

You Will All Fall Away

Scripture: Matthew 26:30-35

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Jesus, Apostasy, Endurance

I. Introduction

The most shocking sentence in this paragraph is, “*You will all fall away because of me this night.*”

It is now past sunset on Thursday evening, the evening before Jesus will be crucified. Jesus and his disciples are inside the city walls of Jerusalem as they shared the Passover meal together in the Upper Room. Jesus has revealed to them—in ways they did not yet fully understand—that he himself was about to become their Passover lamb. He has now explained that the Passover meal pointed to the ultimate purpose of Messiah—to freely offer his life “as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).

Jesus now warns them of the coming darkness. He does not merely refer to the darkness of night, but he now points them to a growing spiritual darkness that is about to come upon them. He warns them neither to condemn them nor to demean them, but rather to deepen their trust and faith in him. He warns them to build their confidence in him by convincing them that he is following the will of God, that he is fully aware of all that was about to unfold, that he was not a hapless victim but rather he was willingly entering into this darkness and offering himself as a sacrifice, and to assure them that his love for them would endure and abide with them on the other side.

There are two pieces to this paragraph. We will see *Jesus’ prediction* and *Peter pride*, though, as we shall see, the pride that infects Peter infects all the disciples.

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
Matthew 26:30 (ESV)

And when they had sung a hymn. The Passover meal traditionally concluded with the singing of the *Hallel* (Psalms 115-118). *Hallel* means ‘praise,’¹ and from it we have our word hallelujah. Psalm 118 includes the line, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the

¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 374–375.

cornerstone.” As the leader of the meal, Jesus would have led the singing of the lines of the psalms, to which the disciples would have responded “Hallelujah!”² Thus, we find Jesus here not only as a singer, but also serving as a kind of worship leader.

The went out to the Mount of Olives. After singing together at the conclusion of the meal, they left the Upper Room, went out of the city, and towards the Mount of Olives. Their intended destination this night is the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:36). Jesus often went there to pray and sometimes he and the disciples even spent the night there, which is what will happen on this night.

This conversation we are following unfolds while they were walking from Jerusalem to the mount, which would have taken them about 20 or 30 minutes.

II. Jesus' Prediction (v.31-32)

While walking to the Mount of Olives, Jesus makes a prediction.

Matthew 26:31-32 (ESV) ³¹ Then 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.’ ³² But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

We can note several observations; it is dark, they will all fall that night, their failure has been foretold, and yet Jesus aims to fill them with hope.

A). Falling in the Dark (v.31)

The outward physical conditions of the geography seem to reveal or point to the inward spiritual landscape of their hearts.

Because of me this night (v.31). Matthew records Jesus saying that what he is predicting will happen “*this night*.” What Jesus is predicting will happen soon. It will unfold within hours, not days. However, he also notes that it is *night* time. It is dark outside. When one is walking in the dark, one is more susceptible to falling.

You will all fall away (v.31). The word ‘*fall away*’ is the Greek word *skandalizō* (σκανδαλίζω) which means, “to cause to stumble; to cause to sin.”³ Sometimes it is translated as being “offended.”⁴ The disciples will on this



² D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 539.

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 774.

⁴ Matthew 11:6; 13:57; 15:12; 17:27.

night, because of Jesus, stumble and fall away from him and into sin. They will run away from Jesus and distance themselves from him. Their desertion of him will be sinful. The close and intimate friendship of the Last Supper will be short-lived. However, their falling away will be temporary rather than final.

Notice that they will **all** fall away. This desertion will not be one disciple alone. This prediction is not merely about Peter. It is about **all** of them. It would be bad enough to have one of your closest friends abandon you in your hour of need, but how much worse your entire friend group or your whole support network? Jesus knew they **ALL** will forsake him. He will walk through this dark night alone.⁵

For it is written (v.31). Jesus knows this will happen because of what he knows to have been **written** previously. "The disciples' defection, though tragic and irresponsible, does not fall outside God's sovereign plan."⁶ Jesus quotes what was written by the prophet Zechariah saying,

For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'
Matthew 26:31 (ESV)

Jesus is quoting Zechariah 13:7. In the original context of this passage, the one speaking is God (i.e. "the LORD of hosts") and he commands the shepherd (i.e. "the man who stands next to me") to be struck. The people who are with shepherd are scattered, but a portion of them survive. They are tested and refined and eventually call upon the LORD. He answers them saying, "You are my people," to which they reply, "The LORD is my God" (Zech 13:8-9).

