

The Sorrowful Savior and His Sleepy Disciples

Matt. 26:30-46

Intro. I thought you might be interested know this is message #100 from Matthew's Gospel. Last week I was encouraged to read about a pastor who took 4 yrs. to preach through Matthew. I think we'll make it to chap. 28 in just under 3 yrs. Throughout this book, Matthew's purpose has been to showcase Jesus...to present to his predominantly Jewish audience the One who is Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. More than just an anthology of great stories, every narrative / every conversation / every section of teaching is designed to show the reader who Jesus is and what He did.

Chap. 26 begins the final section that culminates in the Holy Week or the Passion of Christ. These closing chapters are called "*holy ground*" because they report the execution of God's eternal plan to redeem fallen humanity. What God planned from before creation was now coming to fruition in time and space. For 3 yrs. the Lamb of God had been introduced to Israel and His credentials put on display. Now with the cross just hours away, we're urged to watch Him / believe Him / love Him / and follow Him. Like the centurion who witnessed all of these things, we are urged to say, "**Surely He was the Son of God!**" - **Matt. 27:54**

This morning we come to a section that could be called an intersection. We're shown Jesus conversing with His disciples at the entrance of His darkest hour. We're shown Jesus suffering while His friends are sleeping. We're shown Jesus praying earnestly while the men closest to Him seem checked out and oblivious. More than just acknowledging Christ's suffering, the Spirit of God wants us to feel it. He wants us to understand that God really entered our world where righteousness is hated and He is unwanted. He wants us to really "get it"...to know that this God who became one of us was deeply troubled. Jesus was alone as He wrestled with the will of God. And it was all very dark. You see, the Lord knows there will be chapters like this in our lives. Chapters where doing the right thing is difficult and painful. So Matthew urges us to enter His world. He wants us to see, believe, love and follow Jesus. Just as Jesus obeyed in this dark hour, he urges us to trust God and rest in His goodness. This God who loves us and controls every circumstance, has never made a mistake or lost track of a single child. He wants us to know that victory is certain despite the troubles of the moment. Though we've read this narrative many times, we may have never sensed these underlying lessons. So let's unpack this passage with open minds and hearts.

1. A Stricken Shepherd and Scattered Sheep – vs. 30-32 (A prophecy and a promise) - When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

It was Thursday evening. Jesus just observed the Passover meal with His disciples for the last time. Judas, the betrayer had gone out and was no longer among them. Unlike previous Passovers, Jesus has infused the bread and wine with new meaning. They have now become symbols of the New Covenant in His sacrificed body and blood. According to the Law of Moses, thousands of lambs have been slain. But most of Jerusalem's worshippers are not aware that the Lamb of God is in their midst. Jesus was the ultimate and final lamb to be sacrificed for the sin of humanity. The significance of His person and His death is stated in **Heb. 10:12 - But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.** This sacred gathering in a borrowed upper room ended with singing. The hymn was no doubt from the collection of psalms of praise known as the Hallel found in **Psa. 113-118.** From Hallel we get the word Hallelujah. Leaving this house inside the city walls, Jesus and His disciples crossed the Kidron Valley and made their way up the slopes to the Mount of Olives and a Garden plot known as **Gethsemane.**

Gethsemane means *oil press*. It was a walled garden that may have belonged to a friend or disciple of Jesus. Inside the garden walls was a grove of olive trees. Today visitors are amazed to learn that some of the trees there may have been in existence when Jesus was here 2,000 years ago. Olive trees never die even when cut down. Their root lives on. Like the olive tree which is Israel's national symbol, God has promised that His chosen people will never cease to exist. True to its name, this garden would be a place of great pressure and stress for Jesus and His disciples. Like many who have a special place for reading God's Word and prayer, **Gethsemane** was a favorite place of retreat for Jesus and His disciples...and Judas knew it. **Jn. 18:1, 2** says, **Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.** We're getting ahead of the text, but when Jesus and His disciples weren't found at the Upper Room, it seems Judas led the posse to **Gethsemane** where He knew Jesus would be found.

