

## THE DESERTION OF THE DISCIPLES

### Matthew 26:31-35

Most believers in the church today would like to think of themselves as being *spiritually mature* and *strong*. But those who *truly are mature* in their *faith* know from *experience*...as well as *from Scripture*...that, in and of themselves, they are *weak*. They would like to think that they would never *deny the Lord...contradict His Word...or be ashamed to be called by His name*. But they know that *at one time or another* they have *succumbed to every one of these things*. They find themselves in an *environment of unrighteousness*...but *do nothing to correct it*. They have an opportunity to *speak for Christ*...but *say nothing*. They find themselves in a situation where they *should be bold* for the cause of Christ...but instead are *timid*.

#### I. THE PROPHECY: (vs. 31-32)

As Jesus and the disciples were heading to the **Mount of Olives**, He reminded them that they would soon **all forsake Him** and **fall away**.

Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered’” (vs. 31)...

Fall away...Gk. *skandalizo*, it is the term from which *scandal* is derived...and it has the literal meaning of *setting a trap* or being a *stumbling block*. The disciples would soon be confronted with an obstacle that would make them *stumble* and **fall away**.

As stated in **verse 56**...all the disciples did *desert* Jesus...not just **Peter**.

For it is written...This is in keeping with the words of **Zechariah** who prophesied that the *Shepherd* would be *struck down*, and the *sheep* would *scatter*.

“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate...Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones.”

~Zechariah 13:7

In quoting the Old Testament...it should assure us that every detail that unfolds was part of God’s *sovereign* and *eternal plan*...He *purposed* it.

But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee (vs. 32)...Jesus immediately encouraged the disciples with these words...the assurance of His *victory over death* and His *resurrection*.

Jesus knew He would be **raised** from the dead *on the third day* by the power of His Father, just as He had *predicted* to the disciples many times before (**Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:9, 23; Matthew 20:18-19; Romans 6:4; I Corinthians 15:54-57**).

I will go ahead of you to Galilee...that’s exactly what He did. Outside the garden tomb following His resurrection, the angel told the *two Marys*...

“Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

~Matthew 28:7

Sometime later...

“The eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him.”

~Matthew 28:16-17

#### II. THE PLEDGE: (vs. 33)

**Peter** either *missed* or *disregarded* what Jesus had just said about His *being raised* and *appearing* to them. **Peter** seemed to *hear only* what he wanted to hear and *believe only* what he wanted to believe. He was so concerned about defending his loyalty to Jesus that...in typical **Peter** fashion...he blurted out...

But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.” (vs. 33)...

**Peter’s pride** didn’t allow him to think such a thing was possible.

During the **Passover** meal only an hour or so earlier...Jesus had given the disciples a similar warning. And speaking specifically to **Peter**, He said...

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat.”

~Luke 22:31

Jesus was warning **Peter** that he was *about to be shaken as vicious as a tray of wheat in the harvester’s hand*.

But **Peter** was *oblivious* to the Lord's words.

Instead of acknowledging his need...and his absolute dependence on the Lord for the Lord's protection...he boasted...**even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.**

### III. THE PREDICTION: (vs. 34)

Unimpressed with **Peter's** claim...Jesus responded with a very stinging prediction by saying to **Peter**...

**Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." (vs. 34)**...

Jesus singled out **Peter** as one who not only would *desert* Him...but would even **deny** Him...not *once*, but **three times** before the end of the night.

The Jews *divided the night* into *four* parts:

- **Night**...6:00 – 9:00 PM.
- **Midnight**...9:00 PM – 12:00 AM (Midnight).
- **Cock crow**...12:00 AM (Midnight) – 3:00 AM.
- **Morning**...3:00 – 6:00 AM.

The *third period* gained its name from the fact that *roosters* began to crow about the end of that period and continued to crow periodically until after daybreak.

And just as Jesus predicted...but just before the morning...with his *third denial*...

**"Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!' And immediately a rooster crowed."**

~Matthew 26:74

### IV. THE PRESUMPTION: (vs. 35)

**Peter** didn't believe Jesus this time any more than he had before. With incredible *presumption* and *pride*...he thought that Jesus was mistaken about his *commitment*, *loyalty*, and *devotion* towards Him. Again, he *affirmed his devotion* even *if it meant death*.

**Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too (vs. 35)**...

The first step to *spiritual strength* is the *sincere, humble acknowledgment* of one's own *spiritual weakness*.

**"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."**

~II Corinthians 12:9-10

But Scripture also warns...

**"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."**

~Proverbs 16:18

**Peter's pride** was manifested in *at least three ways* in these verses:

- **He contradicted the Lord (vs. 33)**...He *argued* with the Lord. Keep in mind...this wasn't the first time that **Peter** had *disputed* or *contradicted* what the Lord said...and this wasn't the first time that Jesus had to *rebuke Peter*.

Remember **Peter's confession of Christ**. Back in **Matthew 16**, when Jesus asked **"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"**...and after the disciples responded by telling Him who others thought He was...**John the Baptist...Elijah...Jeremiah...** or **one of the prophets**...

**"Simon Peter answered, 'Though art the Christ, the Son of the living God'...**and then a few verses later...**"Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'."**

~Matthew 16:16, 21-23

- **He considered himself better/stronger/more committed than all the other disciples (vs. 33)**. Even if the rest of the disciples might desert Jesus, he would never do so.
- **He trusted in his own strength (vs. 35)**. **Peter** was deceived by his self-confident pride.

**Peter** and the other **disciples** sincerely believed that they wouldn't **betray** Jesus (**vs. 22**)...so why would they **deny** Him?

Yet, they did **scatter**. And after **Peter's third denial**...

*“The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, ‘Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”*

~Luke 22:61-62

#### **LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:**

- Don't be deceived...or willfully ignorant...of your *spiritual strengths* as well as your *weaknesses*. And don't underestimate *Satan's strength*...or His *strategy*. Satan isn't *omnipotent*...but he is *very strong* and *very devious*!
- In spite of our *pride*, *desertions*, and *denials*...God, in a *gracious act of divine mercy*, *forgives* and *restores* us.