

Overconfident Faith

Mark 14:27-31

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We are looking at a short text in Mark 14 today. People often say the Bible is hard to understand. This is not one of those texts. However, the question raised by the text is one we need to take some time to ponder.

Last week Rick took us through the Last Supper. During this special Passover meal with the disciples, Jesus dropped a bombshell that one of the disciples would betray him. This shook up the disciples. After singing a hymn, they departed for the Mount of Olives (where the Garden of Gethsemane resides). That is where we pick up our text for this morning.

²⁷ On the way, Jesus told them, “All of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say,

‘God will strike the Shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸ But after I am raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.”

²⁹ Peter said to him, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will.”

³⁰ Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

³¹ “No!” Peter declared emphatically. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And all the others vowed the same. (Mark 14:27-31)

Luke adds a little more detail to the story in Luke 22:31-34

³¹ “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. ³² But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.”

³³ Peter said, “Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you.”

³⁴ But Jesus said, “Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

Some Observations on the Texts

Notice a few things about this account. **First, Satan targeted Peter (and the other disciples).** This dialogue isn’t much different from the beginning of the book of Job where Satan asked to test the faith of Job. God gave His permission but set some limits on Satan’s power. Satan finds strategic people and goes after them. Perhaps this is why some very well-known leaders have fallen. Satan knows our vulnerabilities. If he can use our pride, he has the advantage.

Second, **Jesus prayed for Simon's faith to stand.** Jesus knows Peter is going to fail, yet he prays that this failure would not destroy Peter's faith. Notice, in Luke, Jesus says, "When you have *repented* and turned to me *again*." Here is a great reminder that failure does not have to be final.

Third, **All the disciples deserted Jesus.** In the madness of the time in the Garden of Gethsemane all the disciples ran away. Jesus says this is what the Bible predicted. It is in many respects unfair to single Peter out here. After all, we will see that he did follow Jesus into the courtyard. He went further than most of the other disciples.

Fourth, **Peter was however overconfident.** Peter was not sure what the other disciples would do but he was confident he would never deny Jesus . . . even to death. However, Peter would face a circumstance different from anything he had experienced before. In the Garden, Peter did pull out his sword and cut off one soldier's ear. This shows that Peter intended to stand by Jesus. However, Peter forgot how easy it is to step on a slippery place in life and fall. He overestimated his ability to respond to new situations.

Peter had some great experiences with Jesus. He was part of the miraculous catch of fish, he walked on water, he was in the inner circle of Peter, James, and John who were there on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, and these three also saw Jesus raise Jairus' daughter from the dead! Peter had reason to think he was among the strongest disciples. However, he underestimated the strength of his enemy.

Do you remember when Michael Jordan retired from basketball and decided to play baseball for the White Sox? The idea was that to such a superior athlete this transition would likely be a piece of cake. As it turned out, MJ was only a mediocre baseball player and soon returned to the Chicago Bulls to un-retire and play more basketball.

This raises a caution flag for every believer who feels they are solid with the Lord. We are confident that we would never deny Him. We believe our roots are deep. But, how do we know how we would respond if

- We were threatened with imprisonment for our faith?
- If we had to go through the time of Tribulation mentioned in the book of Revelation?
- If our faith created a threat to our life or family?
- If we could not work and provide for our needs because of our refusal to deny Christ?
- If your school friends ridiculed you because of your faith?
- If a professor stated it would hurt your grade to believe in this supernatural nonsense?
- If the government told you not to speak about Jesus, or else.

A lot of times you will hear people say, "I used to be a Christian." Or, "I used to be involved in the church." If you ask them "What happened to turn you away? . . ." you will discover the unforeseen circumstance that overthrew their faith.

It is interesting to read some of the things people have endured for the gospel's sake. They were thrown off cliffs, hung, and had their heads chopped off. They might have their skin peeled back and then dipped in hot oil. They were covered in skins and the dogs were let loose to chase them and kill them like animals. If you read Foxe's Book of Martyr's you will quickly see that what we call persecution is petty inconvenience compared to what so many have suffered. So, the question remains: Would we remain faithful under those circumstances? Would our testimony be sure and steady? I'm sure we *hope* so, but there is no guarantee.

