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Mark / Mark 14:32-52

Prayer of Illumination

Divine Spirit, illumine to me the words of the Lord. Show me the wealth of glory that lies beneath the old familiar stories. Teach me the depths of meaning hidden in the songs of Zion. Raise me to the heights of aspiration that is reached by the wings of the prophet. Lift me to the summit of faith that is trod by the feet of the apostle. Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Amen.

(Matheson)

Text: Mark 14:32-52

Introduction

Here we come to the Garden of Gethsemene. We will see that Jesus arrives at the place we deserve to be: alone, abandoned, and facing God's judgment. He does it for failed disciples (just like us). He loves them (and us) through suffering, even unto death.

We will see in our text three different ways of abandoning

Jesus. And we will see how prayer and watchfulness help guard us from that failure.

Explanation of The Text

In **verse 32**, Jesus and the disciples have come down from the Mount of Olives and have arrived in Gethsemane, an olive grove, whose name means ‘olive press’ in Hebrew. He is in between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. He leaves nine disciples behind and tells them He is going on to pray. He takes His inner three further in **verse 33**, and confides in them that He is greatly distressed and troubled, telling them in **verse 34** that His soul is “*very sorrowful, even to death.*” He tells them to remain and watch.

Remember Mark 13. Jesus tells the disciples in that chapter to ‘see’ (verse 5), to ‘be on guard’ (verse 23, 33), and to keep awake (verse 33, 35, and 37). Just prior to our text in Mark 14, Peter has told Jesus that he won’t scatter when opposition comes. He says, “*Even though they all fall away, I will not*” (verse 29), and “*If I must die with you, I will not deny you*” (verse 31). Verse 31 also tells us that “*they all said the same.*”

So, Christ is sorrowful, even unto death, and the disciples have been prepared for this moment. Jesus has warned them there was coming a time when their watchfulness would be tested. They have all promised that they would die for Him when the time came.

One question we might ask here is, why did Jesus experience such horror? It can't have been the thought of the physical pain and suffering. Others have endured and faced their own deaths more bravely, if that was the case. No, Jesus knew that He didn't face mere physical death, but the judgment of God on the sins of the world. There was a cosmic hammer ready to fall on Christ. Mark 10:45 tells us that Christ came to give His life as a ransom for many. Isaiah 53:4–5 tells us, *“4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”* The righteous punishment on sin was about to fall on the sinless One, who bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, our transgressions, and iniquities. That's what He knew was coming. One commentator puts it this way: *“Jesus came to be with the Father for an interlude before his betrayal, but found hell rather than heaven opened before him, and he staggered.”*[^] This is the anguish of the eternal Son of God who is facing being forsaken (Mark 15:34).

Jesus indeed staggered. He got to the edge of the precipice and hesitated for a moment. In **verses 35 and 36** we are told that He asks His Father that the 'hour' and the 'cup' might pass from him. John 12:27 tells us that the 'hour' Jesus speaks of is His crucifixion. It is the hour for which He was born. The 'cup' is the cup of God's wrath,

ready to be poured out on Christ. Jesus here faces His greatest temptation, yet He does not succumb. He humbly asks the Father if there is another way, yet submits perfectly to His Father's will when He says *"Yet not what I will, but what you will."* He trusted His Father perfectly, even with the knowledge of the hellish torment He was about to face. Even though He knew His Father would not spare Him that trial. At 1 Peter 2:23 tells us, *"23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."*

Jesus in **verse 37** gets up from His time of prayer and returns to the three, who have fallen asleep. He speaks to Peter, but He calls Him Simon. In other words, why have you gone back to the person you were before I called you? Why have you fallen away? You're not living like the rock I named you for. Could you not watch one hour?

Remember again that Peter, just before all this had been adamant in verse 29 that he would follow Jesus even unto death. He can't even follow Jesus unto an hour of prayer! How confident we feel in making our bold declarations in following Christ no matter what. He can have my whole life! I will live and die for Him! Peter made the same declaration. And he fell asleep at the wheel. Here we realise that even the most genuine and sincere disciples of Christ are unable to obey Him in our own strength. We, like Jesus, make real commitments of faith, but at times of trial and testing, we are quickly reminded that we are

not strong enough. We need the help of Another.

