

Scripture: Mark 14:26-31

Text: Mark 14:27-28

Gathering Scattered Sheep

Beloved in Christ, one who is not a Christian, will sometimes attend a funeral of a Christian, and are amazed by all the singing. 'How can they be so happy?' they ask.

They see tears flowing from the eyes of family and friends. And yet they hear, through their quivering voices, a song of hope and comfort. "There in the ground His body lay,

light of the world by darkness slain;
then bursting forth in glorious day,
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me;
for I am His and He is mine –
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

In verse 26, Jesus and His disciples now leave the upper room singing a hymn. What a fitting conclusion to the blessing enjoyed at the feast.

Yet what a strange thing to hear what Jesus now declares after singing with His disciples! He will be struck to death. His disciples will scatter. How did Jesus manage to bring Himself to sing knowing this? If you ever have difficulty singing at a funeral, remember your Lord singing with His disciples as He walked, step by step, towards His death for your sakes.

In view of verses 27-28, Jesus, the true Shepherd, through His sacrificial death, promises to gather His scattered sheep. He declares

1. His sheep will scatter (v. 27)
2. He will gather His sheep (v.28)

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Jesus leaves with His disciples from the upper room and walks toward the Garden of Gethsemane; a twenty-minute walk. On the way Jesus declares to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" Being the Son of God, He is thoroughly aware of what is going to happen.

What is becoming of this movement with Jesus in the center? Will it now come to nothing? In John 6, after Jesus' lesson on the bread of life, "*many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*" Then Jesus asked the twelve, "*Do you also want to go away*" (6:66)?

Now Jesus says to the eleven, "*all of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night...*" One already has left – Judas Iscariot. He is not the kind of shepherd Judas was looking for- showy, flashy, a military leader over the Romans.

Now Jesus says, "*all of you...*" They too will fall away – all of them. This very night. They "*will be made to stumble.*"

This does not mean that the disciples will willfully or deliberately desert Him. Our sins are often not intentional but come from weakness and lack of courage to stand strong. Something else, other factors, will cause them to abandon Jesus. They will be untrue to Him. Why? Jesus says "*because of Me...*" They will be offended because of He is going to die. A suffering servant rather than a glowing celebrity.

Jesus affirms what is written in the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7 about Himself: "*Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*"

God Himself will strike or kill the Shepherd. As Isaiah 53 says, "*smitten by God, and afflicted*" (v.4); it "*pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief*" (v.10). "*The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (v. 6).

In normal life, when a shepherd is struck down, the sheep scatter in every direction. Why? Because they have lost their rallying point. He cares. He keeps/protects them. But if he is struck down, they become afraid; they panic; they scatter in all directions. Likewise, when Jesus is arrested and crucified, His disciples will flee. They will be made to stumble because of Him.

It looks hopeless here. Sometimes for the church things look so hopeless and dark. We lack faith, courage. We are timid and afraid. We panic.

Yet our Lord foreknows the weaknesses and failures of His disciples. But this did not stop Jesus from choosing His disciples to be His apostles. This did not stop Him from allowing them to live in close fellowship with Him. This did not stop Jesus from earnestly teaching them and loving them. He knew perfectly well what they would do.

There is comfort for you here. The Lord Jesus does not abandon His believing people because of sinful failures and imperfections. This is why He went to the cross – to die for your sins and to cover your sins. This is why God struck the Jesus, the Shepherd. Even for His disciples who were made to stumble because of Him.

Jesus knows your sins of weakness. He knows what they are. He takes them, as the husband takes his wife with all her blemishes and defects. And being joined to Him by faith, He will never put you away. Husbands will do that – put their wives away; but Jesus – never! He knows His sheep -

weak, erring, frail; still He loves them. In spite of all their shortcomings, He will do what it takes to save them and bring them to God, by laying down His life! He is the true Shepherd!

Maybe you have heard the saying, 'The church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners.' Paul says in Romans 5:8, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" The psalmist adds, "*He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds*" (Psalm 147:3). In Ezekiel we read, "*I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick.* . . (34:16).

But neither should you think you are so strong and spiritual or that we have such great faith. This was Peter's sin. He says to Jesus in verse 29, "*Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.*" 'Not me!' he says. No, no, he is an exception from the others. He separates himself from the other followers of Jesus and affirms his absolute commitment to Jesus.

Even after Jesus says, "*Assuredly, I say to you, that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times*", Peter speaks even more vehemently, "*If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!*" Really, can he die with Jesus and provide redemption? Is Peter's blood able to save?

