

MBC - 9/16/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“Weak Sheep and Their Strong Shepherd”
 Matthew 26:30-46

Turn with me to Matthew’s Gospel this morning as we continue to look at the moments leading up to the Cross. Our Lord has just given His men the bread and the cup and told them of a brand New Covenant, but before He goes to make the sacrifice to inaugurate that Covenant, He needs to pray.

- Matthew 26:30-46 ³⁰And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ ³²But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” ³³Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” ³⁴Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” ³⁵Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same. ³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” ³⁹And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” ⁴⁰And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴²Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

(prayer - we’re on holy ground . . .)

This passage seems like a real downer: first we hear about Juda’s betrayal, now Jesus says that all the Disciples will leave Him, and Peter will actually deny that he knows Jesus - three times. Then we see Peter, James, and John, sleeping when they should be praying, while Jesus stays awake and prays to the point of bleeding.

But this passage is filled with Gospel hope and encouragement for you and me - in a very *counter-intuitive* way. What do I mean? I mean that we think that we are encouraged by hearing how strong we are, how great we are; we can pass every test, resist every temptation. But that is the sure recipe for discouragement and depression, because we will all - I repeat, all, fail and fall at some point. Read yourself into this story: you and I are those sleepy Disciples! At some point or another in our lives, we are even Peter, boasting about our loyalty to Jesus, then denying Him when the pressure comes.

So how does that give us Gospel hope? - When it causes you to put *no hope* in yourself, but *all of your hope* in Jesus! Look at *Him* in this passage - don’t focus on Peter and the Disciples - look at Jesus: He’s God, omniscient, He knows the future; and He is the perfect Man, struggling and suffering, and being tempted just like we are, but He remains obedient and faithful, and goes to the Cross for our salvation, and rises again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! So

when you put all of your hope and all of your trust in Him, you will never be disappointed because Jesus never fails.

- Back in the 90's there was a huge movement for Christian men called "Promisekeepers." Maybe some of you men were part of that. They filled stadiums with Christian men who re-committed themselves to being godly husbands and dads. Nothing wrong with that at all. Except for the name, "Promisekeepers." We're not promisekeepers, and we never will be. God is the Promisekeeper - that's the Good News of the Gospel. He keeps His promises in Christ that we could never keep.

And that is the whole point of the New Covenant that we looked at last Lord's Day. The Old Covenant said, "Thou shalt, thou shalt not . . ." And we couldn't and we didn't. But in the New Covenant, God says, "You couldn't, so I will! God supplies the faithfulness we can never supply. That is such good news - because God is a Promisekeeper!

- If my salvation depends in *any way* on my own faithfulness, I have no hope of being saved. Zero. I call that "Murphy's Spiritual Law:" if I can mess up my own salvation, I will. But if my salvation depends on Jesus alone and His faithfulness, then I *can't* be lost.

So as you look at this passage, the Holy Spirit wants to take away every last shred of confidence that you might put in your own faithfulness, so that all of your hope and trust would rest in Jesus and His faithfulness—Because He will hold me fast.

I. The predictions.

Let's look at the passage. Jesus makes 3 predictions here in the omniscience of His divine nature. First He predicts that all the Disciples will fall away -

- Matthew 26:31 ³¹Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

Literally, they will all 'stumble' - *skandalon* - because of Him that very night. Remember how devastated they were to hear that one of them would actually betray Him? They were crushed. But now Jesus says they will *all* scatter and leave Him alone in His darkest hour.

Matthew Henry said, "Though there was only one traitor, all were deserters."

- Jesus quotes from Zechariah here to show His men that all of this was predetermined by God. It's all been scripted out, none of it is accidental. Later, they will look back and see that Jesus was in complete control of every detail.

The second prediction is in—

- Matthew 26:32 ³²But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

He will go to the cross, He will die, but He will be raised up! And He will meet with them, as their Shepherd, in Galilee. I.e., this won't be the end of Him, and it won't be the end of them either! They will be scattered, but He promises that they will be re-gathered. In Galilee - where they had so many good times, and saw so many miracles, and heard such amazing teaching. They should have rejoiced at this promise.