The point is that this striking of the shepherd is the LORD's doing. He is working out his will and in the end the relationship between him and his children is restored and renewed. All that unfolds on this dark night is unfolding according to the will of God for the purpose of refining his people and restoring their relationship with their God.

B). Finding Hope in the Future (v.32)

Jesus confirms this interpretation because immediately after warning them of their defection, he fills them with hope by giving them a promise of his resurrection and their restoration.

After I am raised up (v.32). He means after he is raised up, *from the dead*. This is now the seventh⁷ time that Jesus has predicted his resurrection from the dead. Can you hear the certainty in his voice? Jesus has absolutely no doubt of God's will for his life. He has absolutely no doubt that he will be crucified and then **raised up**! The crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were each steps in God's great redemptive plan of being restored and

⁵ See John 16:32.

⁶ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 540.

⁷ Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:18-19; 26:2.

reunited with his people. Though they cannot at this point see it, Jesus is giving them hope in the fact of his resurrection.

I will go before you to Galilee (v.32). Jesus is promising to meet them again—after his resurrection—in Galilee. He is again pouring hope into them. He has told them that they will fall “this very night,” but their falling will not be the end of the story.

- He will not forsake them because of their falling.
- He will not fail them even though they will fail him.
- He will see them again even though on this very night they will not want to be seen with him.
- He will receive them after his resurrection even though this very night they will reject him.

He is promising to keep loving them despite their lack of love for him. Jesus is saying to them that he knows that they will fall away on this very night, but even before they fall he is promising to maintain his love for them. Like a good shepherd who leads the way, Jesus will go before them to Galilee and make ready to receive them. Jesus is amazing!

III. Peter's Pride (v.33-35)

Now we come to part two. We have seen Jesus' prediction, but now we will see Peter's pride and the pride of the other disciples.

Matthew 26:33-35 (ESV) ³³ Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” ³⁴ Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” ³⁵ Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

From this we see four facets of pride; 1) the priority of pride, 2) the pain of pride, 3) the persistence of pride, and 4) the plurality of pride.

A). The Priority of Pride (v.33)

The first facet of pride that we see is the *priority of pride*. Pride always thinks about itself first and more highly than it should. Notice how Peter's pride put him into a different category than all the other disciples.

Though they all fall away..., I will never fall away (v.33). Peter thinks he is not included in the prediction that Jesus has just made. At first, we may be tempted to admire his determination, but perhaps we'll change our minds if we consider that his estimation of his own ability is entirely misplaced and overrated.

How many of us fall into this category? Peter thinks Jesus' words apply to all the other disciples, but not to himself. Even though Jesus said, “*You will all fall away*,” Peter concludes that “all” means “all them, not me!” And in his pride, he is not wise enough to keep such

thoughts to himself, he is so arrogant as to say out loud what he was thinking inwardly. "They will all fall, but I will never fall!" The apostle Paul's words come immediately to mind, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:11-12). Here we see the priority of pride. Peter prioritizes himself by thinking that he stands in class all by himself. The rules apply to everyone else, but not to him!

B). The Pain of Pride (v.34)

The second facet of pride we see is *the pain of pride* as Jesus gets very personal with Peter.

Truly, I say to you (v.34). *Truly* (*amēn*) is Jesus' way of getting Peter's attention. Peter has heard Jesus use this word so many times before. The word customarily precedes a solemn and serious warning, which always ends up being proved true. Surely this will get Peter's attention. Surely he will pause and pay attention. Jesus gets very personal with Peter saying, "*I say to you*." Jesus had previously been speaking to all eleven of the disciples, but now he is speaking directly to Peter. Peter is now singled out because he draw attention to himself.

