

## **Restoring Deserting Disciples**

Scripture: Matthew 26:31-35

Code: 2384

Open your Bible, if you will, with me to the 26th chapter of Matthew. We're going to be looking at verses 30 through 35 – Matthew 26:30 through 35. As much as we would like to think of ourselves as strong Christians, the fact of the matter is that, in and of ourselves, we are weak. We would like to think that we could never be caught in a situation where we would deny the Lord, where we would deny His Word, where we would be ashamed to name His name or to be associated with Him. But the truth of the matter is from time to time, we do just exactly that. We are caught in an environment of unrighteousness, and we say nothing. There is a time to speak of Christ, and we do not speak. There is a time when someone would identify us as a Christian, and we shun such an identification for fear of social pressure or social ostracization. There are times when we should be bold for the cause of Christ, and we are anything but bold.

I remember when I was young I used to think about how it would be when in the future I went to serve the Lord, and should He call me to a very difficult place, I was faced with death or denial of Christ. I had read missionary stories about those people who affirmed their faith in Christ all the way to death, and I wondered whether I would do that, and I wanted so desperately to believe that I would. I really wanted to be able to say, "I'd do that – I'd name Christ right down the wire, and if they were going to burn me at the stake, I'd keep naming the name of Christ." I wanted so much to be able to say that about myself, but I really had a lot of doubts. And what gives me the doubts, and did then and still does, is that there are times when I don't even say what I ought to say in a situation far less intimidating than death. There are times when we just retreat from the identification with Christ that we should have. There are times when as disciples, we desert, we go AWOL, we defect for shame's sake. We'd rather not be identified with Jesus Christ. We just don't want to step out and stand firm.

And so it was with the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so the lesson He teaches them here is a lesson for us as well. They defected in this passage. They deserted Christ. He predicts that, and it came to pass exactly as He had predicted it. But it was a profound and unforgettable lesson to them; a lesson which I believe changed the course of their lives. Of all the things that Jesus could have said to them, of all the things that He could have warned them about, of all of the issues that could have been brought up about the future, He chooses to bring up the fact that they will all desert Him and defect. And Matthew, by the Holy Spirit, chooses to place that story right in the midst of this chapter on preparation for the cross, because it is such a monumental lesson to learn. And if, as our Lord has planned, the disciples are to carry the message to the world, they have to be strong. And the first step in strength is to learn how really weak you are, right? So the lesson of weakness is the first thing to

be learned. And that is the lesson He teaches them here.

It is, as all the rest of this chapter up to now is, part of the preparation for the cross. We've read about the preparation of God, the preparation of the Jewish leaders, the preparation of Mary, the preparation of Judas, the preparation of our Lord in ending the old economy with the final Passover, in initiating the Lord's table. And now there is the preparation by the Lord of the disciples, who are going to carry on the message. And they are prepared by learning a very important lesson about their own human weakness, about their own inability to live up to the standard they say they affirm. And it is a lesson that we need to learn as well. We all face the fact that we might stand firm for Christ amidst Christians, we might want to make a testimony as we talk to the Lord – "Lord, I'll never deny You, I'll never forsake You, I'll never desert You, I'll stand with You" – as Peter said, "I'm ready to go to prison with You and to die if need be, I'll do it all" – but when it comes right down to meeting the issue, we defect. All of us face that same kind of thing. And we need to learn that we do not have the strength in ourselves to handle that kind of situation, unless we recognize our weakness and depend on the Lord. If we think we can do it in our own strength, we will fail.

A few moments ago we sang a hymn, and I want to just remind you of a couple of the lines in that hymn that I thought were very important for us. "O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end. Be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend. I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side, nor wander from the pathway if Thou will be my Guide." Now, there is a promise made, but an affirmation that if the promise is to be kept, You have to be by my side. "O let me feel Thee near me, the world is ever near. I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear. My foes are ever near me, around me and within, but, Jesus, draw Thou nearer and shield my soul from sin." The promise is there of faithful service to the end, and so is the sense of inadequacy, the sense of weakness that depends on the Lord. "O Jesus, Thou hast promised to all who follow Thee that where Thou art in glory, there shall Thy servant be. And, Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end. O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend," the recognition that a promise like that can only be kept in divine strength and by the presence of Christ.

Now, we will make those promises, and as disciples we should make them. But we should learn from this lesson that we cannot keep them in our own strength. Look at verse 30. "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives. Then said Jesus unto them, 'All ye shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." But after I am raised up again, I will go before you into Galilee.' Peter answered and said unto Him, 'Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended.' Jesus said unto him, 'Verily, I say unto thee that this night before the cock crows, thou shalt deny Me thrice.' Peter said unto Him, 'Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee,' likewise also said all the disciples." You see, they all affirmed what we would like to be able to affirm. But they were affirming it based on their own sense of strength, their own sense of commitment. They thought their love for Christ was greater than it was. They thought their spiritual strength was greater

than it was. They thought their ability to handle Satan was greater than it was. They were leaning on their own understanding, in the terms of Proverbs 3.