In **verse 38** Jesus remarkably doesn't complain that they weren't watching over Him. He challenges them about watching over themselves. They are to be watchful, they are to pray, that *they* might not enter into temptation. Even now, Jesus is concerned about their discipleship, about their spiritual vitality and health. We see here the very practical point that prayer is an essential safeguard against temptation. Being watchful in prayer helps prevent being blindsided by sin. Jesus says that we must not just react to temptation with confession and repentance (although we must do that); He says that we must anticipate temptation and watchfully pray that we would pass the trial when it comes. Temptation is a snare, a trap. It is a covert operative and will come at God's people when they are not being watchful.

Jesus is tempted in the garden; they too are tempted in the garden. He passed His test for He was watchful in prayer; they (we) failed the test by being slothful in prayer. But here's the good news: while we sleep, He works. While we fail, He wins for us. As disciples fall asleep at their post. He saves them yet. This is not an excuse to fall asleep on the job! But it is a reminder that we are not saved by our efforts, but by His for us.

We are in a spiritual battle. Jesus reminds the disciples that all the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. The failing of the disciples shows us that watchful prayer is not

necessarily the default behaviour even of a true believer! The flesh all too easily creeps up on us and lulls us into a false sense of security and ease and laziness. Then temptation comes and we are caught unawares. So watch and pray, Jesus says.

Then we see that twice more Jesus finds His disciples sleeping. After going away to pray again, He returns in **verses 40 and 41** and they still can't stay awake. Their eyes were very heavy, the text tells us. We disciples can't even lift up our eyelids, let alone a cross! But Jesus has remained awake. Jesus has remained watchful. And as He rouses them from sleep, He declares, *"The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."*

Three times at the end of chapter 13, Jesus tells the disciples to stay awake. Three times here in chapter 14 they fall asleep. This all foreshadows the threefold denial of Peter coming at the end of chapter 14. In **verse 42** He says to them, *"Rise, let us be going."* The tragic irony is that this is a call He makes to His disciples that they will not follow. But Jesus is not running away; He is submitted to the will of the Father, and He is ready to obey even unto death on a cross. He sees Judas coming. This was all in God's plan, as Acts 2:23 tells us. We see that Jesus, once He has prayed, once He has discerned the will of God, once He has submitted Himself to that will... He gets to work.

Judas arrives in **verse 43**. The conspiracy of verses 1-2

and 10-11 is about to play out. Judas has brought backup. The Sanhedrin have sent the armed police, perhaps even a detachment of soldiers, to arrest Jesus under the cover of darkness. The plan had been hatched previously: Judas would kiss Jesus, showing the crowd who they were to arrest (**verse 44**), and that's exactly what happens in **verse 45**. Judas is tragically referred to as 'one of the twelve' in verse 43, and approaches Jesus as such: calling Him Rabbi, kissing Him. But this friend has become a traitor. Only an insider could have betrayed Jesus like this. Judas uses a term of respect, but an enemy multiplies kisses, and there will be no mention of Judas again in the Gospel of Mark.

They seize Jesus in **verse 46**, but (as John's gospel tells us), it is Peter swipes off the ear of the servant of the high priest (**verse 47**). Remember that Mark's gospel is more than likely *Peter's* account of the life of Jesus as recorded by Mark. Perhaps Peter leaves out his own name when it comes to his heroic defense of Jesus here, but happily puts his name to his failings. Christian disciples are humble disciples. They boast not in their greatness or strength, but in their weakness — for that is where God works His power.

Jesus, the peacemaker, fights not with swords however and confronts the crowd in **verse 48**: *"Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?"* They have come out as if they were against a robber. Jesus was here numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah

53:12). He was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7), giving up no resistance. In **verse 49** Jesus presses further however to show the hypocrisy. He says He's been teaching openly in the temple and they didn't take the opportunity to seize Him then. But this was happening, the text says, for the Scriptures to be fulfilled. And Isaiah 53 indeed was being fulfilled here.

And it is at this point that everyone flees (**verse 50**). All these disciples drank the cup in verse 23, all had pledged to die for Christ in verse 31, and here, they all desert Him.

