

The Spirit is Willing But the Flesh is Weak
Mark 14:26-52

Can't you just see the headlines? "Disciples of Jesus Scandalized, Fulfill His Words. Examples at 6:00 on Jerusalem Nightly News."

When Jesus told them one of them would betray Him, they all wondered if they were the one. Now, when He tells them they will all fall away, they are quick to assert they will not be the one!

The word translated "fall away" is the word from which we get our English word "scandalized." In this context it means to stumble and fall. It means to be scattered but not so scattered there can be no return. Jesus tells His disciples, again, that His death is coming and that when that day comes, they are all going to scatter, but that after He is raised, He will meet them in Galilee. Neither His death nor their flight is hopeless.

Here's what Mark and the Holy Spirit wants us to know. Mark records Jesus revelation to His disciples who boisterously and emphatically declare their allegiance to Jesus. Mark then gives us five (5) examples of how the words of Jesus prove true. Jesus to Peter in the Garden reveals the point of the five examples. First we're going to look briefly at the five examples of falling away. Then we'll look at the point Jesus makes. And then we will ask how we can avoid being an example of falling away ourselves.

First, we have Peter the Denier. He asserts his loyalty and faithfulness, putting far more faith in himself in that moment that he puts in Jesus. Does Peter not realize who he's talking to? This is Jesus who walks on water. This is Jesus who heals the blind, the deaf, and the lame. This is Jesus who turns water into wine, a few fish into a feast, and death into life. This is Jesus who talks with authority, walks with conviction, prays with devotion, loves with enthusiasm, and isn't bashful calling out a fraud when the situation demands it. This is Jesus the truth-teller, the Law-keeper, the conundrum solver. This is Jesus the Master, the Christ, according to Peter's own confession, and here when Jesus tells Peter what's coming in his life, Peter denies Jesus putting more faith in his own ability to be faithful than in Jesus' divine capacity to be right.

Next, we have the Three, the Trio: Peter, James, and John with Jesus in the Garden. Jesus has looked into the cup of God's wrath. He ponders the events that are soon to come and the suffering He must suffer for the Father's glory and the burden of what He sees weighs so heavy upon His soul it nearly crushes Him to death.

We must not think of Jesus merely exaggerating His emotional state. In this moment in the Garden, when the hour for which He was born had finally arrived, with it came the full measure of the awareness of what He was to do. He prayed, "Father, remove this cup from me." What was in the cup? Two dregs. The first, the full scope of all human sin. All its evil. All its guilt. All its implications as an affront and offense to the infinite holiness of Almighty God. In the cup, undiluted in all its wretchedness flowed the full measure of sin and the punishment sin deserves as only God could know it. There in the cup which Christ must drink stirred the awfulness and horror of sin as only the purest heart, and mind, and soul can see it. Within the cup the Son

agreed in eternity to take from the hand of the Father lay all the darkness and terror due our disobedience as only He who bears our iniquities and carries our grief can truly experience it.

Not only was the scope of sin in its fullest extent in the cup. So also was the full measure of the just and righteous wrath of holy, sovereign God. All the holiness of God, all the purity of God, all the righteousness of God, all the wisdom and justice and perfection of God brought to bear adequately and completely on the offense and guilt of every broken Law committed by every broken sinner in the history of humanity.

No, we must not think Jesus exaggerated when He spoke of His soul being sorrowful to the very point of death. He is not exaggerating. He is understanding, embracing, expressing.

And His disciples are sleeping.

Not watching. Not praying. Not wrestling in prayer for their beloved Teacher and Friend. Not supporting. Not sympathizing. Sleeping. It is hard to know which is more sad: Peter's loud denials or his loud snores. All three of his closest disciples, in that hour when Christ must yield, in the flesh, to the eternal agreed upon will of God, when He needed them closest to Him, they slept far off in dreamland, unaware, unconcerned, unengaged while the battle raged.

