WHAT THEIR PERSONAL IMPULSES PROMPTED THEM TO DO.

**1. Their most obvious impulse was TO SAVE THEIR LIVES...
and to preserve their personal physical well-being.**

I don't know at what point they began to remember and recollect all the times Jesus had talked with them in somber and serious tones about His mistreatment and death in Jerusalem.

Jesus had used terms like: **suffer many things...betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes...condemned to death...mock, scourge, and crucify** (*Matthew 16.21 and 20.18-19*).

It is true that Jesus always followed up these ominous predictions by His victorious promise: **“And after three days I will rise again.”**

I REPEAT...that on this very night, just a short while ago --

Jesus had told them again that He, the Shepherd would be stricken,
and that the sheep would be scattered...

and then Jesus repeated again that same ominous warning, **“But after I have been raised.”**

They just couldn't see any ray of hope or happiness in that promise,
because it was not in their “big picture” at all that Jesus could be harmed!

They understood, at least subconsciously, that IN ORDER FOR HIM TO BE RAISED,
HE WOULD FIRST HAVE TO BE KILLED.

But the disciples had always just chosen to live in denial about these eventualities.

But, it may be that at this moment, this reality was beginning to come down hard!

And when they realized the reality of Jesus' warnings, they instantaneously decided
that they didn't want to have any part of it!

They knew that if they stayed with Jesus and took His side,
they would surely suffer whatever fate was in store for Him.

And so, THEY RAN!

**2. I'm sure also there was no small degree of SPIRITUAL DISAPPOINTMENT
in their defection.**

They had been expecting all along that Jesus would establish a physical kingdom on earth...
and that they would share prominently in the power structure and hierarchy.

They were at least confused with the Lord Jesus at this moment...
and no doubt disappointed and disillusioned.

They probably actually thought that Jesus Christ had at least let them down.

They couldn't bear the thought that He had deliberately misled them and deceived them
with all His promises about the Kingdom of Heaven...and that they would inherit it.

But, what are they to do?

WAIT AROUND AND SEE IF IT ALL SHAKES OUT INTACT, after all?

They just thought they couldn't take that risk.

Do you know what it means to “cut your losses” and leave?

It means that you're going to bear the losses you have already sustained...you can't recoup them --
but if you cut your ties and leave now...at least you won't lose any more.

That may have played a prominent role in their thinking as well.

But, here is what we do know...

JESUS KNEW ALL ALONG THAT THIS, TOO, WAS IN THE COVENANT.

Jesus had been saying all along that He had come to do His Father's will.

Whatever the Father had written in the volume of the Book concerning Him, that's what He would do.

He had made His final commitment just a short while ago in His Garden agonies and struggles.

Whatever cup the Father had for Him to drink -- He would go and drink it.

He knew that whether anybody else stood with Him, by Him, and for Him --

HIS FATHER WOULD NOT ABANDON HIM.

Back in the upper room (or maybe in their walk to the Garden that night)

the disciples had again had confidently professed their faith, belief, and commitment to their Lord.

Jesus had told them in that exchange: *John 16.31-33*

Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe?

Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone.

And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

As you and I go out again into the world and work God has assigned to us,

We need to be aware also that our Enemy, the Devil, is real...and he is powerful...

and he wants to devour you, too.

And he will do everything within his power and means and resources

to shake us loose from our confidence, love, and commitment to Jesus Christ.

He wants nothing more than to see Jesus' sheep scattered and running away from Him to save ourselves, or perhaps to save some paltry, ragged element of this vain world for ourselves --

as if we are afraid of losing something we really need or would really enjoy

if we didn't follow Jesus so closely.

Jesus had the confidence He had because He knew He was in the Father's hand...

and that the Father had planned it also...

and that the Father had graciously scheduled for the Third Day Resurrection

just as surely as He had purposed Tomorrow's sufferings.

And that was enough to give Jesus ***"strength for today...and bright hope for tomorrow... blessings all MINE...with ten thousand beside."***