And when it came down to the very moment of having to take that stand when Christ was taken captive in the garden, you will notice in chapter 26, at verse 56, the last sentence of the verse, “Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.” When it came down to the moment of trial, they all fled. So all that they promised – verbalized by Peter and then affirmed by all the rest – was nothing but empty words, because they were endeavoring to stand in their own strength. So Jesus here, as part of the preparation for His cross, is teaching the disciples a strengthening lesson, warning them about the inadequacy of human strength – the inadequacy of self in spiritual warfare. Now, not any Christian really is exempt from the trials that can cause us to be ashamed of Christ. I remind you of 2 Timothy, chapter 1, where Paul says to Timothy, “God has not given us” – verse 7 – “a spirit of fear or timidity, but of power of love and a sound mind; be not thou therefore ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Imagine Paul having to tell Timothy not to be ashamed of Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 12, he says, “For I was not ashamed of Christ but bore my suffering willingly,” is what he says in effect. And in Romans 1:16 he says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” There is no place in the life of a believer for shame regarding Christ. There is no place for defection, or desertion. In fact, in Romans 9:33 it says, “Whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed.” And in Mark 8:38, Jesus said, “It is a characteristic of an unbeliever that they are ashamed of Me, and whoever is ashamed of Me, I’ll be ashamed of him.” It is unbelievers who are ashamed of Christ, not believers. And yet sometimes under pressure we desert, we defect, we’re disloyal, we’re unfaithful. And here is the lesson about restoring the deserting, defecting disciples.

Now, there’s another thing that I want you to notice in this lesson, because it is certainly Matthew’s main point. He’s not primarily focusing on the disciples, though they are the seeming surface issue here. The primary focus is on Christ, I believe. Matthew’s intent here is to preserve the majesty of Jesus Christ. How can you do that in a situation like that? How can Christ come out with any dignity, with any respect, with any glory, with any majesty, in any sense the regal royal Son of God, King of kings, how can He in any sense be that in the midst of the desertion and defection of all of His followers? Someone is bound to say of Him, “What kind of leader is this who has His troops come to the heat of the battle, and they all go into desertion when they meet the enemy? What kind of leader is that who has no more control over His own, who has no more loyalty from His own, who has no more love and commitment from His own? Lesser men than these have stood in greater seriousness, and they stood their ground. What kind of men are these? Does He not pick right kind of men?”

In other words, it could be a very demeaning kind of thing for Christ. He could lose face here. It could be something that weakens His regal splendor. But it doesn’t, because Matthew under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit turns it around, so that it exalts Jesus Christ in contrast to the defecting disciples. And as I read through this, and read it again and again, and studied it over this week, I came to see

the majestic character of Jesus Christ in this passage as clearly as any in this part of the New Testament. I see it by way of contrast with the disciples. And I assume in my heart that that also was in the mind of the Spirit of God and Matthew as this was penned. Now remember, this is hours before the crucifixion. This is the conclusion of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the climax of redemptive history. This is the greatest moment. I don't know if you know this, but only four chapters in all four gospels, a total of four chapters are devoted to the first 30 years of Christ's life. Thirteen are devoted to the last day of His life. This is a monumental moment in redemptive history, and all part of the preparation of the cross. Christ has ended the old economy, closed out the Jewish dispensation with the final Passover, instituted the new economy in the new covenant of His blood and the cup and the bread. And now He teaches this very profound lesson to men who are very critical men in the ongoing extension of His kingdom and covenant. And so, as we come to verse 30, we just get into the text and read, "When they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."

Now, do you remember that in the Passover I told you there were four cups? After the main meal of the lamb, the bitter herbs, and the sauce, the unleavened bread, they would take a cup, then they would sing the *hall* [???], which would be the latter part of the *hall* [???], Psalm 115 to 118. Then they would take the fourth and final cup, and then they would sing the final song, which was Psalm 136, called the great *hall* [???]. And every verse in Psalm 136 ends with the same line, "For His mercy endureth forever – for His mercy endureth forever – for His mercy endureth forever" – every one of them. So they would have sung that. But Matthew leaves something out. In fact, before they sung that last hymn, or literally the Greek says, "Before they hymned and then went out," Jesus taught them. And that whole teaching is recorded in John 14 through 16. So somewhere after He instituted His supper and before they left, you have to insert John 14, 15, 16 and 17. Fourteen, 15 and 16 are teaching; 17 is a prayer to the Father. In those three chapters of teaching, He promises them all of the legacy that He has to give – peace, joy, contentment, comfort, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, hope for the future. He even promises them persecution, but deliverance from it. He gives them all the information they need, the final culmination of teaching before the cross. Then in John 17, He prays to the Father on their behalf in that marvelous high priestly prayer; so all of that comes before the final hymn and the departure from that place.