Once again, we see Jesus preparing His disciples for what was ahead. He quoted **Zech. 13:7** which reads, **"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones."** The meaning of this prophecy is cryptic and no one could understand what it meant until Jesus came and applied it to the events that were about to unfold. The **sword** is the *sword of God*. And notice, God's sword is turned against the One who is His associate or as the verse says, **the man who is close to me**. Here again, we find evidence for the Deity of Jesus who is equal to God the Father. The one called **my shepherd** is Jesus who said, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** – **Jn. 10:11**

But it shocks our sensibilities to read that God the Father would turn His sword against His shepherd, His beloved Son! But here and in other passages the crucifixion of Jesus is described not entirely as man's doing, though men were the agents...the executioners, but as God's doing. This is how Isaiah described Christ's suffering. **Isa. 53:10 - Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.** Notice in this prophecy that God, whose will was carried out in the suffering and death of Jesus, also guaranteed His continued life and success. The same guarantee applies to each of God's children. That's why the Apostle Paul could write, **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. – Rom. 8:18**

In **v. 31**, **the sheep** and **the little ones** are Christ's disciples and their converts. Jesus used these terms to describe believers like you and me. The Lord knows we're all helpless like **sheep** and vulnerable like **little ones**. Remember these terms when tempted to think so highly of yourself! Our actual condition in God's sight is not as flattering as we might imagine.

When Jesus was arrested, the NT says all the disciples fled. But even their cowardly flight was part of God's plan. Had they remained with Jesus...had they resisted His arrest and put up a fight...they would have been arrested and crucified with Him. But God's plan required their survival. These men would become Christ's first witnesses...His apostles and Gospel ambassadors. Today, the Church is built on their testimony. **Eph. 2:19, 20** says we are **fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**

Notice how Jesus directed His disciples to the Word of God...to Zechariah's prophecy. After awhile those who are saved and Bible taught should catch on to something. We should learn that God's Word really does have the answers we need.

We should come to realize that God never makes a mistake and that God knows what He's doing all the time. In fact, so much of the Bible is God telling us His plans before they happen. That's why Jesus quoted Zechariah who wrote these words 600 yrs. before Jesus came. To the disciples, the arrest / the trials / the crucifixion / and their run for cover, would certainly seem like circumstances spiraling out of control. Satan and wicked men would seem to be the ones calling the shots. Jesus knew that anyone of us in their sandals would be tempted to think that way. By quoting Zechariah, He prepared these men by demonstrating that God, not man, was in charge. God would be the One to strike the shepherd and scatter the sheep. So these events were not happenstance, they were part of a predetermined plan. This is the key to enduring life's challenges. Its believing God is in control no matter how frightening the storm may be. It's being certain that despite the troubles of the moment, God has planned a good outcome. This confidence in God is what enabled Paul and Silas to sing praises in their prison cell. Though chained to a Roman guard with no pardon in sight, this confidence is what enabled Paul to write, **I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. - Phil. 1:19**

In the same spirit, notice **v.32** where Jesus said, "**But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.**" Jesus knew that God had planned to raise Him to life again. He was so sure God's plan would come to pass He told His disciples where He'd meet them after His resurrection. It's as though Jesus said, "*Though everybody will think they've seen the last of me, I'll see you in Galilee. Count on it...be there*" In the same way, Jesus says to believers today... "*No matter what happens, "because I live, you too will live". I'll meet you in the air...that's my promise...count on it!*" Jesus offered the same hope in **v. 29** when He said, "**I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.**" So listen believer, God has a phenomenal plan for the future and it includes you! But as we see next, trust in God and self-confidence are not the same.

2. Self-confidence and salvation's security – vs. 33-35 - (Peter's proud boast) - Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

In **v. 32** Jesus said, "**This very night you will all fall away on account of Me.** Though Paul had problems with his eyes and eyesight, there's no indication Peter had a problem with his ears or his hearing. He heard what Jesus said though he often seems to have heard selectively. He must have been a married man!

The Greek word translated **fall away** isn't *apostasia* which means to *apostatize or fall away from the faith*. That didn't happen to the disciples. Instead the word here is *skandalizo* from which we get the verb *to scandalize*. Here Jesus said His disciples would soon encounter something that would trip them up and cause them to stumble. But instead of taking Jesus at His word where **all** means **all**, Peter felt obligated to interject his own thoughts. So what else is new? He replied, "**Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.**" Would you agree that **never** is a word we ought to banish from our vocabularies? How many times have we had to eat crow after saying, "*I would never do that!*" Peter felt he wasn't in the same category with his fellow disciples. His loyalty and trustworthiness was superior to theirs. He patted himself on the back while throwing his friends under the bus. You've got to love this guy! I've known men just like him. This wasn't the first time he boldly contradicted Jesus and it wouldn't be the last!