Then in **verses 51 and 52**, we have this odd account of a young man who followed Jesus, who wasn't wearing much, just a linen cloth, and when the crowd tried to seize the young man, the cloth came away and he ran away naked. A strange story until you read Amos 2:16 which says, *"16 and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day," declares the Lord.*" The word used for 'young man' here is a term that reflects "young men who are exceptionally strong and valiant, or faithful and wise."^^ Amos is being fulfilled. Such is the trial of this hour, that not even the youngest, strongest, or wisest, will stand the test with Christ.

Conclusion and Application

We are meant to come to the end of this section with one thing firmly established: Jesus was utterly alone in His trial. We are meant to feel the impact of His isolation and

abandonment. We are meant to see that we too are disciples who fail, who abandon Christ, whose hearts are prone to wander and leave the God we love.

Christ was abandoned, and He was abandoned in three different ways here. May we be watchful in prayer that we might not fall into these traps.

Sleeping On The Job

The first way in which Jesus was abandoned was through the disciples **sleeping on the job**. Apathy. Sloth. Laziness. A lack of watchfulness and prayerfulness. Rather than being on guard, rather than being watchful, they slept. How easily we too fall into this trap. Like Peter, we can make bold proclamations of faith and commitment, but often fail the most basic test. We just aren't ready when called upon. We say we will live and die for Christ, but so often fail to even pray or watch out lest temptation take us unawares.

On the macro level, the Church has been asleep on the job for far too long. We failed to fight against theological liberalism in the 1900s. We failed to fight against the creep of feminism from the sixties onwards. We failed to fight against same sex marriage in the 2000s. Now the government can prosecute ministers for praying with trans people because of conversion therapy. We wouldn't speak out when the issues seemed small, and now the issues are big. Small obedience matters. Obedience in the

details matter. Even in — especially in — the culturally unpalatable details of Scripture.

But it's all too easy to point the finger at the apostate denominations and churches and blame them. We have to also look at our own lives. We have to *first* look at our own lives. Where might we be sleeping on the job? Where might we be unprepared or demonstrating a lack of watchfulness. Where might we be unaware of or blind to the temptations the enemy wants to use to render us ineffective?

Are we overconfident, like Peter, in our own ability to make things happen? To endure? To obey? Have you become self-reliant and boastful, even if just in your own mind, about your capabilities as a disciple? Do you rely on your own self-discipline? Or do you prayerfully rely on the Spirit's sanctifying you? Self-discipline is wonderful, but if it's *all* you have, it will at some point run out.

Are we neglectful, like the disciples, when it comes to prayer — especially when tired or run down? Tiredness and busyness often become excuses that edge out prayer in our lives. We start to binge the TV show, or get lost scrolling on social media, or even just sleep too much.

Do we fail to take temptation seriously? Men, do you spend time alone with women — in person or online — who are not your wife? That is not being watchful. Women, do you allow yourself to form emotional connections with men who aren't your husband? If you

are prone to anger, do you pray and watch *before* heading into the situation that often triggers your behaviour? Before you get in the car? Before you get home from work and the chaos of home and kids hits you? What sins do you often return to? How can you be watchful and prayerful *before* that situation occurs *again*?

The first battlefield for all this is the home. How many homes have become centres of slothfulness! How many Christian homes have become worldly! We are watchful at work, watchful at church, but then head home and comfort, entertainment, and laziness cause us to be anything but watchful in our marriages and parenting. Are we diligent with getting our kids to church? Good! But then are we lazy and asleep at the wheel when it comes to their spiritual formation during the week?

Christian, the first way we — all of us — abandon Christ, is by falling asleep on the job.

Conscious Betrayal

The second way we abandon Jesus is through **conscious betrayal**. If the first way of abandoning Christ can be likened to falling asleep at the wheel; this is when you drive the car the wrong way down the motorway. Conscious rebellion and betrayal of the God you profess to love.

