

The Wake-Up Call of Christ

Matthew 26:30-32

Morning reading: Zechariah 13

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Main point: The poise and dignity of Christ reveal His deity and our need to trust Him in everything He says.

Introduction:

Two truths strike immediately from this text: 1) *the danger of overconfidence* and 2) *the promise of resurrection*. Both serve as a wake-up call to us that we need to hear this morning.

Why the need for a wake-up call today?

Even the best of believers can falter and crumble. It is striking to discover that those who, from the outside, look to be the strongest and most confident, in reality from the inside, are just as vulnerable as the newest baby Christian in and of themselves. From this account, we learn that even the strongest believer is subject to fall into sin, temptation, and failure without the Lord (1 Cor.10:12).

On the other hand, not only are the best of believers vulnerable to failure, but *the most knowledgeable Christian only sees things in part*.

There is a moving conversation near the beginning of *The Pilgrim's Progress*—that masterpiece by John Bunyan. Poor, burdened Christian had met Evangelist and begged for help and guidance. So, Evangelist pointed in the far distance and asked, "Do you see yonder to the wicket-gate?" And Christian looked, shook his head, and answered, "No." Then Evangelist tried again, "Do you see over yonder that shining light?" And Christian peered away to the far horizon and noticed something—one spot that seemed not quite so dark as all the rest; and he answered, "I think I do." "Keep that light in your eye," said Evangelist, "and go up directly unto it, and there you will see the gate."

Now I wonder if someone asked you or me, "Do you understand the mystery of suffering?" "Do you understand the grand scheme of why things happen in life?" If we were honest, we would have to answer as Christian did, "No, I don't think I do."

But if someone went on to ask you, "Do you see any shining lights, any places where the mystery of suffering is not so dark as in other places? Do you see anything that gives you hope to guide your way?" Some of us, like Christian, would say, "I think I do."

It is some of these beams of light that I invite you to consider with me now. It was James S. Stewart who once said, "For the darkness in which we walk is not impenetrable gloom; and the night—thank God—has stars."

As we come to the closing scene in the earthly life of Jesus before the cross, it is dark, dark indeed. And the blackest darkness is yet to come. However Matthew centers our attention on the bright spot. It's His *poise*. His *dignity*.

The Oxford American Dictionary defines “**poise**” as a dignified and assured manner; a great coolness and composure under strain. And this is one of the outstanding features that Matthew highlights for us about the Lord Jesus Christ! But why was Jesus so poised? What explains the reasons for His dignity?

The reason for His dignity can be summed like this: Jesus saw in His situation what no one else had eyes to see.

In this brief snapshot, we have a glimpse into *the clear-sightedness of Jesus as He approached the cross*. Come with me and let’s fix our eyes together on two clear perspectives that Jesus had, and in fixing our eyes upon these things—we too will find our way in the darkest hour.

A. The departure (v.30)

B. The disclosure (vv.31-32)

Exposition:

A. THE DEPARTURE (v.30)

- ³⁰ After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

From where did they go out? The previous passage tells us that they went out from the Upper Room where they had just shared together in the Passover meal. It was a Passover they would never forget. Jesus interpreted the elements of the bread and the wine as symbols that represent His death. Their heads are full; their hearts are humbled. In addition to the interpretation of His death for them and instituting the one commemorative event that the church is to share in, again and again, Jesus had given them all the teaching we find in John 13-17.

- The teaching of His ascension and the promise of His return (*John 14:1-6*)
- The revelation of His oneness and equality with the Father (*John 14:7-10*)
- The role of the Holy Spirit (*John 14:16-26*)
- The teaching of the vine and the branches (*John 15:1-11*)
- The commandment to love one another (*John 15:12-17*)
- Their relationship to the world (*John 15:18-25*)
- The warning of persecution (*John 16:1-4*)
- The promise of answered prayer (*John 16:23ff*)
- The high priestly prayer (*John 17*)

This was more than a Bible study or a sermon; it was a divine commissioning. It was the opening up of the treasury of the kingdom of God! The tradition after taking the Passover meal was to sing Psalm 115-118 in an antiphonal manner. As the host would read a line, the family would sing the same line back. This is the scene as they leave the Upper Room; they are singing these beautiful Psalms with Messianic references.

At this point, we learn something significant, and that is, Christianity is a singing faith. Part and parcel of biblical Christianity and a warm, personal saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ is, are these acts of worship where we lift up our voices and sing!