We know that because in John 18:1, after 14, 15, 16, and 17, we read this, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out." So we know the Lord didn't leave that upper room until He had taught through 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 of John. So all of that is covered; John records it. Matthew does not. So all that great teaching has been given, that great prayer to the Father praying for the oneness and the unity of His own who would come to believe in Him in the days ahead, as well as those who were there that night. All of that, and then the final *hall* [???], Psalm 136 and then they leave. And the leaving was very significant. It was nearly midnight. They go out of this upper room, down the stairs, out into the street, and the city is alive as if it was midday. It is alive because it is Passover time. It is the time of the feast of unleavened bread, and there's activity everywhere and people are hurrying around. Some are in the midst of eating their Passover meal. Remember, the Galileans and the

Pharisees ate it late Thursday night. Some are still eating it, so the lamps are burning in the houses. Some are getting ready to have it the next day, the Judeans and the Sadducees, and so, they're getting the preparations ready.

The temple gates will be thrown open at midnight for the special festival. And so people are surging toward the temple wanting to get in that place. Visitors are everywhere; people negotiating for a place to have the Passover the next day, who had come from out of town, animals being collected and carried all around to be sacrificed the next day. It's alive, even though it's night, and so they're pushing their way, no doubt, through this kind of crowd at night, down the eastern slope of the temple mount. They've crossed the Kidron valley, where the little brook is running as full as it ever runs because of winter rain, and it's even more full because of the blood of all the thousands of animals that have been slain, and the blood runs out the back of the temple, down the slope, into the stream to be carried away. And so the disciples, eleven of them now, and Jesus cross that in the dark, and they ascend the Mount of Olives, headed for a very familiar place that they have gone to many times called the Garden of Gethsemane, which means "olive press;" Mount of Olives, many olive trees, and a place called olive press.

People in the city didn't have gardens in the city. There was no place for that. They had gardens out on the slopes around the city, and they would cultivate those, and those would be the gardens that belonged to the people that lived in the city. And Jesus went to a familiar place, and they were headed for that place, but it must have been up the slope a ways, and as they went up they needed to stop and rest – maybe in a similar place that they had stopped the night before when He gave them the great Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and 25 on His Second Coming. So they stop again on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, and there are just 12 of them now, including the Lord, and they're gathered together in these final hours, and Jesus has something to say to them, verse 31 says. And He launches in to this confrontation of their weakness. Now, basically, all of the teaching prior to this has been positive. Promises, promises, promises, all through John 13 to 16, a hopeful prayer in John 17, but now as He comes to this moment on the side of the hill, it is time for a negative message, it is time for a warning. They must learn this great lesson, that strength is born out of a recognition of weakness, not of a recognition of strength. That illusion has to be eliminated. And as He teaches this lesson – and this is really what I want you to see; among other things, this is the primary thing – as He teaches this lesson to His defecting disciples, we see a marvelous contrast between Christ and the disciples which preserves His majesty. And I think you'll see that as we move through it.

First of all, there is a contrast between knowledge and ignorance – between knowledge and ignorance. The disciples, frankly, are woefully ignorant. We find Peter saying, "Though all men," verse 33, "will be offended because of You, yet will I never be offended." Such ignorance. I mean it was only a matter of a few hours before he would be offended. In verse 35, "Though I should die with You, yet will I not deny You." He didn't know that. He couldn't affirm that. And as it turned out, that was

ignorant. And then all the disciples said the same thing in verse 35. They were ignorant. They were ignorant of their own weaknesses. They were ignorant of the strength of Satan. They were ignorant of the test and its great power that they were going to be facing in a matter of a few hours. They were ignorant of so very many things – to say nothing of their ignorance of the Old Testament, of their ignorance of the prophecy mentioned in verse 31 about the shepherd having to be smitten and the sheep of the flock being scattered. They were ignorant about many things. And their ignorance is obvious.

But over against their ignorance is the marvelous knowledge of Jesus Christ. Notice verse 31. “Then” – and the ‘then’ is indefinite, some way up the Mount of Olives that night – “Jesus said to them” – it’s another time for teaching, another time for instruction. And this is a lesson about the stupidity of self-sufficiency. He says, “All you shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written ‘I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad,’ but after I am raised up again, I’ll go before you into Galilee.” And then in verse 34 He says to Peter, “Verily I say unto you, this night before the cock crows you’ll deny Me on three occasions.” Now that’s knowledge. Listen, He knew they would be offended. He knew that. He knew it would happen this night. He knew it would be because of Him. He knew He would be raised from the dead. He knew He would meet them again in Galilee. He knew they would be offended to the point where, that very night before the cock crowed, Peter himself, the leader, would deny Jesus Christ. He knew they would never pass that trial that night in their own strength. He knew everything.

