

Frail Followers  
Luke 22:21-38  
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When I was coaching little league baseball I always tried to make sure the kids knew about the Babe Ruth, the Bambino, the greatest hitter the game has ever known. Why do I think that? Well, in 1927, E.G. Ruth hit 60 hours more than any other entire team in baseball. In 2019 the Twins set a record with a team total of 307 hours. The Detroit Tigers were at the bottom with 149, but no individual in the MLB hit more than 53. That was Pete Alonso of the Mets. During his 22-year career Babe Ruth hit 714 hours, 3<sup>rd</sup> on the all-time list. Yet, he also struck out 1330 times, which as a record until Mickey Mantle broke it in the 1960's.

So when a little league player would strike out and walk back to the dugout with her head hanging down or maybe with a tear in his eye, I would sometimes say, "Hey, that's ok. Even the best hitters struck out sometimes. Remember Babe Ruth struck out 1330 times."

For today our journey through the gospel of Luke brings us to chapter 22:21-38. If you have a bible you can turn there, otherwise the verses will be on the screen.

Now, there is nothing about baseball, or even football in this passage. We will see, however, that sometimes those who are followers of Jesus are rather frail followers, who strike out, big time. Let's pause and pray the Lord would encourage and challenge us today.

Today we will focus on Jesus' disciples, the 12 minus Judas which marks 11. They are ***Luke 6:14-17 Simon, whom he also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot;***

***and Judas the son of James.*** The lists in Matthew and Mark refer to this last disciple as "Thaddeus." It is not hard to imagine that after Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, that this other Judas starting using a nickname of some type. These are the 11 followers of Jesus. We will see they are rather frail followers.

We are in Jerusalem, Passover week, circa 33 A.D. Thursday evening, Jesus is in an upper room sharing the Passover meal with these 11 men, plus Judas. It is often called the Last Supper. After explaining how the bread and the wine they have shared represent his body and blood, Jesus says, ***Luke 22:21 Look, the hand of the one betraying me is at the table with me.*** He is referring to Judas Iscariot. We talked about him 2 weeks ago. ***22:23 So they began to argue among themselves which of them it could be was going to do it.*** Though Jesus knows that Judas is the betrayer, the other disciples do not. This is an indication that we're not men trends discrimination.as we mentioned 2 weeks Judas had been stealing money from the group and though Jesus certainly knew that, the other 11 did not. Now, I am not saying these men are responsible for what they did not now. But I do think this shows they may not have been the best judge of character. Begin with Judas almost 24/7 for 3 years maybe should have given some type of clue about who he really was.

However, when Jesus makes his accusation that one of them will betray him. They quickly point fingers at each other. They do not seem to rely on evidence or logic to determine who the betrayer is. Instead they apparently allow paranoia and self-protection to fuel their suspicion and their argument likely was full of wild accusations. But

that was just the beginning. **22:24 then a dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest.** Some bible scholars suggest Luke is writing topically, rather than chronologically. In other words, he is describing an event that happened earlier in Jesus' ministry or maybe earlier in the evening. They say Luke includes it here because it fits with the topic of the disciples arguing. Maybe, but, I think Luke is clear this dispute over "who is the greatest" happened on more than one occasion. E.G. **Luke 9:46-50** describes another incident and even though it may be hard to believe the disciples would be arguing who is the greatest right after he had washed their feet (John 13) and shared the last supper with them. I think it's plausible. E.G., I can imagine Andrew saying, "How dare you accuse me of plotting to betray Jesus, when I was the 1<sup>st</sup> one to follow him." And then Matthew responding, "you might have been the 1<sup>st</sup>, but I gave up a whole lot more than you to follow Jesus. You left your pitiful little fishing business. I left a lucrative tax collecting position." It doesn't take much for people to start arguing about who is better. That type of competition seems to be deeply rooted in human nature.

Jesus then uses this to give another lesson on greatness. **22:25 but he said to them, "the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who have authority over them have themselves called 'Benefactors.'** Like they are doing their subjects a favor by ruling over them. **22:26 it is not to be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever is greatest among you should become like the youngest, and whoever leads, like the one serving.** Whether within the church or other contexts, those in positions of authority are not to focus on the power or prestige. **22:27a for who is greater, the one (sitting) at the table or the one serving/ isn't it the one at the table?** That is what we would assume, whether in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century. **22:27b but I am among you as the one who serves.** No matter how inflated of an ego any

of the disciples might have had, they all realized Jesus was clearly the greatest among. Yet, he was the one who washed their feet. The one who served them when they were at the table. The lesson **Matthew 20:26 whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant.**

Now, there is good news for the 11. They are Jesus' followers. They are not total losers and Jesus has some very encouraging words for them. **22:28-30 You are those who stood by me in my trials. "I bestow on you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one on me. So that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom. And you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.** This is an amazing promise, one which only Jesus as Messiah, as God's son can make. The 11 plus Judas' replacement, Matthias, will indeed find greatness in God's kingdom.