Even though he experienced the friendship of Christ,

Judas traded His Lord for money. He wanted something more than Jesus, and went after it. He didn't try to put his sin to death. He didn't try to fight his sin. He gave into it completely and continued in unrepentant sinful behaviour. Hebrews 10:26 says, *"26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins..."* In other words, if we are aware that what we are doing is sinful and don't fight it, don't repent of it, don't try to mortify it, then we can have no assurance of our place in the family of God. Peter could admit his failings, because even though his failings were great, he *repented* of them. He went on to commit many more sins, but he wasn't like Judas.

Now, I don't want you to get paranoid over this. We all sin deliberately in many ways. The point is the intentional *going on* in that sin, without any confession, any repentance, any fight. Real Christians will put up a real fight against sin.

Fleeing Under Pressure

The third way we abandon Jesus is by fleeing when the pressure comes. I believe this is one reason the young man of verses 51 and 52 is included. Even the strongest and bravest failed Jesus. The pressure became too much. The opposition too great. The challenge too tough. The stress too unbearable.

All of us have fled from our duty, from our responsibilities, as husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, employees, as *believers*, when the pressure got too much.

How many people have left churches because the healthy pressure of sanctifying community became too much for them?

How many people have stopped being generous to others because financial pressures became too hard?

How many people have run away during pressure and have run to food and drink and shopping and whatever other self-medicating options we have out there, rather than sticking close to Christ? And don't be fooled - you can run to the gym and to obsessive healthy eating just as much as you can run to Krispy Kreme!

More directly related to Mark 14, how many of us have caved under the pressure at work or among non-believing family or friends when it comes to standing up for what we believe?

Christ, The One Who Watches and Prays

At this point, it would be easy to feel hopeless. And in a sense, *you're meant to*. The whole point is that you cannot do this. Not on your own. Not in your own strength.

When we are found sleeping on the job, we must look to

Christ who stayed awake, and stayed on guard. He watched then and He watches now. When we sleep, He prays for us. When we sleep, He works. When we fail, He wins. Jesus was the only One who could endure to the end, and He did.

When we are tempted to walk away from Christ, when we are tempted to go on sinning, we must look to Christ who completely submitted His own will to the Father's during His greatest trial and test.

And when the pressures of life get too much, when anxiety, stress, opposition, and challenge come, that is the time to look to Christ, who sweat blood, and who stood up and met His greatest pressure head-on.

Friends, we are not to take the instruction to watch and pray as some legalistic way of 'keeping ourselves saved.' Like we ever could! We are to watch and pray because He first watched over us and He still prays for us.

Remember what we said earlier. Christ suffered this test *alone*. We do not. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. We are surrounded by the fellowship of believers. We have a Great High Priest interceding for us and who sends His Spirit to equip us. Christ of course was not completely alone — He never broke from His Father and from the Spirit — but in a way that none of us could ever do, He faced this trial on His own. And won.

Why is this important? Christ suffered here *alone*. He

obeyed *alone*. He died *alone*. Not just abandoned (although He was), but set apart. He was the only pure One. The only One who could do this. He had to do it alone, for, with any 'help' from you or me or some other disciple, the mission would have surely failed. Only a flawless God-Man could pull off a flawless mission to defeat sin, death, and hell forever. We trust in Christ *alone* now – we add nothing to His works for us.

And *that* gives the fuel you need to pray. That gives you the fuel you need to stay awake and be watchful. We resist temptation because we know He did.

And in one final sense, this is what it means to be watchful. We are to be watchful of, looking to, the suffering of Christ. When we forget what He did, when we are blind to what He did, what He went through for us, we can so easily fall asleep. Christ prays for us, and urges that we continue to pray for ourselves (38). We are to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and His work for us on the cross. His abandonment is our inclusion. His rejection is our acceptance. His brokenness, our healing. His work, our rest.

The first Adam was tested in the garden and failed. And with him, the world fell into sin. But the Second Adam, the True Adam, was tested in the garden and *passed*. And if you believe in Him; if you trust in Him, that means you are *in Him*. His victory becomes yours. His righteousness becomes yours. His test-passing becomes yours. So trust

in Him now. Pray in His Name that you may not give in when the trial comes.

Let's pray.

Footnotes

[^] Lane, *Mark*, 516.

^{^^} Lane, *Mark*, 527.