It was as if He was in a control booth and everything was being televised, and all of the screens of all the events were in front of Him, and He could see the panorama of everything that was happening. He could see Judas doing exactly what Judas was doing at this very moment. He could see the rulers of the Jews doing what they were doing. He knew exactly what was going to happen. And there was one screen that would show to Him the denial of Peter, another the fleeing of the disciples. He could see everything. He could see already the movement of the soldiers, the Roman soldiers along with the Jewish leaders, coming in with the clubs and the swords and the torches into the garden to take Him captive. He could feel on His cheek and He could see with His mind eye the kiss of Judas Iscariot. It all was right there in front of Him, He could see the whole thing. And He could see there vividly in His own eyes, the eyes of His supernatural knowledge, the prophecies of the Old Testament coming to pass. He could hear the echo of Old Testament prophecy. He could see the plan of God unfolding. It was all in front of Him, every bit of it.

He didn’t strain to find such knowledge; it was imminently in His awareness. He knew the kiss. He knew the betrayal. He knew every step in the mock trials. He knew it all, the descent, the desertion of the disciples, the denial of Peter, the whole thing, every bit of it was in front of His eyes. And so you lose nothing in looking at Jesus in this passage. He loses none of His regal majesty here. His royal personage is clear, because He has a knowledge of all these things that will come to pass. And all you need do is keep reading to find out they came to pass just as He said they would. He knew it all.

He knew the moment, this night. He knew the past, it is written, it is the plan of God. He knew the future, you're going to be offended. It was all very clear to Him. He knew it all, the majestic knowledge of Christ. And it focuses basically in verse 31 on an Old Testament prophecy found in Zechariah 13:7. He says, "You're going to be offended, you're going to be offended because of Me, and you're going to be offended because of Me this night, right tonight, for it is written." This is the plan of God. This is not some event that has come to pass by the whim and the will of Judas, or the religious leaders, or anybody else on earth; this is God's divine plan, it is written. And He quotes Zechariah 13:7, "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Jesus not only knew what Judas was doing, what the religious leaders were doing, what the disciples were thinking, He knew what Satan was planning, He knew how the whole trial would come out. He knew everything that was going to happen that night when the soldiers and the leaders came to take Him. He knew the kiss was going to come, He knew the disciples were going to flee. He not only knew all the present and all the future, but He also understood the plan of God in the past, and He also understood the meaning of the prophet Zechariah when he said what he said.

And by the way, that is not an easy passage to interpret. If it had been very easy, the disciples might have understood it. That passage in Zechariah 13:7 is somewhat difficult; I'll tell you why. In Zechariah 13, Zechariah is talking about some false prophets who will be wounded in their idol houses. He's talking about false prophets that God is going to come and wound in their idol houses. In other words, God is going to judge false prophets. And the prophet is speaking against those false prophets, who are worthy only of the judgment of God. And then he comes right behind that in verse 7 and says, "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." And it might seem at first that he's referring here to a false shepherd, that God is going to come down and smite a false shepherd – makes sense – and scatter all of the followers of that false shepherd. And we might think that, except for the clear interpretation of Christ, who says, "The smiting is Me, and the flock is you." And so the smitten shepherd of Zechariah 13:7 has to be the Messiah, and the scattered flock has to be His people. And if you understand that, you understand the meaning of Zechariah 13:7, and it makes sense out of that passage, especially as you look a little closer to it.

Now, look at Zechariah 13:7 for just a moment, and I'll show you some interesting things. It says, "Awake, o sword," and this is God, Jehovah God speaking, "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd." Now, that tells you right away that it's not a false prophet. God is not slaying a false prophet whom He calls "My shepherd," God's personal representative. God says, "My sword will slay My shepherd" – "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd." And then this most interesting phrase, "And against the man," and he uses a Hebrew word here that is not the normal word, not the generic word, but means "mighty man" or "man of great strength." So first of all, the shepherd to be slain is called "the shepherd of God, My shepherd, a mighty shepherd." And then it says, "Who is My fellow." Literally, "the mighty man of My union," or "the mighty man equal to Me." Marvelous statement, isn't it? Who is equal to God? Christ. Who was God's shepherd? Christ. Who is the mighty shepherd? Christ.