-- The way we should rejoice when we read promises like the one Jesus just made in--

- Matthew 26:29 ²⁹I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

*Beloved, that day is coming! If you know Jesus, you will be there at that Marriage Supper of the Lamb! No matter how painful life is right now; and how long it seems to be dragging on, "we will feast in the house of Zion, we will sing, with our hearts restored!" Momentary affliction is producing an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison with your pain. Don't just run out the clock, waiting for this life to be over - take every step in the joy and hope of these promises.

Those discouraged men should have grabbed on to this promise and it should have caused their joy to overcome their sorrow, but it didn't happen. Every prediction Jesus made about His resurrection seemed to go over their heads. But again - the day would come when all of these fulfilled predictions would be rocket fuel for their faith!

- They should be rocket fuel for your faith too. That's why they're here.

Jesus has another prediction, but first, Peter pipes up. He needs to correct Jesus!

II. The prideful promise.

- Matthew 26:33 ³³Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."
- Matthew 26:35 ³⁵Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

So once again, Peter is leading the other Disciples - in the wrong direction. Peter didn't hear what Jesus said about being raised and gathering with them in Galilee because he was preparing his self-defense. If Jesus would just stop talking, he could set Him straight!

*Wow. Are we ever like that? We need to read and hear God's Word personally, and ask how it applies to us - but we can miss what God is saying when we push everything through the lens of our own ego and our own feelings: "What about me? What about me?" *That affects our hearing*. Do you know anyone who thinks the world revolves around him. Maybe their initials are D-J-T? I meant Douglas Jay Thompson - I don't know who you were thinking of.

We can't fault Peter for his loyalty to Jesus. Peter loved Jesus, but he still had way too much ego, and way too much confidence in himself. He was actually telling Jesus that He was wrong! He corrected Jesus on another occasion--

- Matthew 16:21-23 ²¹From that time 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 on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Peter actually pulls Jesus aside - it's like he's embarrassed for Him: "Uh Jesus, can I talk to you in private?" The word for *rebuke* here is a strong word. It's the same word Jesus used

when He *rebuked* demons and the wind and the waves. And He did it again on this same night, just a little earlier when Jesus began washing the Disciples' feet—

- John 13:6-9 ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” ⁷Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” ⁸Peter said to him, “*You shall never wash my feet.*” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” [so he does a complete flip-flop:] ⁹Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

Peter is a guy you want on your team! But he needed to learn not to put faith in his faith, but in the object of his faith - Jesus. Faith *is* nothing, and *does* nothing - it only connects us to the God who can do anything. Faith doesn't save you - it only connects you to Christ who saves.

Didn't Peter learn that when Jesus asked him to step out of that boat and walk to Him on the water?

- As long as he stared at Jesus, he could do the impossible, but as soon as he took his eyes off of Christ, he put his faith in his own faith, and all he could see was the storm around him, and his own inability to walk on water - and he began to sink.

And beloved, you can't walk on water either! And neither can I, unless Jesus calls us to come, and we keep our eyes on Him.

But at this point, Peter still thinks he can trust in Peter, so Jesus has to break Peter's faith in his own faith before he will trust only in Him, so He makes a sad prediction—

III. Another prediction.

- Matthew 26:34 ³⁴Jesus said to him, “Truly (Amen), I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”

In just a few hours. It was heartbreaking for Jesus to say this to Peter. Peter said, “*I will never fall away, Jesus!*” Jesus said, “*You won't even make it until morning, Peter.*”

Did that break Peter? Did it humble him?

- Matthew 26:35 ³⁵Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, *I will not deny you!*” And all the disciples said the same.

“Jesus, You are wrong again! You said I will deny You three times, and I say, *I will not!*” Maybe Jesus had to get Peter to say it with his own lips: And in just a few hours, these words would come back to him and he would weep bitterly.

And what happens next was a living illustration for the Disciples and for us, that we will always be weak sheep, but in Jesus we will always have a strong Shepherd!

IV. Our praying Shepherd.

- Matthew 26:36-38 ³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he

said to them, “My soul is *very sorrowful*, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”

His sorrow.

Jesus suffered so much before He ever got to the Cross. He is facing this horrible physical torture and crucifixion, and in His darkest hour, He knows that Judas is about to betray Him with a kiss, Peter will deny Him three times, and the others will scatter. He is feeling so alone, and He knows - He knows - even His own Father will turn His back on Him while he bears the sins of His people. To the point that He will cry out, “My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?”