But Jesus knew Peter's limitations. He knew exactly how Peter would react when pressure increased and loyalty became risky. So He shot down Peter's self-confident boast.

He said, **"I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."** This was too hard for Peter to hear so his proud rant continued in **v.34 - "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."** Because the future is as clear to Jesus as the past, Peter's loyalty came unglued when questioned by a couple of servant girls. Glance ahead to **v. 74 - Then he (Peter) began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.** Would you nail this down?...*We are often wrong but Jesus is word-perfect and right all the time!* Now roosters crow between 3 and 4 AM when sane people are asleep and students are still playing video games. But the point is this... Acting in the flesh and prompted by selfish pride, Peter's boasts were proven to be entirely disingenuous. The rooster crowed and Peter was forced to eat some crow.

The wonder here isn't Peter's self-confidence. His boast and behavior is not unlike our own. We think we can do so many things without prayer and without God. Peter blurted out his thoughts, but we're more sophisticated. Yet his pride and ours is no different. Notice that the other 10 disciples felt just as confident in their loyalty as Peter did. **v. 34** says...**And all the other disciples said the same.** The wonder here isn't Peter's pride, the wonder is the loving patience of Jesus who didn't write these guys off and send them packing. Jesus knew these men even as He knows us. In **Psa. 103:14** we read, **He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust.** Instead of rejecting them, Jesus loved them to the end. He showed the full extent of His love when He took the place of a servant and washed their feet. - **Jn. 13:1** And listen, this **Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever!** Once you trust Him to save you and make you His own, He will never cast you off no matter how slowly you learn or how foolishly proud and obstinate you may be. He's got your number and loves you anyway. **II Tim. 2:13** promises, **if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.** To be saved by grace is to be secure in a salvation that doesn't depend on our performance but on the loving grace of our faithful Savior who is again brought to center stage.

3. Sorrowful yet Surrendered (Trusting God all the way) – **vs. 36-39 - Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."** Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, **"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."**

Leaving 8 disciples outside Gethsemane's gate, Jesus entered the garden with the 3 men who were closest to Him...Peter, James and John. In a dramatic way, this section demonstrates the humanity of Jesus. Though He is fully God, Jesus was also fully man. As God, He had the power to neutralize circumstances stacked against Him. But Jesus didn't do that. Instead, He surrendered Himself to His Father's will while allowing wicked men to do their worst. The writer of Hebrews noted this attribute of Jesus in **Heb. 10:7 - Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'** So even though Jesus had power to stop what was happening, His higher value was obedience to His Father's will. Because Jesus was fully man, He was sorrowful and deeply troubled to the point of sweating drops of blood. Now think about this...though Jesus is God and entirely sufficient in Himself, He needed the camaraderie and fellowship of His disciples. He took 3 of them with Him into the garden that night. And He **said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."** Jesus told His friends that His sorrow was so intense it felt as though He was dying inside. Speaking of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, **He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. - Isa. 53:3** Don't let this slip by. The sovereign Creator of everything who is entirely sufficient in Himself asked His disciples to **keep watch with Him.** So **v. 38** is a strong reminder of how much we need each other. God has provided a fellowship where we can share our burdens and help each other.

These verses should dispel any egotistical idea that we can make it on our own without help from anyone. God birthed us into a family. He gifts us with friends. When He saves us He brings us into a fellowship. Why does He do this?...because we need each other. The lone ranger spirit of independence and self-reliance, is antithetical to God's plan and Christ's example. So let me insert a commercial. You need to be a member of a Life Group! You really do! You need some believing friends with whom you can share your joys and sorrows. If Jesus needed this...isn't it reasonable to imagine that you might too?

Now remember, when Satan tempted Jesus, he offered Him an alternate route to glory. And when Jesus said He would be crucified, **Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"** There's that word, **never** again! But notice how Jesus responded...**Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** - **Jn. 16:22, 23** Satan put these thoughts and words in Peter's mind and mouth. And we can be sure that his legions were present in that Gethsemane garden. Jesus said this was an hour when darkness would reign.