So clearly, Zechariah is turning a corner from the false, saying, "Yes, God will wound the false shepherd in the house of his idol, but God will also wound the true shepherd, and His sheep will be scattered as well." And the end of the verse, "And I'll turn My hand on the little ones," there will be a remnant – there will be a remnant. What Zechariah was saying is the day is coming when God is going to smite His own shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sheep are going to be scattered. Now, the sheep I believe Zechariah has in mind is the nation Israel. Israel went into chaos after the death of their Messiah. Seventy A.D., the city was destroyed, the temple and everything else, and they're still in the same chaos resulting from the rejection of Messiah. But the disciples being scattered were sort of the first phase of the chaos that hit the nation Israel. So Zechariah sees God smiting the shepherd, the nation disintegrating, and the first phase of it the Lord applies to this group of His own disciples, who will be scattered.

But, may I also add, and He doesn't quote this in Matthew, but it is in Zechariah. Zechariah says, "But I will gather again My little ones." And while the whole nation ultimately went into chaos, God went back out and gathered back His scattered disciples, didn't He? And He has continued to do that in the remnant. The prophecy of Zechariah is critical. And so we see the supernatural knowledge of the Lord. He knew the meaning of the plan of God, "It is written." He knew how to interpret a difficult passage in Zechariah perfectly clearly. He understood the disciples and where they were going and what they were going to do. He knew what Satan was going to bring to bear on them, and He knew they couldn't handle it. He knew what Peter would do, even though he said he wouldn't do it. He knew every detail of what was going on, and He knew when it was going to happen, "this night, and you're going to do it before the cock crows." Supernatural knowledge, as over against the ignorance of these disciples; so Jesus doesn't lose in this, they do. They're not heroes because they left the guy whose revolution went sour. They show themselves to be ignorant, to be dull, unable to understand the plan of God, unable to understand the prophetic word, unable to understand the signs of the times that they were looking at. And Jesus majestically knows everything – every detail is in perfect place. So Christ shines by contrast.

Secondly, we see a contrast in courage and cowardice – in courage and cowardice. In verse 31, that phrase, "All ye," or "You all shall be offended." The word is trapped. You'll get trapped. You're going to get caught in a trap, and it's going to be more than you can get out of. The trap will catch you. You're going to hit a trial that is too much for you to bear, and you're going to get trapped – all of you are. And what was the trap? Proverbs 29:25 says it: "The fear of man brings a trap." They were afraid. They were afraid of what the Romans would do to them, or what the Jews would do to them. And when they saw, it says back in verse 55 of this chapter, when they saw those soldiers coming with the clubs, and the staves, and the swords, and the torches, and they saw the leaders come, they fled. They were afraid. "You're all going to be offended. You're all going to get in a trap because of Me" – because of Me. "You're going to leave Me," He says. "You're going to defect. You're going to forsake Me. You're going to desert. You're going AWOL at the heat of the battle." And it was exactly



as He said. When the pressure was on, they were gone – they were gone.

They're afraid of what is going to happen. They're ashamed to be identified with Jesus Christ. They're ashamed to bear the reproach of Christ. Not that they don't love Christ, not that they don't want to be true to Christ, but that they are just afraid. They – here it is simply – they don't have the faith to believe the Lord can what? Deliver them. That's it. They don't trust Him. "You can't get us out of this, we're gone." And you see, what they're saying is, "Look at Him – He's a victim. If He's a victim, what are we going to be; if He can't get out of this, how we going to get out of this?" Now, admittedly, identifying with Jesus Christ can be a reproach. It can be difficult. It says in Hebrews 11 that Moses chose the reproach of Christ rather than the sins of the world. But not everybody makes that choice on every occasion. There are those of us who flee when the pressure's on, who run for safety because we're afraid. And so you see the cowardice of the disciples, but you see Jesus in perfect courage, just moving to the cross, committing Himself to the Father, unwaveringly. "Not My will but Yours be done, whatever it is that You will Me to do, Father, I will do it, I trust You, I put My life in Your hands." And they can't do that. They're cowards.

Christ's valor is unbelievable. He goes to a cross to bear sin. He's never touched sin. Sin has never touched Him. He's never been tainted with one single sin, and He will bear the sins of the world. He will be abused, and mocked, and spit on, all of those unbelievable things happening to the Christ of God, and He moves toward that with valor that is distinctly divine. And it is predicated on an absolute trust in the Father who called Him to this commissioning; something far surpassing the cowardice of the disciples. And so even His defecting disciples can't diminish the majesty of their Lord; while they run out of fear, He stands true to the task in great courage, facing death, facing sin, facing Satan, for their sake. And so the contrast again presents Him in His splendor.