Now many religions in the world chant, others hum, and others repetitiously state some mantra or belief, but Christianity sings. However, just because one sings, it doesn't mean they are a Christian. However, if you are Christian, and you never find yourself singing praises to God at home, or while in your car, and as a healthy and natural part of your faith, then something malfunctioned in your faith. Something is disconnected in your spiritual life. Something is not hardwired into your soul. In fact, the more spiritual you are, the more you will love to sing. Wherever God's people are, there will be singing, and when we get to heaven, it will only intensify with perfection. Here is my proof.

- **Ephesians 5:18-20**—And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.
- **Revelation 5:8-10**—When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

Where did they go after singing this hymn? Mark tells us that they went out to the Mount of Olives (*Mark 14:26*). At this very time, Judas is conspiring with the leaders of the Sanhedrin. They will rendezvous at the Mount of Olives because Judas knows that Jesus went there many times to pray. But Jesus knows what Judas doesn't know. Jesus knows they will come there, and our Savior goes anyway.

On the western slope of the Mount of Olives is the Garden of Gethsemane. As they go out of one of the gates of Jerusalem, it immediately slopes down into the Kidron Valley. Scholars believe that whoever owned the Garden gave Jesus access to it to pray, meditate, and commune with the Father.

Jesus is leading the way. It is late in the evening. Perhaps around 11:00 o'clock at night. While they are walking, Jesus gives...

B. THE DISCLOSURE (*vv.31-32*)

It is shocking! Scandalous! Jaw-dropping! Knee-buckling!

- ³¹ 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." ³² But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

There are four insights that you must see.

1. What Jesus saw as He faced Calvary was that there would be failure among His very own disciples.

- ³¹ You will all fall away.

These are the men who left everything to follow Jesus. They had been afforded every spiritual blessing you could think of. No one has had a greater privilege than these men. No one has had the proximity to Jesus that these men enjoyed. He had washed their feet; He had given them a full disclosure of all that He is and would do.

Now, like a balloon that bursts, Jesus discloses, you will ALL fall away from me. What does it mean?

It does not mean that they will fall from grace. In John 13:10, Jesus has already said, "*you are clean, but not all of you*" (speaking of Judas). But Jesus meant, you are forgiven. Saved. Secure. In the kingdom. But now He says, you will fall away? Not from salvation. The true Christian is like a passenger on an unsinkable ship. They never fall overboard; they just slip on board (*John 10:27-20*). No true believer can ever fall from salvation.

What Jesus means is that they will momentarily and temporarily fall from their commitment of loyalty to Jesus.

That included Peter, despite his protest that he would not. This is why, although Jesus must have been deeply hurt by His disciples' failure, He was not taken by surprise. He was safeguarded from a disappointment that leads to bitterness because He saw the real condition of human nature.

At the start of His ministry, just as the word was spreading about the signs He performed, John gives us this insight about our Lord when he said of Him,

- **John 2:24-25**—But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men...²⁵ for He Himself knew what was in man.

In the same way that Jesus knew the real heart of Nathaniel (*John 1:47-49*), despite Nathaniel's skepticism about Jesus, Jesus sees right through the apparent enthusiasm of all would-be followers. He knows that some are more interested in *His miracles* than they are *His Person*. Yet faith that is based upon miracles is suspicious at best. It's ok to believe in miracles, but you must trust Jesus! And this is why He made it clear throughout His ministry that our greatest need is to recognize exactly *who He is* and what it was that He ultimately came to do.

Jesus gave frequent warnings about things which we cause people to stumble (*Matt.24:10; Mark 4:17; 9:42*). Stumbling blocks are the things that can undermine your trust and commitment to Jesus. And James 3:2 says *we stumble in many ways*, that is to say, we are guilty of stumbling in many things. Some stumble with their *tongue* and the quickness of temper. With others, it is *doubt* and *mistrust*. Others still, struggle with *gossip* or a *wandering eye*. But these are not the things that caused the disciples to stumble?

Why would they fall away? Well, the cause of their defection would be the horrible death of Christ.

- ³¹ because of Me this night,

Even as sheep are scattered in panic when their shepherd falls, so the death of Jesus will cause the disciples to desert Him. This is actually what the word *"fall away"* (*skandalizein*) means, *"to cause to stumble"* or *"to fall."* It carries a passive sense, that is, it does not mean that the disciples will willfully defect, but that external factors will hit them and cause them to defect. In other words, their falling away is a *lapse* rather than a *rebellion*.

In addition, this term also has the basic idea of being offended or trapped. By this we are not to think that the disciples were offended at Jesus personally, but rather the disciples would be caught and overwhelmed by what would happen to Him that very night. This is the *offense of the cross*. It would stagger their faith and shake their confidence in Him as the Messiah. It would challenge their very loyalty to Him. The same is true for us.

