

SESSION TEN

The Denial of Jesus: *Facing Failure in Discipleship (Mark 14:27-72)*

"In Gethsemane the holiest of all petitioners prayed three times that a certain cup might pass from Him. It did not. After that the idea that prayer is recommended to us as a sort of infallible gimmick may be dismissed." ~ C. S. Lewis

I. Overview

The focus of this study centers upon Jesus and His commitment to the Father and to His followers. His commitment is all the more amazing in light of the disciples' lack of dedication to their Master. Even the apparent leader of the twelve, Peter, fails to fulfill his promise to stand by Jesus' side even in the face of death.

II. The Content

A. Peter's Promise to Stand with Jesus (14:27-31)

v. 30 - "*before a rooster crows twice*" - As opposed to a literal rooster crowing, the phrase indicates that the denial will take place very soon.

While Peter's willingness to die may be sincere, his professed superiority over the other disciples is shameful (cf. Stein, *Mark*, 655).

B. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42)

Despite Jesus' explicit instruction to Peter, James, and John to stay awake, they are found sleeping three times (vv. 36, 37, and 40). It may be significant that these three disciples were the very ones who specifically declared their willingness to share in Jesus' sufferings (10:38-39). Clearly their sleeping demonstrates their lack of understanding concerning the gravity of the situation. Their resting also foreshadows their literal abandonment that will soon take place.

Two significant theological points from this event:

- The sovereignty of God is seen as His plan unfolds. While various human agents are involved, God is the primary actor.
- Jesus serves as the obedient Son of God as He fulfills the Father's will. As noted by one commentator, the purpose of Jesus' prayer has been to overcome his human weakness which shrinks from fulfilling the Father's will (R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 199-200). It was not the physical death that solicited Jesus' turmoil, but it was due to the fact that He became sin for us even though He knew no sin (2 Cor 5:21; also, cf. Mark 10:45).

C. The Arrest of Jesus (14:43-52)

The disciples will now fade from the story as Mark's focus is upon Jesus.

vv. 43-46 - This was not a disorganized mob; it was a well-orchestrated group prepared for any possible resistance from Jesus and His disciples. The "cue" was a kiss. While this is a common greeting between a rabbi and his students, the Greek implies an exaggerated kiss to show clearly whom the crowd was about to seize.

vv. 47-50 - The Sanhedrin's actions are cowardice and treacherous, but ironically enough, they also unwittingly fulfill Scripture. The Old Testament text that is being fulfilled is found in Zechariah 13:7 (also, cf. Isa 53:12). Ultimately, Jesus is the master of the situation.

vv. 51-52 - Sadly, the disciples, along with an innocent bystander, flee. This unknown bystander's nakedness accentuates his shame in abandoning his Teacher.

D. Jesus' Appearance before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65)

According to Jewish law, Jesus would have been executed for blasphemy. However, Rome prohibited any local government to enforce capital punishment. Thus, the religious leaders were not putting on a trial, but rather, they were engaged in a preliminary hearing. They were seeking to garnish enough evidence to bring a "worthy" charge before Rome and Pilate.

v. 62 - What was once kept secret, Jesus now openly and firmly declares His identity. Indeed, He is the Son of God. The pronouncement of Jesus is taken from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. By citing these Old Testament texts, Jesus claims His universal and sovereign authority. He will serve as their Judge!

v. 64 - In the first-century Jewish world, arrogant speech and even action against God and His people, even the Temple, could be construed as "blasphemous" and punished as such.

v. 65 - "The reader is not likely to miss the irony of their sarcastic demand that Jesus 'prophesy' when the way they are treating him is in fact itself a direct fulfillment of what he has earlier predicted as his own fate in Jerusalem . . ." (France, *Mark*, 617).

E. Peter's Failure to Stand with Jesus (14:66-72)

Peter's remorse at the end of this scene distinguishes him from Judas' lack of repentance. Peter's eventual restoration encourages Mark's readers that there is a prospect of forgiveness and rehabilitation.

vv. 66-71 - The Greek term for "female slave" portrays a socially insignificant girl—hardly a person to fear. And yet, Peter lies and cowers to a less lit place in the courtyard.

v. 72 - Peter not only failed to stay alert three times in the Garden, he denied Jesus three times in the courtyard.

III. The Intersect

- A. Failure in the past does not nullify one's usefulness for the Lord's work in the future. The Church is for sinners. Two of the greatest heroes responsible for the founding of the Church both exemplify this fact! Peter denied Jesus. Paul persecuted Jesus and His Church.

John 21:1-19, esp. v. 19—

- B. God's plan entailed the death of His Son, and Jesus willingly participated in this ordained sacrificial death so that you might have salvation. God is the ultimate cause; the redemption of sinful humanity is the reason.

Romans 3:21-24 —

- C. Just as Jesus' prophecies were literally fulfilled, the believer can take great comfort in knowing that future prophecies will be fulfilled as well. Our Savior will return (e.g., 8:38; 13:24-27, 32-37; 14:62)!

2 Peter 3:9-13 -

“Evil by its very nature opposes the purposes of God, but God, in his sovereignty, can make even this evil serve his purposes.” ~ David Wells