The third element of the contrast that I see here is a contrast between power and weakness. The disciples were afraid to face the moment, because they were weak and they couldn't handle death; that's what scared them. In verse 32, the Lord says, "After I am raised up again, I'll go before you into Galilee." The Lord faced death with tremendous courage, because He knew He had the power over death, right? The disciples knew they didn't. They were looking at themselves and saying, "We can't handle death. They're going to kill us and that's it. We have no power over death." And they wouldn't commit themselves to the one who did have that power. They lacked faith. Jesus, Romans 6:4 says, was raised from the dead by the power of the Father. Which means that when Jesus went to the grave, here He says, "I will be raised up," and He said it over and over again, Matthew 16, Matthew 17, Matthew 20, "I must go and be crucified, and three days later I'll rise from the dead." But He committed Himself to the power of God, to divine power over death. He, it says in Hebrews, came to conquer death which had held men in bondage all their life long. He came to destroy Him who had the power of death, Satan. Christ's power was so great that He faced the cross, because He knew there was power to conquer death. And He took on death as an enemy to be defeated. The disciples paled in the face of death and ran, and so you see their weakness as over against His power.

He believed what Abraham believed in, Hebrews 11:17 and 19, when he offered up Isaac and we say, "Why would he do that when Isaac was the son of promise?" It says because he believed in God who raised the dead. And Abraham believed that if God wanted to take Isaac's life, He would have to raise him back from the dead to fulfill His promise. But God was a God of promise, and God would do that if He had to, so he was willing to offer his son. And Christ, of course, was willing to go to the grave, because He knew God to be a God of promise, and if God said He would be the Christ, and He would be the King of kings, and He would be the ruler, and He would rise from the dead, that's exactly what would happen. You say, "Well, did the disciples know that?" They should have. They should have remembered a few days before, when Jesus raised whom from the dead? Lazarus. John 11:47 to 53 – all the rulers knew He raised Lazarus from the dead. They should have remembered, and they should have remembered what He said, "I am the resurrection and the life, He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever believeth in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" They should have known that – they should have known that. But in the weakness of their faith, they were cowards. And in the strength of faith in the God to whom He committed Himself, Jesus moved in power toward the cross.

And so you see again the majesty of Christ compared to the weakness of the disciples in the fact that He believed in the power of God over death, and they did not – they did not. They were weak. He was strong. And He said, "I will lead you into Galilee, I'll be back personally to be your shepherd to lead you once again." And He did that – He did that. In chapter 28, you read it in chapter 28, verse 9, He meets them again, He gathers them together, they go into Galilee. "Go tell My brethren," He says, "and I'll meet you there." Yes, He did it. He came out of the grave and He met them. He knew He had the power – listen – not only to conquer death, but to abolish death. And after He did that, He would come and collect them again. But they had weak faith, weak love, weak gratitude. Basically all they had was sentimentalism, and not much more than that. But you see, the lesson is very important for us, people. Look, we can parade our ignorance, and we can say we're smart when we're not. We can go around saying how courageous we are, and when the chips are down, we turn out to be cowards. We can say we have the strength to face anything, and when we come to the real issue, we find ourselves to be very weak. And that's not all bad. No, it's not all bad, because until you learn the lesson of your own weakness, you can't learn where the strength is, right? That's why in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul says, "My strength is made perfect in" – what – "weakness." You have to learn to stop trusting yourself.

And then there is a marvelous contrast between pride and humility here – between pride and humility. The pride comes through in the mouth of Peter. "Peter answered" – although no one was asking, frankly – "and said to Him" – he just mouthed off, that's all – "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." And you can just see him looking at the other guys saying, "You may go, I'll stay, I am the truest of the true." Proud, self-confident Peter – coward, weak, ignorant, but didn't know it. He is a tough case. My own feeling is he's the closest to Judas of all the

disciples. Except for the fact that he believed, he's very little different – very self-centered, very egotistical, very consumptive, very proud. And you know, the guy does not learn well. He does not learn well. "Though all men shall be offended," everybody may be trapped, all people may be trapped, "I will never be offended, I'll stand with You all the way." You know something? Do you know that just a matter of a few minutes, or a few hours before this, he had been taught one lesson already? Back in the upper room, let me tell you, John 13, remember I told you that happened in the upper room? John 13, 14, 15, 16, 17?

Listen to John 13. The Lord's talking about going away. "Simon Peter said to Him" – John 13:36 – "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus said, 'Where I go you cannot follow Me now, but you'll come later.'" In other words, I'm going to go to heaven, you can't go now; you'll go when your time comes. "Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why I can't I follow You now?'" Like a three-year-old, I want to go. Then he says, "'I will lay down my life for Your sake.' Jesus answered him, 'Will you lay down your life for My sake? Truly, truly I say unto you, the cock shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.'" Now, wait a minute. You mean He already said that once to him? Yeah, that's in the upper room. Now watch what happens. Now we're out of the upper room, a little while later we're up the slope of the Mount of Olives, and he says, "Though all men" – Matthew 26:33 – "be offended, I will never be offended." And Jesus gives him the same answer. "Verily I say unto you, this night before the cock crows you'll deny Me three times." This guy's a hard case. This is twice in one night. Twice, he just doesn't listen. He has got so much pride, and so much self-confidence.

