

Matthew 26:31-46

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[0 : 00] Well, now I'm going to begin with a question, which is, I wonder if you've ever made a promise that you could not keep. Maybe it was to a colleague or a spouse or a partner or a child.

Maybe you made a promise to a friend that you would show up somewhere in some time. Maybe as small as an appointment that you just simply forgot. Who hasn't done that?

Maybe as big as covering someone's back under contentious circumstances. Well, the last one is similar to this reading, but I know not even to the same degree.

Well, now this morning, we look at two acts of failure. One is the final act at the scene of the Last Supper in the Mount of Olives, and the other is the final act before Jesus' rest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

So we're going to look at these two. But before we do that, just notice that verse 30 before 31, where Cindy picked up and read this morning, reads like this. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

[1 : 19] Have you ever wondered what hymn they sung? Where did it come from? And I can't help but think that two hymns that would be really appropriate for these two acts, the one at the Mount of Olives, the other one in the Garden of Gethsemane, would be one, what a friend we have in Jesus, for what happens in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And for the one that happens, I'm sorry, in the Mount of Olives, but one for the Garden of Gethsemane would be Man of Sorrows, what a name. So with that kind of in background, I know that that's not the two hymns that they sung, but boy, would they have been really fitting, at least before, if not after, both of those acts.

So let's first look at this first one, this final act after the Last Supper, as they go into the Mount of Olives. Jesus then said to him, it says in verse 31, you will all fall away because of me this night. For some reason, this was predictable in Jesus' mind, in his heart, I'm sure, as well. Jesus softened the news to his disciples, though.

Fall away? Why not call it what it was? A colossal failure. It does, you will all fall away because of me this night.

[2 : 34] For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. Sound as shocking to you as it does to me. Jesus is saying he will cause the disciples to fall away.

And he's not saying they'll fall away because of themselves. He is saying he is the reason, though, that they will fall away. Do you think Jesus is letting the disciples off the hook just a little bit here?

Now, I don't think he's blaming himself and not holding the disciples responsible for what's about to happen. But I think Jesus knows his life makes it impossible for people to follow him.

Impossible, that is, if the disciples and you and I try to do it on our own or alone. And I find Jesus' statement incredibly gracious and graceful.

Gracious because he lets the disciples know what will happen without condemning them. And graceful because of what he says after he shows that he knows it all.

[3 : 45] And so Jesus shows the outcome of his death, his resurrection, and grace. And Jesus says, but after I am raised up, in verse 32, I will go before you to Galilee.

Our Lord doesn't say, you backstabbing cowards. He gives them a promise and an invitation. And he gives them a general rendezvous location.

Now, friends, this is grace like few of us can show to one another. And Peter's assertion in failure is the kind of action that breaks up relationships between spouses and family members or friends, but not with Jesus, apparently.

Peter doesn't quite get it, though, does he? Now, Peter has confidence in his own will or in himself. And I admire Peter, though. He has the nerve to say what others dare to do.

Though they all fall away because of you, Jesus says. I'm sorry, Peter says. I will never fall away. Now, some advise us to say never, except maybe in marriage.

[5 : 06] And that advice would be lost on Peter, though. But Jesus, with precision, gives Peter the details only a prophet or a god could give. And so Jesus said to him, truly, truly, I tell you, this very night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

And then Peter said to him, even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. And all the disciples said the same.

And Jesus gives all the disciples, including Peter, knowledge of how it will all then shake down. And doesn't it just kind of amaze you? I mean, think of all the major conflicts in history and the best made plans of mice and men, which rarely unfold as the way we think.

As prime ministers and generals and criminals and coaches and CEOs plan. But not Jesus. No. His game plan, I don't mean to minimize it, but is really precise.

There is something unique about Jesus' knowledge that only God could know. But Jesus isn't just showing off like a magician or some kind of fortune teller. He's revealing something for Peter that shows just how much he understands.

[6 : 27] He completely understands Peter. And not to condemn, but to care for him. And don't you just find Jesus just a little bit like that with you, with me?

Do you ever doubt that Jesus knows you so well that before anything that you have already done, he already knows it? He doesn't make you do something.

He doesn't make you or keep you from doing something. But he knows you and is with you through and through it. Well, as I've already said, Jesus makes me think of this hymn at this stage.

What a friend we have in Jesus. And it's a good part of our, sorry, it's a good hymn for this first part of our text today. And if you had to pick a hymn for the second one today, which I've already shared, a really good one would be, Man of Sorrows, What a Name.

So let's look at that part of the text. This is the final act before Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. And verse 38 reads, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

[7 : 37] Remain here and watch. Watch with me. The disciples were sorrowful earlier in the chapter, back in verse 22. You can look at that if you want.