But Jesus has some not so good news for one of the 11, for the leader, the one who seems the most faithful, Simon Peter. **22:31,32 "Simon, Simon look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. "but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."** Ultimately, Peter's faith would not fail. But there was rough water ahead. Peter, no surprise is overly confident. **22:33 "Lord," he told him, "I'm ready to go with you both in prison and to death."** But Jesus says, **no you are not! 22:34, "I tell you, Peter," he said, "the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that you know me."** In a few weeks we will see that is exactly what happens. This disciple who thought he was full of faith, will fail miserably.

Ok, there are probably a number of lessons the Lord has for us from this passage, but what stands out to me is how often the 11, the followers of Jesus, strike out. After being with Jesus almost 24/7 for 3 years, they are still very human and their faith, at times, seems very frail. Here are 3 lessons for us.

#1 followers of Jesus are not always very discernful. Though lacking discernment may not be a sin, it is an indication of an absence of spiritual maturity. In *Hebrews 5:14* the Lord tells us, ***but solid food is for the mature-for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.*** I believe a spiritually mature disciple would at least have had some questions about Judas and when Jesus spoke of a betrayer, “Judas” would have immediately come to his mind. Friends, this is a huge need in the church today. We simply need people who can see the difference between good and evil. Yet, when something goes wrong, when someone you trust maybe lets you down, it usually doesn’t do a lot of good to beat yourself up.

I think of Sue. Yes, her parents told her they do not believe Bill would make a good husband, but she had been so “in love.” Now 4 years later, its been a year since the divorce. Sue just keeps thinking, “how could I have been so gullible? I should have known he could not be trusted.” Well maybe so. But Sue was certainly not the 1<sup>st</sup> person to get fooled. The 11 disciples, he apostles, were blind to who Judas really was. Yes, Sue struck out. But, the Lord will likely give her another chance sometime, and she needs to make sure she is more discerning.

Or there is Joe. He was chairman of the board of the church search committee that hired Pastor Nelson. Joe felt sure he would be a very personable and godly pastor. Now Joe keeps thinking, “how could I have been so naïve.” After 2 years the church treasure has discovered that Pastor Nelson had stolen almost \$25k from the congregation. Joe, thinks, “if only I had been more discerning our church would not be in this mess.” Maybe, Joe was blind to Pastor Nelson’s flaws, just like the 11 were blind to Judas Iscariot’s. so Joe maybe struck out, but I suspect that the Lord will make sure he gets another at bat. Here are folks out there, and probably in here

who blame themselves for all sorts of things, because of mistakes and misjudgments they have made. But God’s grace is much bigger than all those regrets. Friends, if you are a believer in Jesus, you can be confident that God is working in your life, weaving every mistake into your story in such a way that there will be a good and happy ending.

#2 followers of Jesus sometimes have bad attitudes towards each other. For one they are quick to accuse. When Jesus says, one of you would betray me, they try to defend themselves by pointing their fingers at someone else and then they get into an argument about who of them should be considered the greatest, thinking they were somehow better than their fellow followers of Jesus. My guess is that for every one person who is beating him/herself for mistakes made in the past, there are 3 people thinking all of their problems are pretty much someone else’s fault. These folks tend to think they are smarter, more honest, and easier to get along with than “the average person.” Psych David Myers found out that on average 80% people thought that about themselves. I suspect some of these folks might even think they should be considered the greatest.

So do followers of Jesus still think like this? For sure. One common theme in marriage counseling is that the husband and wife are both usually pretty good at pointing out what the other is doing wrong. They can explain how their marital conflict is really the other person’s fault. I also find that some people like to blame their parents for flaws in their character. Pointing fingers of blame is something a lot of us do sometimes.

And as far as thinking we are better than other people. That happens fairly often. Sometimes it is feeling of racial or ethnic superiority. It could be thinking whites are somehow superior to people of color or swede finns and swedes arguing about who looked down on whom.