To be offended at Jesus is really the opposite of believing or delighting in Him. It implies the desire to be disassociated from Him because too close an association with Jesus invites the treatment He receives.

Oh, but here is the marvel of it all: *although Jesus knew that they would deny Him, He did not love them any less.* Peter would deny Him three times and later when Jesus asked Peter the three-fold question; it must have reminded Peter of his failure. And Peter confessed, *"Lord you know all things...you know that for all my failures, I really do love you"* (Cf. John 21:15-17).

This is something we really need to remember about Jesus when we fail. *Our sins, no doubt, can harden our hearts against Him and blind us to His grace*—but never think that He is taken by surprise when you fail Him. Go to Him immediately and confess your sin and the weakness of your love for Him.

2. Jesus saw that Scripture was being fulfilled.

- ³¹ because it is written

Everything that Jesus predicted was grounded in Scripture. This would happen because the Scripture foretold that when God's Shepherd was smitten, the sheep would be scattered. Here Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 where the prophet declared that God would strike the Shepherd of His people—or allow Him to be struck—in fulfillment of His will. Here we see that divine paradox where God uses evil to fulfill His higher purposes. Jesus knew that He was the Shepherd and that the smiting was His death. This is what Isaiah meant when he said,

- **Isaiah.53:4**—Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
- **Isaiah 53:10**—But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering.

This explains another reason for the Lord's dignity as He entered His sufferings. His mind and heart were so saturated with the teaching of Scripture that nothing could ultimately surprise Him and unbalance Him.

Oh, what poise! What dignity! What balance! You say, ah, but that was Jesus. He is different. We are just common people. You can't expect us to achieve that kind of poise of soul, that serene spirit. You say, yes, His dignity is wonderful. It is marvelous; but is it impossible for us. Don't be too sure of that!

How can you know this poise in the face of your storms? Well, let's ask someone who learned from experience. If anyone knew how important it was to be strong in the face of adversity or storm it was Peter. Peter recognized that in His sufferings Jesus was also giving his disciples and us "an example." Later on, this is what He learned,

- **1 Peter 2:21-22**—For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an *example* for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself (and His cause) to Him who judges righteously.

The word Peter uses for "*example*" would have been used of *a teacher showing a child how to write by writing a letter and asking the child to copy it down*. This is exactly what Jesus does. He says, "Look how My life was marked by a poise which came from My submission to My Father's Word. Now you copy that! Get your heart and mind saturated with truth and submit to God's will in every circumstance."

3. Jesus saw the hand of God in His experience.

This is Jesus' interpretation of Zechariah 13:7. "*I will strike down the shepherd*" is a reference to the hand of God. Here Jesus places emphasis on the Identity of the One who would strike Him. It would be the Great I Am—His own Father! And because Jesus knew this, He knew that His suffering was ordained of God. It was not contrary to divine providence, and this enabled Him to trust His Father completely because He knew that not one blow would fall upon Him that was not necessary for the salvation of you and me.

But we must ask, why was it necessary *to strike down the Shepherd*?

In the context of Zechariah (13:7-9), God commands that the Shepherd be struck down that the sheep may be scattered as in central part of *a refining process*, which will result in the creation of a new people of God. This action, according to the prophet (13:1), is connected to the opening of a fountain for the cleansing of sin on behalf of the house of David and Jerusalem.

In other words, if there is no death of God's Servant, the Shepherd, there could be no salvation nor cleansing from sin.

But, "ah," says someone. "I don't understand it. If God was for Jesus, why didn't He prevent it? If God had been there this tragedy of the crucifixion of Jesus would have never taken place!"

This was not how **the Apostle Paul** looked at the cross. When Paul looked at the cross, he saw that behind it were three factors which had met and interlocked: 1) the design of man (organized religion, politics, and the average man), 2) the will of Jesus, and 3) the predetermined plan of God.

- **1 Corinthians 2:6-8**—Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

James Stewart once said, "no evangelism will be valid, no preaching of the atonement strong and effective, in which this (*predestinating element*) does not hold a central place."

But this is not how the Apostle **Peter** saw it. In the first sermon just after Pentecost, listen to how he thinks of the crucifixion.

- **Acts 2:22-24**—Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. ²⁴ But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

They never preached the cross without saying, "This is God's deed, God's purpose in action, God's way of bringing a mad and ruined world back into health and sanity." John Calvin put it, "Had it not been by God's will that Christ was crucified, where would our salvation be?"

The Jews looked at the cross and said, "It's a scandal! I need a sign, a work of power. DXon't offer me this pathetic symbol of defeat!" The Greeks looked at the cross and said, "This is sheer folly. I want wisdom. You need to give me a rational explanation of life. This is irrational! Take it away!"