He knows all of this is coming! Every detail. He’s horrified at the physical pain that He is about to endure - I will never believe those who say that didn’t affect Him. *He’s a man!* Of course He dreaded the torture and the crucifixion. But the worst part will be the sins that He will bear, and the wrath of His Father on those sins.

- You know how badly you can feel when you sin? To the point of despair and depression. But you’re used to it! Your conscience is no stranger to sin.

Jesus was a complete stranger to sin and all its ugly effects. He never experienced the sting of a guilty conscience; never felt shame over lying or deception; *never ever knew the sorrow of grieving His heavenly Father!* But He is about to have all the accumulated guilt and shame of the sins of His people piled on Him, while He takes on Himself the burning wrath of God on those sins. That’s why He was on His face in the Garden—

- Luke uses the word *ago_nia* which means a great, agonizing struggle.
- Mark says Jesus was *greatly distressed*. The Gk. word means “dread, shock” B.B. Warfield, the great theologian said this Gk. word “is used of those whose minds are horror-struck by the sight or thought of something great or atrocious, not merely because it injects fear, but because the mind scarcely takes in its magnitude.”
- Matthew says Jesus was “*troubled*” = It’s the deepest Gk. word for depression. Warfield said, “. . . it describes the confused, restless, half-distracted state, which is produced by physical discouragement or mental distress, or grief.” Picture a person pacing and talking to himself - that’s Jesus in the Garden.

He said “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death;” Jesus felt as though He was drowning in His grief, He was going under. Listen to these prophetic words from Ps.69, written 1,000 earlier—

- Psalm 69:1-3 ¹Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. ²I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. ³I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

Jesus said that the grief was enough to kill Him. And my brothers and sisters, it did! You remember that when the executioner came to Jesus on the cross, he was surprised to find that Jesus was already dead. It seemed too quick. That’s because He died of the emotional stress on His heart. He died of a broken heart.

Luke tells us how bad it was—

- Luke 22:44 ⁴⁴And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

This is a documented medical condition known as *hematidrosis*, in which the capillaries under the skin rupture and mix with the sweat. It leaves people weak and dehydrated—remember Jesus couldn't finish carrying His own cross, and He cried out that He was thirsty from the cross. Dr. Luke wants us to know the indescribable emotional stress Jesus experienced as He faced the cross.

But through all of this emotional struggle, *He stayed strong*. While His sheep sleep, He stays awake and prays because He has to go through with this. He can't fail or there is no salvation. There is no plan B. And even though He is the God-Man He needs to *pray* to His Father to resist the temptation to bail on the plan.

If Jesus needed to pray to stay strong and resist temptation, how much more do you and I need to pray!

- Matthew 26:39 . . . he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

I like Mark's version—

- Mark 14:36 ³⁶And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

This is the perfect prayer - it's the perfect model for our own prayers: Jesus calls God His Abba Father. Then He confesses God's power and sovereignty: “All things are possible for You - You can do anything You will to do, My Father!” Then He lifts up His request: “Remove this cup from Me.” Now Jesus knew there was no other way! He knew how this was going to end, but in His fully human nature, He was struggling just the way you and I would struggle. And as a Son He pours out His human heart to His Father.

Hebrews gives us a fascinating commentary on this scene—

- Hebrews 5:7-8 ⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸Although he was a son, *he learned obedience* through what he suffered.

Jesus was always obedient! But as a real Man, facing real temptations, He had to *experience* the cost of obedience, as a Man, so that He can be our sympathetic High Priest.

*Let me give you a quick theological footnote here - and it's a hit and run because we don't have time to go into it, but Jesus had a fully human nature, and a fully divine nature, in One Person. He was, and still is, the God-Man. But He went through this time of struggle and temptation in His human nature - Satan was tempting and attacking Jesus' human nature, not His divine nature. I make this point because we need to know that Jesus went through what we go through! He didn't kick it into divine overdrive to sail through the hard times.