This very night (v.34). Jesus again highlights the nearness of the events about which he is speaking. This falling away is not days away, but rather will happen within hours. Some prophecies take place far in the future, but not this one. This prediction will unfold "*this very night*." In fact, it will happen before morning.

Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times (v.34). Hearing Jesus speak such words had to be painful.

"*Before the rooster crows*," may simply be another way of saying, 'before morning.' If so, then Jesus is warning Peter that even before the sun rises he will do what he presently thinks is impossible for him to do. Or Jesus may be being even more specific than that.

Scholars note that the Romans divided the watches of the night in to four sections.⁸ "Romans called the third watch of the night (midnight to 3:00 a.m.) 'Cockcrow.'"⁹ If Jesus is referring to the Roman designation of night watch, then he is telling Peter that he would deny him between midnight and 3:00 a.m. This may very well be the case since Jesus predicts, not merely that Peter would deny him, but that he would deny him *three times*! This is incredibly specific. Peter cannot conceive of denying Jesus Jesus even once, but Jesus predicts that Peter will deny him *three* times!

This had to have been painful to hear. It is painful to imagine a person you know and trust, one of your closest friends and mentors, indeed your spiritual advisor and man you have professed to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God,"¹⁰ standing before you and announcing before a group of friends that you would three times deny even knowing him. No only would

⁸ The Romans broke up the night watch into four segments; first watch 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., second watch 9:00 p.m. to midnight, third midnight to 3:00 a.m. and fourth, 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.

⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 977.

¹⁰ Matthew 16:16.

such a thing be a lie, but it would also be self-serving and demonstrating a desire to please the crowds more than a close friend. This kind of denial would also be sinful. And painful!

C). The Persistence of Pride (v.35)

The third facet of pride is its persistence. Pride does not die easily. Even though Jesus has spoken and warned Peter of his soon three-fold denial, Peter remains unwilling to listen.

Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. Peter believes he would sooner die than deny Jesus. He refuses to believe what Jesus is telling him. In Peter's mind, death is preferable to denying Jesus. Peter is so confident in himself that he is convinced that he is ready to lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus has now twice told him that tonight he will fall away and deny him, but the pride of Peter is so robust that he is unwilling to receive Jesus' word's as true. Peter is not humbled, but rather he persists in maintaining his pride. And he is not alone.

D). The Plurality of Pride (v.35)

The fourth fact of pride is that it is plural, not singular. Peter is not alone in his persistent pride.

And all the disciples said the same. Each of the disciples say that they are ready to die rather than to deny Jesus. This is vastly different from what they were saying just an hour ago when Jesus predicted his betrayal and they all very humbly said, "It's not me, is it?"¹¹ One wonders if they all persisted in their pride because Peter persisted in his. Here we see the plurality of pride. Peter was not alone in his pride. Does pride seek to replicate itself? If Peter had responded humbly, would the other disciples have also responded humbly? Or were their proud responses fueled by Peter's proud response?

Pride is deadly. It prioritizes itself, it is painful, it is persistent, and it spreads.

Application for Us

Let's pause for a moment and ask how we should reflect on this. What might the Lord be saying to us through this paragraph?

1. **Trust Jesus in the dark.** Dark days will certainly come, but Jesus walks with his children through them. Jesus never promised his disciples that he would spare them from dark days or dark seasons. In fact, he very much and often said the exact opposite. On this very night he said to them, "The world will hate you."¹² The hour is coming when people will kill you and will do so thinking that they are doing the will of God.¹³ In this world you will have tribulation..."¹⁴ Yet, Jesus said, "I'm telling you these things in advance so that you'll

¹¹ Matthew 26:22.

¹² John 15:18.

¹³ John 16:2.

¹⁴ John 16:33.

believe in me when they happen.”¹⁵ And he also said, “I will send my Holy Spirit to you to help you.¹⁶ He will be in you¹⁷ and with you forever.”¹⁸ Even in the darkness, the Lord is with his children. When I was thinking about this fact this week, I read this in my daily Bible reading plan.

Psalms 18

⁴ The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;

⁶ In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.

⁹ He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.

¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him,
thick clouds dark with water.

¹⁶ He sent from on high, he took me;
He drew me out of many waters.

