

Mark 14:26-42 – The Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus and his disciples now left the “Upper Room” where they had eaten the Passover (v26). Jesus' betrayal was now very near. He had some last words to speak to his disciples – and some last prayers to offer to his Father.

1. The shepherd and his sheep (v27-31)

Jesus had a warning for his disciples. They would all run away when the trouble came. The Scripture had said so (Zechariah 13v7-9). Jesus was the shepherd of his people, and would be struck (for our sins). The sheep (here, the apostles) having no shepherd, would be scattered. The reason why Jesus told them this is in verse 28. When they ran away from him, they would surely later feel very sorry, and ask if Jesus could ever forgive them. But he told them beforehand that after he rose again, he would meet them in Galilee – he would gather his sheep again to himself. Peter, though, did not listen to the warning: he told Jesus he was wrong! We can admire Peter's love for Christ and his boldness and desire to do right. But sadly Peter did not know his own weakness. A little earlier (14:19) the disciples had all suspected themselves and said, “Is it I?”. But now they all believed they could not go wrong – how quickly they changed! The sad truth is that we often have very wrong ideas of our own weakness. We imagine ourselves to be strong, but we are not. We can also imagine ourselves winning running medals, World Cups, owning huge businesses and leading big movements – but we have just fooled ourselves. Before God can use us, we must see our own emptiness and weakness. Here, though, Peter refused to listen even when Jesus told him exactly what would happen (v30-31). It was because he refused to listen, that he then fell – he ignored the warnings. Do you realise you could easily fall? Many have before you, and you are no better. Your only safe place is to get much closer to Jesus.

2. In the garden of Gethsemane (v32-42)

Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane, to pray (v32). Then he began to be “deeply distressed and troubled”; the burden was so great, it almost brought him to death even there (v34). The load which Jesus carried, when he carried our sins, was so great we cannot imagine it. The cup of punishment which he had to drink (v36) was so terrible we cannot even describe it. He did this for us; this was his love to us. We must remember that Jesus was a true human being, who felt real suffering and pain. Because he was a true man, he could only feel great horror as he saw this immense punishment – this infinite anger of a holy God – coming on him. Do you think you will be safe if you die with your sins unforgiven? Jesus prayed that he might be spared, but only if it was God's will. There is nothing wrong with asking to be spared from great pain and trials – but only if it is God's will. Of course, Jesus knew that God's will was for him to go to the cross, and that is why he prayed for strength.

The disciples, however, were sleeping. They were full of sorrow (Luke 22:45), but instead of taking their sorrow to God, they let it bring them down. Jesus told them to “watch” (v34, 37, 38), but they instead despaired. When the hour came (v41-42), they were not ready. We need to learn that a willing spirit is not enough (v38); we need God's strength to carry us through. When in trouble, do you despair – or do you pray?