And then comes Judas the Betrayer. Judas, the one who hands Jesus over to those who seek to kill him. Judas the Thief. Judas the Deceiver. Judas the Weak. Judas the Betrayer. Judas is not really an example of a disciple who falls away. Judas is not present when Jesus tells the others they will fall away. Judas has already left the building and headed out to make a deal with the enemy. There is another word for Judas. The falling away, the scattering of the disciples at the arrest and trial and death of Jesus will be a temporary condition. Judas' betrayal is permanent. His condition is not temporary. Judas is terminal.

But with the coming of Judas, Jesus is betrayed into the hands of the leaders of the people who have sought for years for an opportunity to get rid of him. With Judas comes the fourth example of Jesus' words about his disciples proving true.

And they all left him and fled. -Mark 14:50

They all left Him. They all fled. They all abandoned Him. They all left Him behind. They all saved their skins while leaving His to be ripped and torn by whips and thorns. They sought refuge in their homes leaving him to hang on a cross.

They all left Him. They all fled. They left their words ringing in His ears while His words were silent in theirs. He said, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" He told them and they scolded Him. And now, he is right, and they are wrong. His prophecy is proven true. Their assertions are proven false.

But there is a fifth and final example of the fulfilment of Jesus' words.

And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

Some would rather run away in bare naked shame than stand with Jesus clothed in faith and righteousness. What is, perhaps, most astonishing is not a young man slipping away from his captors by slipping out of his clothes. What is astonishing is that it is likely that the young man of whom the narrator speaks is the narrator himself, Mark, inserting a biographical note of humility and repentance.

What is the point of these examples? The point is more than merely reinforcing Jesus' integrity, his reputation for truth, his perfect relationship with the Father that leads to His perfect knowledge of God's will. Jesus gives us the point when He first comes back from praying in the Garden and finds the Three sound asleep. "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Do you see it? There is the point: "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." No matter what our real intent may be in following Jesus, we cannot follow through on our own. No matter how moved we may be in a worship service, by a song on the radio, by a plea for mercy, we cannot succeed in discipleship, we cannot have victory in the Christian life without Christ, without His Spirit. And effort to attempt to live for Jesus without Jesus is doomed to failure. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

Peter thought he could do it on his own. By daylight the same night he denied Jesus three times. The disciples thought they could serve him by their own efforts, but could not watch and pray with him for an hour, and when real opposition came, they left him and fled. Some even left their clothes and fled.

But here is the greater question. Jesus faced greater opposition in that hour than anyone else, ever. He faced the opposition of the Devil. He faced the opposition of His people. He faced the falling away of His disciples. He faced the betrayal by one of His own. He faced the weight of sin and the unmitigated wrath of God, but Jesus did not run. He did not fall away. Why? Everyone else ran at lesser risk. Why did Jesus stay?

Mark tells us not only how Jesus found what He needed to stay in the fierce will of God but what we need as well.

And going a little further, he fell on the ground, and prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass from him. —Mark 14:35

He fell on the ground before God and He prayed. Listen again to His prayer:

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

First, He asserts the relationship He has with God. God is Father. Jesus is Son. Jesus is not there

to usurp the Father and demand His will, but to obey the Father and secure God's will.

Second, He affirms God's nature and person. All things are possible for God. Jesus makes no effort to use God's word or revelation as leverage against Him. He simply holds his situation up before the Father and declares that if anything can be done differently, God can do it.

Third, Jesus is honest about his request. "Remove the cup." If there is another way, I'll take it.

Finally, Jesus affirms His commitment to follow through in faith with the Father's plan. He will not fall away from God. He will not betray His Father. He will stay the course, He will endure the cross. He will despise the pain. He will attain the joy set before Him. And the strength to follow through comes through His willingness not to fall away from God but to fall down before God.

Christian, the same Spirit that filled Christ fills you. The same world that surrounded Christ surrounds you. The same Father to whom Christ cried hears your cries. The same sovereign will leads you that led Him. You cannot succeed in the life of faith on your own. Your spirit may be willing but your flesh is weak. You need the power and strength of Christ and you will gain that power when you give up your own effort and pray, calling on God and surrendering to His will.