

I WILL GO AHEAD OF YOU

Mark 14:27-31; 43-51; 66-72 (Key verse 28)

"But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

We have now reached the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus. In today's passage, Jesus is betrayed by mankind; all the people He loved so much. Most shocking, He was betrayed by all His disciples. This is very much unexpected because He was so close to all of them. We'd expect the disciples to support Him and be there for Jesus. But they all denied Jesus. Yes, they scattered and fell away, all of them. Is there anyone who would like to betray Jesus? I doubt there is. Just like the disciples, we all don't want to betray Jesus. However, we end up betraying Him. No matter how much we don't want to sin, we end up sinning against the Lord. No matter how much we don't want to hurt our brothers and sisters, our neighbours, our work colleagues, friends, parents or even strangers, we many times find ourselves being guilty of causing so much pain in their lives. How is it that so? We will understand this through Jesus who, though He knew that everyone would betray and deny Him, promised to go ahead of the disciples into Galilee, after His resurrection. This is the faith of Jesus for all us. This is the hope of Jesus for all sinful mankind.

The sheep are scattered

Last week we learned about Jesus as the Passover Lamb. The message is continued today, and Jesus predicted the events leading to His death again. He told them, "You will all fall away" ... "for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' (27) Jesus clearly told His disciples that they will all away from the faith. They will no longer be united in Christ, but they will all be scattered. Why would the disciples all fall away and be scattered?

It is because Jesus; their Shepherd, will be stricken. This simply means that Jesus would be killed. It was the will of God for Jesus to die as a sin offering for all mankind. This is what was written and prophesied about the Messiah when He comes to the world. It is still one of the most misunderstood mysteries of God; how God would put to death His one and only Son Jesus, for us undeserving and wicked people. Even though this was the amazing love of God for us sinful mankind, the death of Jesus put the lives and spiritual wellbeing of the disciples in a serious danger. Just like a sheep without a shepherd, the disciples will all fall away and be scattered. Cute and clueless as it looks, a sheep is not also one of the wisest animals. It is prone to so much danger, and a delicious meal for its predator. This makes a sheep much dependent on the shepherd. Can you imagine what would be of a sheep without a shepherd? Can you imagine what would happen of the disciples when Jesus is no longer with them? Yes, they will fall away and be scattered.

When Jesus was with the disciples, He would teach them many things. Jesus would protect them against Satan, feed them and show them love. Jesus transformed their lives so much from being fishermen and tax collectors to being His apostles. Jesus changed their lives so much from being zealots and always looking for a fight in their radical movements, to being messengers of peace. This teaches us how important Jesus is to all of us. Yes we might be tempted to think that we can do all and take care of ourselves. We tend to think so highly of ourselves as though we don't need Him. If we look deeply in our lives, we will see how, even though we are sheep, we behave as though we need no shepherd. Without our Shepherd Jesus, we are nothing, and cannot survive. Without Jesus we cannot be fruitful. How much more do you need Jesus? Can you start your day, and end the day without Him? God put Jesus as the source of our

existence and wellbeing. Yes, without Jesus we all fall away from the faith. Without Jesus in our hearts through the word of God, there is no spiritual life. There is no protection. Without Jesus in our hearts through the word of God, there is no unity in the body of Christ; we all do as we see fit. Without meditating on the words of God in our hearts, there is no presence of God, but are filled with all the many cares of this world which lead astray and destroy many. Yes, in as much as 'the sheep be scattered without a shepherd', we can by faith remain strong and faithful on the way, no longer disorientated but focused to the way of salvation, when we have our Shepherd Jesus in us. May God bless our ministry to be bible centred so that Jesus can live in our hearts. May God bless our bible studies, bible testimony writing & sharing, Sunday message preparations and worship service attendance as good tools for coming under the guidance and lordship of the Shepherd of our souls; Jesus.

How did the disciples respond to the hearing that they will all fall away and be scattered? What did Peter, the self-proclaimed top disciple of Jesus, say? Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." (29) But Jesus was more clearer to him and corrected him of these fairy tale assertions. 30 "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." Peter didn't accept Jesus', and remained resolute on his declaration. 31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same. Why would Peter not accept Jesus' words? We can understand him because he didn't want to betray nor disown Jesus. He wanted to be on the good side of the Lord. But he was in denial of his sinful nature; something that Jesus was bringing to his attention. It was not only him, but all the others said the same.