And Jesus said something else to him that Matthew didn't record, but Luke recorded it, fortunately, and it is really interesting. This is what else Jesus said to him. "Simon, Simon" – and He's calling him by his old name, before he was saved, because he's acting like that. "Behold, Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat." Sifting was to put the wheat in and you violently shake it back and forth like this. He says, "Satan wants to have you," and He uses the word *humas* [???], you plural. Not just you, Peter, but all of you guys. Satan is after you and he is going to shake you like you have never been shaken. Now, Peter had run into Satan before. You remember in Matthew 16? Peter said, "No, Lord, no, I'm sorry, You're not going to die. Now, I know it's what You want to do, but no, You're not going to do that." And Jesus looked at him and said, "Get thee behind Me" – whom – "Satan." So Satan had been messing with Peter for a long time.

But in Luke 22, verse 31, Jesus says, "Satan is going to shake you guys like you've never been shaken. He's going to shake you violently, as a man shook a tray to let the wheat fall and the chaff blow away. You're going to get shaken." But Jesus says, "I prayed for you that your faith not fail. And when you're converted, strengthen the brethren." Jesus said, "I'm going to pray for you that it's not going to be a total collapse. You're going to have a disaster, but it's not going to be total, 'cause I've prayed for you. And when you get restored and recovered, then you're going to be able to strengthen others." Why? 'Cause you're going to go out and say, "Hey, folks, don't trust yourself." You're going to learn a lesson that you can preach to somebody else. And in Luke, he says, "I am ready to go with

You both into prison and to death.” Boy, he’s obstinate. And He said, “Peter, the cock will not crow this day before you deny Me three times.” You’re going to deny you even know Me.

So back to Matthew 26. Jesus is speaking of a severe trial – and the “you” is plural – not only to come upon Peter, but on all the rest. They are on very treacherous ground. Peter is a fool here, frankly. He is an absolute fool. And his pride is manifest in three ways. Get this, if this isn’t pride I don’t know what is. Number one, he contradicted the Lord. Do you understand that? He contradicted the Lord. I used to get my mouth washed out with soap for contradicting my mother or father. Contradicting the Lord, “No, Lord, You’re wrong, I will not deny You.” It’s very brash. Secondly, he claimed to be better than everybody else. “Though all be offended, I will never be offended.” Thirdly, he trusted in his own strength. “I,” he said – “will die with You, and I will not deny You.” I, I, I, I – the man was very proud, and all the other disciples, at the end of verse 35, said the same thing. “Oh yeah, we’ll never do that.” And the humility of Jesus comes through so beautifully. “No,” He says, verse 34, “this night, before the cock crows, you’ll deny Me three times.” And He’ll be alone, left, forsaken, deserted.

The stupid pride of men, and the majestic humility of Jesus Christ, who resolutely willingly goes to the cross to die and shed His blood for the stupid, cowardly, weak, proud, disciples who are going to desert Him. Amazing – what condescension, what humility. How dare these men be ashamed of the living God who is not ashamed of them? I mean it would be understandable if God was ashamed to associate with sinners, but for sinners to be ashamed to associate with God? It shows you how twisted they were. And so the Lord says, “This night, before the cock crows,” you know when that was? The Jews divided the night into four parts, evening – that was six to nine, midnight – that was nine to twelve, cock crow – twelve to three, morning – three to six. Cock crow was the name of a period of time from midnight to three in the morning, because that’s when the cock would crow, about three in the morning. It’s very early. And that was called cock crow. And here it is nearly midnight, and our Lord says, “In a few hours, even before that cock can crow two times, you will have already denied Me on three occasions. Before it even gets to be three in the morning, you’re going to have denied Me on three different occasions.”

Boy, He knew every detail. He knew what was going to happen in every movement, not only of His own, but of Peter. He knew where Peter would be. He knew who he’d meet, how he’d deny; everything was all clear to Him. And by the way, look at verse 74 of this chapter, and it shows a man saying, “Well, don’t you travel with Jesus of Nazareth?” And Peter, in verse 74, get this: “began to curse and swear.” It isn’t enough to deny Christ, he starts letting profanity out of his mouth. Now, this is Peter; this is Peter the apostle, folks, cursing and swearing. “I know not the man.” Who was he cursing? Could it be that he was cursing Christ? I mean it’s inconceivable. “I know not the man.” And immediately what happened? A cock crowed, and he remembered the words of Jesus – oh, what a painful remembrance. “And he went out and wept bitterly.” What a lesson – what a lesson. In verse 35 of Matthew 26, he says, “Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.” Nice sentiment, Peter, nice thought; just hot air, a lot of words. You can’t pull it off; you don’t have what it takes.