There is one more thing to notice: **Jesus would forgive the disciples and meet them after His resurrection.** He said all of them would run away BUT He would meet them again in Galilee. Every one of the disciples ran away, but all of them were also forgiven and restored with the exception of Judas. That is not an excuse for laziness, it is a testament to God's grace.

The Question We All Must Face

I told you it was easy to understand what the text said, but there is a question the text raises that is more difficult. We must ask: "What is necessary in my life to give me the best shot of standing firm if Satan, circumstances, or both target me?" I want to spend the rest of our time reflecting on this question.

First, we must remember how weak and vulnerable we are. One of the most encouraging texts in the Bible is Romans 7. Paul talks about what a "wretched man he is." He says, the good he wants to do, he doesn't do. The evil he does not want to do is what he ends up doing. This is an encouraging passage because it mirrors what happens in our lives, doesn't it? We have great intentions, but somehow those intentions give way to weakness.

In John 15:4-5 Jesus said,

Abide (or remain) in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The late Dr. R.C. Sproul used to say, "Nothing is not 'a little something.'" In other words, we need to be people who are very conscious of our need for the Lord's strength to survive any crisis (or even bumps in the road). We think we are spiritually strong, but we are mistaken. In Romans 3 we read, "no one seeks God." That includes us! We must not make the mistake of thinking that we are superior to other "less-mature" believers. It is extremely important to know who God is and the facts about His nature, BUT . . . you can have all kinds of good information and still have only a superficial faith that relies on how good a person you believe yourself to be. We must not overestimate our own faith and we must never underestimate the crafty nature of the Devil and his army.

“Good Christians” are the most vulnerable to Satan because the people believe themselves to be “good Christians.” Like Peter, we must not overestimate the depth of our need or the strength of our resolve. We must seek His strength every moment of our lives.

Second, Do you remember the conversation Jesus had with the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane?” We find it in the very next passage . . . where we will be next week. Jesus said to Peter, James and John, “Watch and pray so you don’t enter into temptation because the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” (14:38) From these words we conclude that anyone who wants to be strong enough to stand in times of temptation and crisis must be people who remain close to the Lord through prayer.

Let me be candidly honest and transparent with you. Sometimes I’m not sure what healthy prayer looks like. Most of our prayers are for God to help us (or our friends) have an easier life. Yet, prayer is supposed to be how we grow in our intimacy and relationship with God.

One of the ways I am trying to strengthen my own prayer life is by reading prayers of the early Christians and the prayers of the Puritans. In the introduction to one of these books the author wrote,

As these early Christians waded through deep waters, personal issues seemed to take a back seat to the all-consuming glory of their three-in-one God. Their outward-focused prayers are typically all about “thee,” not “me.” They seemed to have little time for the luxury of self-centered drama.²

Think about how much of the Lord’s prayer is focused on God and our relationship with Him. Yes, there is prayer for daily bread but most of the prayer is about our relationship with Him. It is mostly about God being honored in the way we live our lives.

Listen to Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:16-21,

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

² Elmer, Robert. Fount of Heaven: Prayers of the Early Church (Prayers of the Church) (p. 2). Lexham Press. Kindle Edition.

Does that sound like one of your prayers? I find that I am too busy trying to remember all the things I want God to fix rather than on how desperately I want God to draw me close to Him. I find myself trying to sound sincere rather than crying out for the Lord to build His heart in me. I spend too much time asking Him to make me (or this church) look good rather than praying that we might do a better job of reflecting His glory to the world.