Sin is essentially choosing a way that is not God's way. Its self-will exalted above God's will. It's doing what we want instead of doing what God wants. It's a decision to please ourselves more than concern to please God. In **v. 39** we again see the humanity of Jesus...but it's defined by perfect obedience and surrender. Because Jesus was fully human, He was apprehensive about the suffering ahead. He prayed, **"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.** But apprehension isn't the whole story. Because Jesus is God in perfect humanity he prayed, **"Yet not as I will, but as you will."** As it does in other Scriptures, the cup represents God's wrath. More than the pain and physical torment of crucifixion, Jesus dreaded those hours when He would bear our sin and be separated from His Father. But friends, where would we be and what hope would we have if Jesus took an alternate route and had not been obedient to His Father's will? What hope would we have? Jesus chose the path God planned for Him and because of His obedience, we are saved. **Rom. 5:19 - For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.**

4. Sleeping Disciples in a Crisis Setting (willing spirits in weak bodies) - **vs. 40-46** - **Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."** When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. **So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"** A whole series of messages could be developed from these verses, but our goal is to finish Matthew before I retire or the Lord returns.

After asking His disciples to watch and pray, 3 x's Jesus found these men sleeping. But the hour was late and their day had been long. **Lk. 22:45** says, **When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.** Given the emotional stress these men were under, sleep was the path of least resistance. It was much easier to close their eyes than to wait, watch and pray. Yet isn't this exactly what Jesus asks us to do until He returns? We're to wait, watch, pray and witness. But what the disciples did is so human and down to earth. If a novelist had written the story, the disciples would have been propped up as though they were more obedient and heroic instead of sleepers. And what's wrong with the Messiah's leadership? I mean, these men who have been with Jesus for the past 3 yrs. seem so useless when they were most needed.

But the novelist's fiction wouldn't resonate with us the way the truth does. Instead, the way these men behaved is so much like our spiritual lives and our own response to what Jesus has asked us to do. Jesus asked them to **watch and pray**, but look at the verbs...**v. 40 – He found them sleeping / v. 43 – He again found them sleeping / v. 45 – He asked, “Are you still sleeping?”** If that doesn't sound like our on again off again obedience, watchfulness and spiritual enthusiasm, I don't know what does!

In His letter to the Church at Ephesus Paul encouraged the believers to wake up. He then explained what that means. **He wrote, “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.** To be spiritually awake is to continue walking in Christ's light / it to be attentive and careful how we live / it's to recognize the evil of our times / its to make the most of opportunities / its to reject foolishness while embracing the will of God. With a perfect diagnosis of what ails us Jesus said, **“The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”** This is the struggle Paul spoke of in **Rom. 7**. It's the struggle Paul referred to in **Gal. 5:16, 17** where he challenges believers to...**live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.** TAnd oh, by the way, this is the subject of our discussion tonight at 6 PM. Ya'll are invited.

So the disciples were disengaged and sleeping. They were idling while Jesus was fully in gear to do His Father's will. After waking these sleepyheads He said, **Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.** Instead of retreating from the posse that was on it's way, Jesus said, **“Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”** It's one thing to resign ourselves to adverse circumstances when we have no other option, but it's another thing to embrace troubles believing they are the will of God. Jesus made no effort to escape the suffering He knew was coming. Instead, His concern was to faithfully endure it. With torches and weapons the posse expected a chase and maybe even a fight. But there was no chase and there was no fight. Instead, Jesus went out to meet those intending to do their worst. As Isaiah had prophesied, **He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.** - **Isa. 53:7** That's next time.

Later the same Peter who whacked off an ear wrote this...**For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.** - **1 Pet. 2:19-21**

So the lessons in this intersection are many. We're shown God sovereignly working out His plan / fulfilling His Word / and in control of every circumstance. We're shown proud disciples who boasted a loyalty they couldn't live up to and a faithful Savior from whose love we can never be separated. We're shown the example of Jesus who in the extreme trusted His Father all the way. And in the case of the disciples we're shown a mirror image of ourselves...asleep when we should be waiting / watching / and always praying. Many things would change after Pentecost when the disciples received the empowering presence of God's Holy Spirit. But even after His coming, we who believe must choose to live in the power of the Spirit who indwells us. Why? Because as Jesus said, **the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.**