I want you to note what it says in Luke – it's so provocative. Luke says, "And when Peter says, 'Man, I know not what you say,' immediately while he spoke, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked on Peter." Oo – can you imagine that? He saw him back there, and He just looked at him – "told you." And all the disciples said, "Oh yeah," the same thing. And so we see their pride, and over against that the humility of Christ, who is actually dying for these ungrateful, unloving, defecting, deserting, disciples, humbly sacrificing Himself for those who wouldn't even name His name under pressure. So, the all-knowing, courageous, powerful, humble Christ goes to the cross alone, without His ignorant, cowardly, weak, and proud followers. Is that how it ends? No, thankfully it doesn't end that way. We have to go back to verse 32. "After I am raised up again I'll go before you into Galilee." The idea of the phrase, "I'll go before you," is "I will lead you into Galilee." And this brings us to the final contrast between desertion and restoration – their desertion and His restoration. In spite of everything they did to desert the Lord, in spite of all the cursing, and the swearing, and the denial, and the fleeing, and the forsaking, and all that, He was loving, He was merciful, He was restoring. And, I don't know, it's sort of like He lived out the final words of that great Psalm 136 that they must have said over and over and over, "His mercy endureth forever – His mercy endureth forever – His mercy endureth forever." And here we see the absolute classic illustration of mercy.

They aren't worthy of anything, but He says, "I'll be back. And in spite of what you do, I'll collect you and lead you to Galilee." And that is exactly what He did. And He led them to a hillside, and He restored them. And in John 21, it records that most specifically He restored Peter, and He said, "Peter, feed My sheep, feed My lambs, feed My sheep." You remember, He asked him three times if he loved him? He got Peter back on board. He got everybody back on board, ascended into heaven, sent the Holy Spirit, and sent them out to change the world. Now, what does that say to me? I'll tell you what it says to me. God is in the business of picking up disciples who have deserted, right? That's comforting, very comforting. We may forsake Him, but He will never, under any conditions, forsake us. Jesus said this, "Without Me ye can do" – what – "nothing." Now, you might as well learn that. You might as well learn that your resources are in the Lord, not in your own strength.

They learned it, thank God they learned it. And to prove to you that they learned it, I want to give you one last scripture, in Acts 5 – same men, same group. Verse 40, the Jewish council in Jerusalem called the apostles – that's the disciples, the same eleven guys – called them in, "and when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." Now, if this is the same bunch we've just confronted in Matthew 26, we expect them to split fast. But verse 41 says, "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Boy, did they learn their lesson? You say, "Well, maybe the difference was the coming of the Holy Spirit." Well, that was certainly an important part of it, but that wasn't the only difference, because Timothy, who was ashamed of Christ, also had the Holy Spirit.

I believe these guys learned an absolutely powerful lesson about their own weakness. And I believe that when Jesus came back from the grave, and put His loving arms around those guys, and pulled them back to Himself, and restored them into the community of disciples that they originally designed to be, and recommissioned them and sent them out, they had so profoundly seen His mercy, they had seen His power in the resurrection, they were now not afraid of death because they knew they would rise from the dead like He did. They had seen the glory of Christ and the grace of Christ in their behalf, and I think they went out with a whole new approach. And so it may be in our lives that it isn't until we've been restored from a defection by the sweet and tender grace of the Lord that we'll go out to conquer uncompromisingly in the future when we face those kinds of difficulties. I thank God for the times that I failed, and the Lord taught me the frailty of my own strength. Aren't you? And I'm glad for the times when He taught me His own power, and I rest in Him.

Let me remind you of the other hymn we sung this morning as a fitting conclusion. Listen to it. "Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed, for I am thy God and will still give thee aid, I'll strengthen thee, help thee and cause thee to stand upheld by My righteous omnipotent hand." Isn't that a great promise? "When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow, for I will be with thee thy troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress. When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flame shall not hurt thee. I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes. That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake." Let's bow in prayer.

O Father, how thankful we are that when we confront the enemy, and when the soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, You'll never, no, never, no, never forsake. We thank You, O God, that You stand with us in the midst of the severest trials and those times when we are tempted to be ashamed. Empower us with Your Spirit, fill us with courage not to forsake. O Lord, that You, an infinitely holy God, should be not ashamed to call us Your brethren and Your children, and yet we are shamed to call you our God, is an impossible paradox. How can it be that a holy God loves to call sinners His own, and sinners refuse to call a holy God their own? O Lord, give us a new courage and a new – give us the vision of the majestic Christ, as He moves to His death for us that we might become His children, gathered together to Him forever and ever.

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