Peter shows that he doesn't know himself. He has a high opinion of himself. We too should be aware when we say, "I would never do that!" When you find yourself in a difficult situation as someone else, then you come to know the battle and how hard it really is. But it's easy to say that when you are not in that person's shoes. God reminds us in Galatians 6:1 says, "*Brothers, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*"

Sometimes, the Lord humbles us by making us fall – and sometimes hard. He does this to make us know ourselves and see our need for Jesus, for the cross – the cross which Peter and the disciples also needed. His disciples, especially Peter, learned of Christ's love and forgiveness the hard way. It teaches us to watch and also to pray for His grace!

This past week I received a testimony of a man who was in critical care and unconscious for many days. The Lord spared his life. After sharing his thanks for many who prayed for him, he writes, "It seems like God has confronted and challenged me to become a more broken pastor/professor, being hit on the hip by Him. I hope, by his grace, to bring new honor to his Name because of this experience. I find these words of Matthew Henry on Psalms 118:17 and 18 as describing my situation: "*I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.*"

Peter thought it was not possible that he could ever deny his Lord. The other disciples, not to be outdone, were of the same opinion. Verse 31 says, "*and they all said likewise.*" Yet, in less than twelve hours, all the disciples forsook the Lord and fled.

You say, 'where is the glory?' No more followers! The church will flee from Him! Jesus- all alone!

Yet Jesus will still go to the cross alone and die in her place, to save her and give her life! The message, Christ crucified, is the glory! He dies in order to gather His sheep!

2. He will gather His sheep (v.28)

We see this in verse 28, *"But after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee."* Our Lord spoke plainly of His resurrection. In the midst of the hopelessness and death, the striking and the scattering, there is the hope of the resurrection and gathering!

Why did Peter (and the others) not hear these words of hope from Christ? Peter was so focused on the first words of Jesus about their stumbling, they didn't hear this promise! Darkness, unbelief and denial took hold of their hearts. They didn't hear His promise – the hope of His resurrection.

Sometimes in church today, as well, we see no hope. Everything begins to look dark. We panic. We get afraid of the situations around us. The church seems so small and powerless. We lose our focus on God's promise in His Word: the hope of the resurrection. Her glory is in the message: Christ is risen from the dead.

The Shepherd's promise in verse 28 is so full of hope. He, the risen Savior, will gather His sinful, fallen disciples and restore them! He promised to go ahead of them. He promised to arrive in Galilee before them and meet them.

By the power of His resurrection life, He will bring them to repentance and faith In Him. He will draw and gather His scattered sheep into His flock. In Mark 16:7, the angel reminds them of His promise. To the women, the angel says, *"Go, tell His disciples."* *"He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."*

Remember, at the Sea of Galilee – He called them to be His followers. Again, because of His work on the cross, He forgives them, restores them and gathers them at the Sea of Galilee. He, the Shepherd, will use them to gather His people from the ends of earth until the end of time. Through His Word, Jesus offers the message of forgiveness and life to all who believe in Him.

Beloved, today Jesus, the true Shepherd, continues to gather scattered sinners into His flock through the gospel. The gathering of His people is a witness to the power of His resurrection: a praying, singing, listening people! His good news is for broken people, spiritually sick people, for all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In closing, I want to address a danger facing our churches today in light of our current crisis – this is the danger of scattering. With lockdowns and current restrictions of ten people, it hurts being pulled apart. It hurts when we are not able to meet together for worship – the gathering of believers together.

We see the powerful work of the risen Christ in our life as a congregation. We have much to be thankful for. He has drawn us together as a family in Christ, adopted children of our heavenly Father. The Shepherd gathers us into congregations and He knows us by name.

At this time, the Lord, it seems, is refining us, testing our faith as churches – also us as a congregation. Will some scatter? What about when bigger tests of faith come? The temptations, even excuses, grow stronger as time passes. May God have mercy.

Christ, our Shepherd, knows our sins, our failings and weaknesses, and our fears. Go to the cross with all of these. Give it all to Christ! Embrace Him by faith who gave His life on the cross. We have all the more confidence today because Christ has accomplished His work and won the victory over sin, death and hell by rising from the dead. The power of His life is seen in our new life and in His risen body, the gathering of believers! By His Spirit and through His Word, He not only gives life but also gathers His sheep and brings them into His flock. This is His grace!

God will strike all who do not believe in Christ with death, but not Christ nor His church for whom Christ gave His life and gives life forevermore! Heaven will be one blessed gathering with Him forever and ever Amen