



Matthew 26:31–35

31 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.’ 32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” 33 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” 34 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” 35 But Peter declared,

“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Craig Tubman)

It’s far too easy to be blindsided by our own pride. When we’re young we get caught up in the school yard challenges of, ‘I bet you can’t do this...’. Ridiculous challenges of eating something gross, climbing up some wall, or going to sit next to the cool guy are all played out and as kids we do them because we don’t want anyone to think we can’t.

One would like to think as time has moved

on, that we've all grown up and have done away with such childish games. But unfortunately it often seems that these games just change their shape. It's not uncommon for those who love us the most, or know us the best, to warn us. They warn us against ourselves because they know our weaknesses and don't want to see us fall. However, when someone speaks a word of critique or warning into our lives it can feel like a dagger to our soul. We can become defensive, we shut down, our pride disables our hearts and minds, especially when we know in our heart of hearts that what is being said is true. Trying to convince our friends and family that everything is fine and that we aren't really struggling with anything is the same game as "I bet you can do this...." It's just that rather than trying to prove ourselves

in bizarre and childish schoolyard feats, we instead try and prove ourselves by refusing to admit that we have any problems.

Here in Matthew 26, the disciples have now left the upper room and are in the cool of the evening on the Mount of Olives. Jesus has been painting a pretty clear account of what is about to take place. And now, as they look out across Jerusalem, Jesus tells his disciples that they will all scatter. They will all fall away on account of what will happen to him.

You can feel the pride bulging in Peter's heart when he immediately replies, 'no we won't'. Jesus' words have been like a dagger to his soul. Rather than hearing what Jesus is saying, Peter switches into defending his own ability to faithfully follow

Jesus.

It would be easy to look down our noses at Peter, but I can think of countless times I have refused to accept loving warnings that have been given to me. Once our pride is pricked, we can very quickly go on the defence.

It's interesting that such pride completely blindsides Peter from something Jesus says right after the betrayal prediction.

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

Peter doesn't pick up on the most profound statement from Jesus! His defences are so far up that he is in survival mode seeking to prove himself worthy of his Lord. But

this means he misses the best part – Jesus is dying, but he will rise again!

Perhaps Peter, in his defensive stance also missed the text that Jesus quotes regarding the shepherd being struck and the sheep scattering. This is straight from Zechariah 13 and the opening verse of this prophecy start with these words;

‘On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.’

It is a prophecy of great judgement which will result in the cleansing of sin and the reversal of the fall. Jesus is very deliberate in quoting from this chapter the night before his death. It seems in the moment,

Peter and the disciples miss what Jesus has just said.

Imagine the patience of Jesus in this moment. He is on the eve of crucifixion, he is about to bare the wrath of the Father for our sin, he awaits vindication in his resurrection from the dead – the greatest event in this history of the universe is about to take place! And yet his disciples have forgotten all that he has said and are trying to prove their own commitment to the cause.

The point Jesus is making to his disciples here is that they will not remain faithful, but he will. Let me repeat that. The point Jesus is making to his disciples here is that they will not remain faithful, but he will.

Whilst the good shepherd, will be struck

down, he will rise and using shepherding language, 'go ahead of you into Galilee'. Peter and the disciples need to stop trying to prove themselves and instead accept the salvation that Jesus is about to bring to them, the very thing they themselves are not capable of achieving by themselves.

Could that be what you and I need to do as well? We aren't standing with the disciples on a cold night at the Mount of Olives. We aren't hours away from witnessing Jesus' crucifixion. We don't share the inherent confusion that the disciples find themselves in. But we do often let our desire to prove ourselves blindside us from seeing what God has done and is doing around us. At every stage the Word of God pricks our pride precisely because it reminds us that we need God's love, patience and sal-

vation.

God is a God of generosity and the Christian life is one of humbly receiving. Rather than switch into defensive mode, ‘I don’t really need God’s forgiveness’, ‘I’m not that bad a person’, ‘I’m not going to ever be unfaithful to Jesus’, perhaps it’s better for us to allow ourselves to be humbled and then receive God’s gift of grace that lay on the other side. As Proverbs 3 reminds us,

‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’.

Think & Pray

Take some time today to reflect upon your heart. Pride is a thief who breaks in and steals our humility, our joy and our ability

to trust in God.

Where in your own life are you so focused on proving yourself or making your own name great that you have been blindsided to what God is doing in this world and who he is calling you to be?

It could well be that you are surrounded by blessings you simply cannot see. It could well be that God has placed a colleague right next to you because he knows they need an invite into his kingdom. It could well be that you're walking away from the man or woman God is calling you to be because you are too focused on trying to do it all by yourself.

Jesus is our shepherd who does for us what we cannot do. Why not spend time in prayer with God? Perhaps your prayer

could echo the words of and old Irish hymn,

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my
heart.