Let us go back to the question I had earlier asked. Why would the disciples all fall away and be scattered? They would because they haven't realised and understood their sinful nature. This is the problem of all Christians; we are all in denial of our sinful nature. Instead of confronting and accepting our sinful nature, we tend to hide it and reject any inclination supporting that we are sinful. Even though we might gather on every Sunday for the worship service and do as many bible studies, without the realization of our sinful nature, we will forever fall away. Yes, usually we'd know our true self when we are met with serious challenges. However, whether in a good or bad situation, our sinful nature is always alive and kicking. One can sin in a good mood. One can also sin when in an unfavourable situation

The depraved sinful nature of the disciples and the people kicked in, and was now showing in full HD. 43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. It was as though Jesus was a criminal leading a rebellion. They came with swords and clubs to capture Jesus. Jesus had done nothing wrong. In fact, He did everything right fulfilling the will of God. Everyday He taught the word of God in the temple, and demonstrated the love of God in many villages healing the sick and welcoming in the kingdom of God even the most undesired of the society. They never dared to arrest Him because Jesus did nothing wrong. But their sinful nature couldn't hold any longer, but to just arrest Jesus through Judas. Judas had arranged with them, in exchange of money, to hand over Jesus. Most of them didn't even know who Jesus was, so they wanted a signal, in a form of a kiss, to arrest Jesus. So, Jesus was arrested.

What happened to the other disciples, including Peter who emphatically declared and insisted that he will never disown Jesus, that even if all fall away he will not, and that even if Jesus is killed he will also die with Him? Well, they all deserted Him. Everyone fled for to save their lives, and left Jesus alone. Just as Jesus had told him, Peter denied Jesus three times.

There was a servant girl of the high priest who came by when Peter was in the courtyard. He was warming himself by the fire. You can see that he struggled a lot with himself that even though he was scared, he was lingering around to see what might happen to Jesus. But he ultimately gave into his sinfulness and denied Jesus when the servant girl had identified him. Peter feared for his own life. If Jesus was to be arrested, he too was going to be arrested. So, 71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." 72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept. Instead of trusting his own strength, Peter should have sought after the counsel of Jesus. Like a sheep which knows nothing and very much helpless, Peter and all the disciples should have consulted with Jesus how they were to overcome this challenge. However, we thank God for always piercing through our hardened hearts. The words of Jesus overcame Peter's stubbornness, and he finally realized how sinful he was. He broke down and wept. What are our triggers? Have we ever come to a point realizing how sinful we are? Without this realization, our walk with God will forever be fake and not sincere. We will forever fall away and never get to experience the new life of the way of the gospel. May God, through the work of His Holy Spirit and the word of God convict us of our sinfulness, to need and return to Jesus the Shepherd of our souls.

Jesus restores the sheep

What I found gobsmacking is how Jesus went through all these, knowing very well that He will be betrayed and killed. He seemed calm and ready to go through all these. Even though He knew even the finer details of how the disciples would betray and deny Him, Jesus was resolute and wanted to go through all these. His mind and all His being was made up to hand Himself over to a people who neither had the justification nor the power to arrest Him. Jesus had the power to call for help from His host of angels. He had the power to condemn and judge everyone there and there. Just as He was able to heal and restore many at His word, He could call down fire from the heavens to burn them all. He could curse all His enemies. But, He didn't. Why would Jesus act in this manner? It is because Jesus wanted to fulfil the will of God. The way of the Messiah was declared in the heavens and way before time by God. The scriptures were written, and by the Spirit of God prophets prophesied about the ways of the Christ. Jesus wanted to obey God because He trusted Him. Nothing and no one can hold off the will of God. If it is God who willed it, then so shall it be fulfilled as He willed it. This was the comfort of Jesus knowing very well that even though He would face and suffer many trials momentarily, He would have victory ultimately because He trusted God. Are we also able to trust God even in the face of severe and difficult challenges? Or is it easier for us to simply rely on ourselves than on God? He is Lord of all.

Blessed and wise are those who will trust in the love and sovereignty of God. What does the sovereignty of God say? It says that God is in control of all, and sees everything. The sovereignty of God says that He so much loves us that everything works out for our good. Even though Jesus knew that He would suffer betrayal and be killed, He also knew that as the Christ, God would raise Him from the dead. He trusted God so much that He would not let Him see decay and be buried. He trusted Him so much that He welcomed and accepted whatever challenges He would face, because He trusted in the sovereignty of God.