People use their educational level, financial status, and physical appearance as reasons to think they are somehow better than someone else. And it can go both directions. For example, let's say someone walked into this morning wearing a \$2k suit. You find out he has a PH.D. and used to teach in the MBA program at the U.M. he has moved here, by himself, after retiring at age 52 because he made over \$10 million stock trading in the 1st 5 years. He is good looking, educated and wealthy. Some of you single gals are thinking, "PH>D where is this guy sitting?" Others, especially, some guys, are thinking, "well, that is not really anyone I would like to know. The guy is probably stuck up. I am sure he does not have any real practical knowledge or skills. And who knows if he made all the money legally." Without hearing the fellow say one word, you have already decided you are a better person than he is. That is not a very loving attitude.

Now, to be fooled by someone's deceptions, as the disciples were with Judas, indicates a lack of discernment, but it is really not a moral failure, it is not sin. However, falsely blaming someone else or thinking we are better than other people, those are sinful attitudes. They violate Jesus' command for us from **John 15:12 this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you**. That is a command that both the 11 disciples and those of us in this room fail to follow consistently. What good is it to know that? Well, it is a reminder that we are all in need of God's grace. None of us love God and other people as we should. And if you are ever disgusted with other people for their bad attitudes, or wonder if God will forgive your bad attitudes, it is good to remember that he forgave the disciples for the same type of attitudes.

#3 Followers of Jesus can be over confident about their spiritual strength and commitment. Simon Peter said, **22:33 "Lord," he told him, "I'm ready**

**to go with you both to prison and to death.**" No, he was not. Not, yet anyway. But he was hardly the last person to loudly proclaim his love for the Lord and then fall flat on his face. it happens at bible camps. At the end of the week students are often very excited about following the Lord and they make pledges to read their bible for 30 minutes every day or to listen only to Christian music. And for the next couple of weeks that happens. But then, well, the enthusiasm kind of wears off and old habits return and those pledges are forgotten. Another time we can make empty promises to God is when we sing. I think of the old hymn, "take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord, to thee. Take my silver and my gold, not a might would I withhold." A might is like a penny. Well, I can think of times when I sang that song with great sincerity on Sunday, but on Monday I was intent on holding on to more than a few pennies that the Lord probably wanted me to use differently than I did.

So, what is the lesson here for us? Well, I guess the 1<sup>st</sup> is we should probably avoid making promises to God that we are unlikely to keep. I think the bible make that clear. 2<sup>nd</sup> we can find comfort in the fact that when we do make and break promises to God, he is willing to forgive us. When other people break promises to Go , he is willing to forgive them. That was Peter's experience. He felt pretty foolish when he fails to do what he said he would do, but Jesus did forgive and restore him. Some of you have broken a few promises in your life: maybe your marriage vows, maybe you have defaulted on a loan, maybe you have let down your children, or a friend, maybe when you were 12 years old you promised God you would be a missionary to India, and 60 years later that still hasn't happened. Friend, remember, if you turn to the Lord he will forgive you. One of the reasons Jesus died on the cross was for all the broken promises you have made and for all the broken people around you have made. That is his amazing grace. Yet, I think the

big lesson for us is that pleasing God is not really about making promises to God or even keeping those promises. It is about Jesus and how he has kept and will keep every promise he has ever made. Being a faithful follower of Jesus is never really about what we do, but about trusting in what Jesus has done for us. And friend, if you find yourself talking more about your commitment to the Lord, than you do about the Lord's great commitment to us, I fear you might be setting yourself up for a big fall, just like Peter did.

Ok, summing up our passage today I might say that the disciples, even as they are that last supper with Jesus, seem like a bunch of "doofuses." But that is not a good word. They were not incompetent. They were just frail followers of Jesus. Prone to mistakes, sinful attitudes and empty promises. They that the Lord still loved, forgave, and used them is encouragement for us. We also can be frail followers of Jesus. If we strike out sometimes, it helps to know that they struck out sometimes, but the Lord never gave up on them.

But there is really more to the story... and that is what happens 50 or so days later, on what we call the day of the Pentecost. It was then that the Holy Spirit came upon these frail followers of Jesus, and really changed their lives. We'll talk about this more in a couple of weeks. Simon Peter, who strikes out big time when he denies he even knows Jesus, then hits a huge homerun on the day of the Pentecost as he preaches an incredible sermon. In fact, God uses that message to bring 3,000 people to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. Peter was transformed by the Holy Spirit from a frail follower to a faithful follower of Jesus. Oh, he was still far from perfect but he was sure moving in the right direction. Friends, by God's grace, through his Spirit, may he help us to move in the right direction and enable us to be more and more, faithful followers of Jesus!