¹⁷ He rescued me from my strong enemy...

The LORD God is with his children even in the darkness. The Lord often speaks to his children from within the darkness.

The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.
Exodus 14:20 (ESV)

God was there in the darkness.

“These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness¹⁹...

Deuteronomy 5:22 (ESV)

John tells us that on this night Jesus said this.

¹⁵ John 13:19; 16:4.

¹⁶ John 16:7.

¹⁷ John 14:17.

¹⁸ John 14:16.

¹⁹ See also Exodus 14:20; 20:21

"Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me."
John 16:32 (ESV)

The Father was with Jesus in the darkness of that night. Jesus was with his disciples in the darkness and he is still with his children in the darkness. He never leaves his children. If you are his child, then you can trust that he is with you in the darkness. How can you know that you are one of his children? Believe the gospel of Jesus!

2. **Treasure the gift of hope.** Jesus knew in advance the "falling away" that was about to happen in the lives of his disciples. He knew they would abandon him. He knew they would deny him. He knew they would forsake him. And yet immediately after warning them of their impending failure, he said, "**After I am raised up, I'll meet you in Galilee.**" Even though he knows in advance of their cowardice and abandonment, he still wanted them to know that he loved them more than he loved their perfect obedience. He loved them, not merely their right behavior. He wanted to meet them again and be restored to them. He gave them a sweet promise of reunion. He assured them of restoration. He was giving them the gift of hope of being with him again. Treasure such a sweet person who so deeply wanted his followers to have hope in him.
3. **Rejoice in the prayers of Jesus.** Luke tells us something about this night that Matthew does not. Luke reports that Jesus also said,

³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have **you**, that he might sift **you** like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers"
Luke 22:31-32 (ESV)

The 'you' in verse 31 is plural, indicating that Jesus was speaking to *all* the disciples. Satan demanded to have *all* the disciples. Satan wanted to destroy *all* the disciples, but Jesus would not allow it.

Peter fell away that night, but his falling was not final. It was only temporary. He did not keep falling. He returned and was restored to Jesus. Why? Because Jesus prayed for him. And Peter, according to Jesus words, became a source of strength for his similarly fallen brothers. In God's sovereign plan, he restores and redeems those who have failed so that they in turn can strengthen others and be a means of restoration and redemption in their lives. All of this is successful through the prayers of Jesus.

And Jesus did not pray only for Peter. Jesus does not pray only for one of his children. He is this very day praying for *all* his children. When you have fallen and you feel like you cannot recover, then trust in the prayers of Jesus. When Satan is condemning you and telling you that you are not worthy and that you are guilty, then rejoice in the prayers of Jesus.

³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Romans 8:34 (ESV)

“Interceding for us” means Jesus is praying for us. “Us” refers to his children. “Us” refers to those who are followers of Jesus.

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)

When you have fallen, trust in Jesus. Look to him in faith. Rejoice in his prayers for his followers.

Conclusion

Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our propensity toward sin. He chooses to love us despite our weaknesses. Pride may be the worst and most persistently subversive sin of all. Oh, may we all prefer the love of Jesus more than the preference to love ourselves. If you find yourself in the darkness, trust in Jesus. If you find that you have recently fallen, turn to Jesus and ask him for forgiveness of your sins. Treasure the gift of hope Jesus alone can give. Rejoice in the fact that if you are a child of God, then Jesus is praying for you. You won't get into heaven on your own strength. The only way to get into heaven is to have Jesus get you in.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about Jesus and his disciples singing together? Why do you think they did this? What does this tell you about the connection of singing and worshiping?
2. Why do you think Jesus told the disciples in advance that they would all fall away that night? What might have been the effect if he had not told them in advance?
3. How did Jesus know they would all fall away?
4. What was Jesus' intention in telling the disciples that he would meet them in Galilee after his resurrection?
5. What are your observations about Peter from this passage? How is Peter similar to the other disciples? In what ways are you similar to Peter and the other disciples?
6. Why do you think Matthew recorded this scene in his gospel?
7. What is one or two lessons you take away from this portion of Scripture?