If only we knew how much God loves us. I am sure 2020 has left us with so many questions than answers. For me personally, this has been a very difficult year! I have so many questions, yet with few if not no answers at all. Loosing my job has put me in a very uncomfortable space; both

financially and spiritually. I ask myself many questions, many of which are 'what is the meaning of all these, what is God's will for all these, will I survive and overcome this period'? Unfortunately, I have not found an answer. However, I am encouraged by Jesus who trusted in the sovereignty of God. I don't know what might become of me, when and how. It matters not whether I know the meaning of what I am being challenged with. I might not know clearly what the will of God is. However, learning from the Good Shepherd Jesus, I also trust God who is in control and ultimately, His love for me will overcome. I know that He loves me, and all will work out for my good because God is in control and everything works out perfectly as He willed it. Please pray for me to remain in the love of God and trust Him all the more.

Let us read the key verse once more. 28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. This is really amazing. Even though He would be disowned by His disciples, Jesus had hope for them. He didn't forsake them, but rather planned for their restoration. The disciples have done such a terrible sin; fleeing and disowning their Lord, but Jesus, despite of all their wrongs, had hope for them and saw them differently. He told them that after He has risen, He will go ahead of them into Galilee. This means that Jesus Himself will take the initiative and bring Himself back into their lives. Even though the disciples would be suffering with a lot of guilt, Jesus would take the first step for them, avail Himself for them and meet them. This is their restoration; not necessarily that the disciples saw a need to come to Jesus, but more because Jesus first came to them. Jesus came to them most importantly so in the time where they were too broken and ashamed to come or even call on His name.

What was the faith of Jesus? He trusted God to raise Him from the dead as promised. He had faith that after He had risen, He will come for His disciples and heal their broken and wounded hearts. It was the hope of Jesus that the disciples would be made well, even much stronger than before after He rose from the dead. The rising from the dead meant victory over sin, over death and over anything. Because the power of death would be defeated, nothing will separate the disciples from Jesus. Because Jesus had risen, there was no falling away or sinfulness, no matter how deep and grievous that is, that would separate them from Jesus. How much have we wronged God? How bad have we spiritually fallen away from God? This is the good news; Jesus had risen from the dead to meet us again and give us victory!

I am sure we feel like we have disappointed God and many people. We feel guilty of sinning against the Lord. For most of us, 2020 was a terrible year. We are nearing the end of the year, and we often reflect on how we did this year. Many of us are still looking for jobs. We feel we should have done a lot better regarding our studies. We feel like we should have been more committed to God. We feel like we had a lot of goals and achieved none if not a few. Many of us are still looking for better jobs and to be financially stable. Many of us were praying for promotions at work, getting those good grades. Many of us wanted to serve God and be close to Him. However, we feel disappointed especially in these last remaining days of 2020. Some of us can't even look past 2020 into 2021 because we feel that we have failed dismally. The good news is that Jesus had risen and went ahead of us! He went ahead of all our challenges and disappointments so that we can be victorious in Him. What are your challenges? What are your disappointments? Jesus went ahead of them, He cleared the way and sanctified them so that even though we will face them, we can trample and overcome them. Just at the right time, in God's time, we will be victorious because Jesus went ahead of us. Despite our many shortcomings, Jesus so much loves us that He hoped and planned for our wellbeing even in our most weakest of states.

In conclusion, how do we view ourselves? I pray we let go of that negative view and see ourselves as Jesus sees us.

What would happen there in Galilee where Jesus went ahead of the disciples? Galilee was an important place for the gospel of Jesus. This is the place where Jesus went ahead of the disciples after God raised Him from the dead. He showed Himself to the disciples that He is indeed alive, and that He has overcome. It was at this place that Jesus gave the disciples the great commission of preaching the gospel to all nations. It was at this place that Jesus entrusted these once betrayers and denialists into bible teachers and missionaries of His very own gospel.

In conclusion, this is how Jesus sees us; precious ambassadors of the gospel, a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Yes, we betray and continue to disown Jesus through our sins. However, we are more than that. With Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and are adopted as the sons and daughters of God. This is the hope Jesus has for each and everyone of us. The will of God is for us to be with our Shepherd Jesus at all times to be a people He has willed of us to be. I pray that we be convicted of our sins and have a deep sincere need for Jesus; the Shepherd of our souls. Yes, Jesus loves you all, and He has overcome. He went ahead of us. We need not fear, or be hopeless. He went ahead of us to pave a way of success for all of us. For this reason, let us be of good cheers, and need Him all the more, and see ourselves the way He sees us.