The theologian and church leader Jerome, wrote in the early fifth century,

I stand to pray; I could not pray, if I did not believe; but if I really believed, I should cleanse that heart of mine with which God is seen, I should beat my hands upon my breast, the tears would stream down my cheeks, my body would shudder, my face grow pale, I should lie at my Lord's feet, weep over them, and wipe them with my hair, I should cling to the cross and not let go my hold until I obtained mercy. But, as it is, frequently in my prayers I am either walking in the arcades, or calculating my interest, or am carried away with base thoughts, so as to be occupied with things the mere mention of makes me blush.³

So how do we do better? That's a tough question to answer since I already confessed my prayers are too often superficial. Asking me how to pray better is like asking me how to fly an airplane when I have never ever done so.

But here is where I am trying to start,

1. Recognize that the most urgent prayer request should always be to know, to love, and to honor Him more fully. We must seek a faith that is genuine, heartfelt, and God-focused. We will never stand in the unexpected times if we are not deeply grounded in Him.
2. Our attitude should always be that of a servant speaking to the Master even though He has called us His sons and daughters. We must never approach prayer as if we are equals. We are not. He needs nothing from us. We have nothing if we don't have Him.
3. Even in interceding for others we must acknowledge that God sees what is unseen and may have a different plan than we do for our life or the life of those we love.
4. We must come to prayer eager to hear, more than to be heard.
5. We should never be in a hurry as we pray.

I encourage you to read the prayers of men and women who were known for their courage, faithfulness, and depth of devotion. Listen to them. You might even want to pray some of those prayers. Don't simple read them . . . pray them! Always notice the prayers in the Bible. Observe their focus and what they are asking for in those prayers.

We don't need God to be Santa Claus, we need to tap into the strength and power of the Almighty God that He is. He alone can anchor us in the hardest of times. Job, when everything he cherished was taken from him, said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

³ Ibid p. 3-4

If we think the end may be near, the urgency to deepen our prayer lives is greater than ever. We'll return to this subject next week.

Third, we must hide God's Word in our hearts. In a time of crisis, we don't generally have time to pull out our Bibles and search for a verse that can help us. We must already know these things. Think about this: if you were thrown in jail and forbidden to have a Bible, how much of it would be accessible to you through your memory?

Bible memorization is not popular, but by the same token, deep believers are not all that popular either. People excuse their lack of memorization saying they aren't good at memorization. But they remember phone numbers, prices, movie quotes, sports stats and lots more. You can memorize by repeating a verse again and again or by becoming more and more familiar with the Word of God. The more you carefully read the Bible, the more of it you will remember. Take your time. Don't hurry. Pay attention to every word. Don't settle for "I think somewhere in the Bible it says something like . . ." because most of the time, you will but just a little off in your memory, and that may be the difference between truth and falsehood. The truth will set us free, falsehood will make us vulnerable to the wiles of the Devil.

Finally, we must decide right here and NOW that we will stand with Christ no matter what happens. Yes, we must realize that the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We know that a mere resolve (like Peter) is nothing unless strengthened and held by deeply rooted devotion and trust. We have to continually strengthen our roots . . . but we will do that diligently only if we believe it is a matter of life and death; faithfulness and unfaithfulness; strength and weakness.

As we draw closer to Him, He will change our view of life. We will see many things as superficial that we once thought were of great importance. We will see the urgency of meeting together in worship and the study of God's Word. We will see the material as a tool for His glory rather than a means to personal indulgence. We will delight to spend time with Him rather than finding it a necessary "discipline" we must do to be viewed as good Christians. We will stop postponing the development of our spiritual life and go after it diligently. We will fear less and trust more fully.

In the coming weeks, we will see that all the disciples did desert the Shepherd just as the Scriptures predicted. We will see that Peter's great boast did not make it through the night before it fell by the wayside. But as we continue in the story, we will see that these men learned from their failures. They repented and received the forgiveness of God, and then they went forward with a faith that transformed the world. These men gave their lives rather than deny Him again. All but one died a horrible death of a martyr. The other (John) died as an outcast on an island where criminals were dumped.

The world we live in is becoming increasingly crazy. Let's learn from Peter's overconfidence and develop a deep trust in the Lord rather than ourselves or men's devices.