- **1 Corinthians 1:21-24**—For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

These same disciples would later come to see with awe and amazement this overwhelming truth: the cross was not an offering of man to God (from earth to heaven), but rather it was God acting in history! "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor.5:19).

So, if anyone ever asks you, "Who delivered up Jesus to die?" Remember it was not Judas for money; not Pilate for fear; not the Jews for envy—but the Father for love. Behind Calvary is the throne of heaven! The hand of God is reaching down to man and saying, "This is how much I hate sin and love you!"

This quotation from Zechariah was not just an announcement of God's action; it was also a warning.

- ³¹ I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.

This explains how the unexpected death of Jesus would scatter them in all directions. If you search in every place sheep are found, you will discover that there is no sheep known to man that can survive in its natural habitat without the care of a Shepherd. They would be bewildered and confused, scared and dumbfounded.

Oh, but bless God...

4. Jesus saw the resurrection that lay ahead of Him.

- ³² But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

The conjunction "**but**" here strongly contrasts *the darkness of His death* with *the light of His resurrection*. "I know there will be darkness," said Jesus! "But after darkness, *life* my dear ones!" Oh, if only those of you who walk under the clouds of dark providences would hear these words.

Here Jesus points to the resurrection in a way much different than we are used to thinking of it. Often the resurrection is mentioned, and our minds race to the end of time and the last day. But here Jesus says it in connection with the Easter Gospel.

Without the resurrection, the death of Christ would be robbed of all its meaning. Without the resurrection, the whole Christian structure falls apart. Paul was right: without this our faith, our hope, our preaching—it's all in vain. (*1 Cor.15:13-15*)

What is the use of celebrating His birth on Christmas, or His death on Good Friday, if on Sunday morning He doesn't get up from the grave?

CONCLUSION:

But what is the message to us? Let me frame it in these three ways that we might see the glory of this announcement.

The message of the resurrection is: a new age has come.

From the beginning of time, the prophets expected, longed for, and looked to a day when life from beyond, from the remote future, would break into the present in such a way that it would change the way we lived in this world. And when Jesus came, He made this startling declaration that the "*hour is coming and now is.*" (*John 5:25*)

What hour? Not the time when men would discover that there was life beyond the grave. They already knew and believed that; read your Old Testament. What the resurrection of Jesus proclaimed is that a time had come when men and women could encounter God in an entirely new way! How?

Let me show you in this example. When Paul met the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, the blinding thing about the encounter was that in that moment he talked to and looked face-to-face, without any veil between, at the Majestic glory of God! No wafer, no priest, no mediator in between! This is the something that God had never done before—and that is, *met with man and transform His life by His presence!* His death had torn the veil in two (that veil that performed the two-fold duty of keeping man out and God hidden).

But the decisive revelatory event said *secrecy is destroyed, exclusion is abolished, whosoever will may come*. Not one priest, once a year, but every sinner who comes by repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! The death of Jesus opened the veil and the resurrection ushers us in to know, by faith, the heart of God!

The second message of the resurrection is: God's power can now be known in man's weakness.

The power that first took Christ out of the grave is still available today. It is not just for *the end of our lives to save us from death*, but it is available here and now, *to help us to live*. (Cf. Rom.8:11; Eph.1:19-20)

Now the evidence of this truth *is not our arguments*. Oh yes, we can speak of *the empty tomb, the broken seal, the moved stone, the frightened guards*, and all of that, but the greatest proof of this reality is the evidence of our lives that have been utterly changed by contact with the risen Christ!

That same power which shattered death *is now given as life to us*—and what has it done? It has transformed enslaved, defeated, depressed, and confused hopeless sinners like us into new creatures in Christ!

Here is the third message. The first: a new age has come. The second: a new power can be known. **Third, the powers of darkness are defeated.**

We forget that behind the scenes of the cross, a war had been waged of cosmic proportions. This is why Satan entered into Judas. This is why Jesus said, *"this hour and the power of darkness are yours"* (Luke 22:53). The age-old conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan had come to a head at the cross—but my dear friends, the last word lay with God. The Son of God had come to destroy the works of the devil, and now in one mighty outbreak from the grave, Jesus had once for all conquered the final enemy—death.

Now if you want to know what gave that early church such confidence, it was this. How could these little men, stumbling and fumbling as they were, turn the world upside down? It wasn't their *impressive credentials*. It wasn't their *official backing*. They had nothing—yet they had everything! The risen Christ had laid hold of these men, and they knew the Devil was defeated. They could see the truth of Christ's life in each other's eyes. They could read the testimony of Scripture in each other's lives. They shared this incredible secret, and it was this—the powers of darkness had been defeated and Christ is Lord!

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