But now it's Jesus' turn to become sorrowful. He's left the upper room in the Last Supper before his arrest and death. And the same disciples who were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration are now with him again.

But this is a different kind of intimacy. There's no Moses, no Elijah, no voice from heaven, only the voice going to heaven from Jesus.

But nevertheless, the message is still to the disciples, Listen to him. And rather than standing up with blazing lights in life like the Transfiguration, Jesus is now falling down, burning with passion and petition.

And Jesus pleads something quite strange with the Father. Don't you think? Like, what does he plead exactly? But let this cup pass.

[8 : 41] And what about this cup? This is the cup of God's wrath that's also quoted from back in the Old Testament of Jeremiah in chapter 25 and Isaiah in chapter 51.

But going forward, it's a cup of wrath that's quoted by John in his book called Revelation, chapter 14. We get in on this point of Jesus' death, even in the hymn that I'm mentioning.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah. What a Savior.

This cup of wrath, Jesus will suffer the separation from the Father for the first time ever in his death. Never before has he been separated from the Father, but he will when he takes this cup of wrath. And now imagine this separation. Can you remember a time that you were separated from a parent?

[9 : 46] Can you remember a time when you, maybe as a parent, were separated from your child? And as bad as that may be, if you even think back on that for a moment, it is nothing like this.

This is much, much worse. And so Jesus checks in with the Father, unlike Peter previously when he asserts himself. And Jesus says, though, not as I will, but as you will, Father.

And Jesus is making sure he and everyone else knows he's not making this up. He isn't some kind of narcissist or grandiose figure.

He isn't imagining some kind of heroic feat or sacrifice. No, he will be sacrificed for sure, but he's not imagining this. No. Jesus is actually laying this before the Father, making sure that he's doing it together with him.

And even though only Jesus can do this for the sins of the whole world, he brings three disciples along. He knows Peter will deny him, but he wants the rock right beside him.

[10:55] He knows the sons of thunder, you know, the ones who wanted the most powerful seats at the right and the left of him. No. But he wants them right there with him too, on the right and the left of him.

But these key disciples just can't stay awake. Most of us, when we're stressed, can't go to sleep. But these men can't stay awake.

And they have the privilege of listening in on a divine conversation between Father and Son, but they can't stay awake. And in the end, Jesus, like Samuel in the Old Testament, and Paul later in the New Testament, or should I maybe say Samuel and Paul like Jesus in their prayers?

No. Jesus three times says, could you let this cup pass from me? He's not making this up. He can't get out of it. But he wants to join his will with the Father's, praying as he taught his disciples, thy will be done.

Thy will be done. Surrendered in sync with the Father is Jesus. Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Exactly what we prayed in the call this morning.

[12:17] Did you hear that? Let me just pray it again. It says, Almighty God who sees that we can have no power of ourselves to help ourselves, keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt our souls.

We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves. Not even our will can do it for us. No. And so Jesus is showing that he will do for us what we cannot actually possibly do for ourselves because our flesh is so weak.

Now later this evening at the evening service, Gabriel Witten will be baptized. I think you may know the Wittens. Derek used to help out with the service. They will often attend Derek and Meredith. But their child, Gabriel, will be baptized tonight. We would have done it here, but we couldn't fit it in just given the kind of the time. But Gabriel will be baptized in water.

But he's also going to be baptized into the death of Jesus Christ and raised to new life. And this is a peculiar thing. But in doing so, his parents are taking a vow that Gabriel, by grace, will sometime later take by himself.

[13:38] That the vow is to turn from the world, the flesh, and the devil. And Jesus did that for us so that by grace we can too.

That world which lures, the flesh which deceives, and the devil which torments and tests us. Oh, how the disciples demonstrated this.

And we can attest to it. But how gracious is our Lord who, even when we're asleep at prayer, intercedes for us. When our flesh deceives us and makes promises like Peter and can't deliver on them, we learn that our Lord's grace is sufficient for us.

Our friends, in these two acts, that is Peter's denial, and the disciples' sleep, we see that they are terrible acts of omission.

Disciples deceiving themselves, but not our Lord. And as terrible as the disciples' sin is, our Lord's salvation is much greater.

[14:50] All of our sins of omission are great. Let's not deceive ourselves. The equal separation from our Lord, but greater is our Lord's sacrifice and his substitution in our place.

And when we realize it, then we can also sing in this hymn, this great verse, guilty, helpless, lost were we. Blameless Lamb of God was he.

Sacrifice to set us free. Hallelujah. What a Savior. I speak to you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.