To take it deeper: Jesus had the same *human* nature that Adam had before the Fall - *a human nature which could sin* - and Jesus had to pass every test and obey where Adam failed, to gain us the righteousness of God. And He did. Listen again to Hebrews, this is food for your soul!—

- Hebrews 2:17-18 ¹⁷Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

So Jesus cried out to His Father, “Is there any other way, Father?” What was the answer? “No.” No other way to satisfy God’s wrath on sin. If even one human being could be good enough and just try harder, God wouldn’t have put His Son through this. But with man, it’s impossible, so He had to go. And He did so willingly: “*Not as I will, but as You will.*” And that should be our desire in every prayer we pray, right? Not to get God to do what we want, but to bring our own will into alignment with His!

V. His sleeping sheep.

- Matthew 26:40-41 ⁴⁰And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

And this happened 3 times! You know that after Jesus’ resurrection, those 3 men remembered this and they thought, “How could we have slept at a time like that!” And it wasn’t the first time this had happened: these same three guys had fallen asleep on the Mt. of Transfiguration when Jesus was in His glory with Moses and Elijah! That’s like falling asleep at an Eagle’s concert!

Why did Jesus tell them to pray? He didn’t say, “Pray *for* Me.” I really don’t think He was relying on their prayers to get Him through this. He said, “Pray *with* Me, so that you won’t enter into temptation.” He had just told them they would all fall away, they should have been slugging’ down coffee to stay awake and pray that it wouldn’t happen. But they didn’t, and it did.

Imagine how Peter felt after his third denial of Jesus and he heard the cock crow. Luke recorded this—

- Luke 22:61-62 ⁶¹And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter must have been thinking, “Why didn’t I pray like Jesus told me to?” And we know the answer: He was over confident in his own flesh. He’s Peter, the Rock! In just a few minutes he’s going to take off a man’s ear defending Jesus. And that’s why he slept instead of praying: he thought his devotion to Jesus would carry him through. He had faith in his faith, instead faith in Christ.

But look at Jesus’ response. He was so gentle and patient, as heartbroken as He was—

- Matthew 26:40-41 . . . And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

So this happened 3 times, then we read—

- Matthew 26:45-46 ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

And they look up and see a crowd coming toward them - led by Judas. And Jesus was ready. The Disciples weren't.

Two Ways to Live.

What is success in the Christian life? When are you getting it right? You really only have two choices - two ways to approach the rest of your life as a Christian, and two ways to pursue joy as a Christian—

The first way is to say, "Success is my own holiness, my own obedience. I will be happy to the extent that I please God by my life." And for some of you, I've taken the words right out of your mouths. And to the extent that you live your Christian life like that, you will be miserable, and unhappy, and very likely, you will become a hypocrite - to cover up all your failures. You might even walk away from it all at some point. Why? Did you hear what Jesus said? "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Just everyone else's? No, yours too.

- *Don't confuse your feelings of love and loyalty to Jesus for *strength*. You might honestly *feel* like you would never, ever deny Him, or disobey Him, or go back to that sin again, because you love Him so much. Oh, fan the flames of that love, and that sincerity - but don't put your trust in it. Your spirit might be very willing, but your flesh will always be weak. Always. Re-read Romans 7. Sing it with Luther: "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing."

The second way to live as a Christian is to say, "Success is trusting in Christ, His obedience, His holiness, His blood shed for Me, and His intercession for me. I will be happy to the extent that I simply trust in Him and rest in Him!"

*I don't want you to leave here this morning with sleeping Peter, James, and John stuck in your mind! I want you to leave cherishing that picture of Jesus, as weak as He was, staying strong, passing every test, obeying every command, loving His own to the end, praying for those for whom He was about to die, and then rising again. And He is still interceding for His own! That's our strength, that's our hope, that's our joy. I said it last Lord's Day, "It's not what you do, it's Who you trust."

You will always, always be a weak sheep, but He will always, always, be your strong Shepherd. That's what I want you to leave with this morning. Just listen—

When I fear my faith will fail,
Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail,
He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold;
He must hold me fast.

Those He saves are His delight,
Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in his holy sight,
He will hold me fast.
He'll not let my soul be lost;
His promises shall last;
Bought by Him at such a cost,

He will hold me fast.

He will hold me fast,
He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so,
He will hold me fast.