

Series: Mark

Title: Staying Safe from Spiritual Failure, Part 1

Text: Mark 14:27-31

Date: April 25, 2021

Verse 27

Mark 14:27-31 contains Mark's account of the way in which Jesus predicted Peter's denial of Himself. Narratives concerning the event appear in all four gospels (Matthew 26:31-35 and 69-75, Luke 22:31-34 and 54-62, John 13:36-38 and 18:15-19). The four-fold repetition of the story was given for good reason. Believers of all generations should be on guard against temptations to falter in their commitment to Jesus. The words of our Lord should often be in our minds — "Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).

Mark began his version of the event by saying, "Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will fall away, because it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mark 14:27). The word rendered "then" was a word of transition. It was intended to move Mark's narrative along from the events described in Mark 14:22-26. As a result, it seems the happenings of our current passage took place while Jesus and His disciples were walking from the Lord's Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane for prayer.¹

The word translated "fall away" was the word from which we get our word "scandal." It depicted one being offended. Earlier in Mark's gospel, the term was used to describe the way in which Jesus' hometown was incensed at His teaching (Mark 6:3). It meant "to cause to stumble" or "to be tripped." Used spiritually and religiously, it meant to "fall into sin because of some baneful influence."²

In predicting His disciples' desertion, Jesus referenced Scripture. He said, "It is written." The expression was a favorite of Jesus in Mark's gospel. He used it often to appeal to the authority of Scripture (Mark 7:6, 9:13, 11:17, 14:21). As it appeared in our current text, the formulaic expression revealed that the disciples' denial of Jesus was a fulfillment of prophecy. Passages like Psalm 31:11; 38:11; 88:8, 18 foretold of the way in which the Messiah would be abandoned.

Zechariah 13:7 said, "Sword, awake against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate—this is the declaration of the Lord of Armies. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones." Ultimately, the Twelve's rejection of Jesus was emblematic of Israel's rejection of her Messiah. The Zechariah prophecy depicted God's elect nation being scattered via the diaspora (James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:1) after their rejection of the Anointed One. Mark's gospel highlighted the theme of Israel's defeat and dispersion earlier in Mark 13:2.

It is important to stress the fact that Jesus' abandonment by the Twelve was a fulfillment of Scripture. Such truth demonstrated that His rejection and crucifixion were not the work of mere men. They were the result of the foreordained plan of the Lord. The sovereignty of God was at work in the disciples' failure.

Practical application can be found for modern students of Scripture. The Lord is aware of all of our shortcomings. As the one who is not limited by time, He knows of them in advance. One has said, "Do not think that he is ever taken by surprise when you fail him. Go to him immediately, and confess your sin, and the weakness of your love for him."³ A big view

¹ Brooks, [CD-Rom].

² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 99.

³ Ferguson, 236.

of God will humble us to confess our sin more quickly. It will also embolden us to pursue holiness through His power.

Ultimately, the prophesy of Mark 14:27 would be fulfilled in Mark 14:50, a passage in which Mark would later say, "Then they all deserted him and ran away." Each and every disciple would abandon Jesus in His darkest hour. His words would prove true. It is worth noting that both Peter (Mark 14:54) and John (John 18:26) would return to Jesus' side at His trial and crucifixion, showing a degree of loyalty after initially forsaking Jesus.

Verse 28

Foreseeing His disciples' failure, Jesus gave them instruction regarding what they were to do after they were scattered. He said, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you to Galilee" (Mark 14:28). When Jesus said "I will go ahead of you," He used language that may have been intended to evoke imagery of a shepherd.⁴ He intended to give the Twelve a promise. Though they would deny Him, He would still lead them. He would not give up on them. They would be restored into His loving care.

His instruction made a clear reference to the resurrection. He had previously given promises about the event in Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:34. The Twelve had still not grasped the realities of resurrection promises. They had forgotten God's Word and they needed reminders concerning what the Lord had previously said. Later in Mark's gospel, the Twelve would be forced to remember the very words of our verse (see Mark 16:7). All in all, Jesus' references to the resurrection in our passage, along with the disciples' negligence at remembering those promises, serve as a reminder of the importance of remembering God's Word. Peter and his colleagues should have been on guard. They would have perhaps stood their ground against temptation if they would have filled their hearts with Jesus' truth.

Jesus Himself was a model in this matter. When He faced temptation, He countered with the Word of God (Matthew 4:4, 7, and 11). He was well acquainted with the power of God's truth when it is stored away in one's heart and mind. The Psalmist was too. It is not without reason that he sang, "I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). He knew that memorizing and meditating upon God's Word is a surefire way to overcoming temptation.

Spiritual memory is important. The author of Hebrews said, "For this reason, we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away" (Hebrews 2:1). When we stay grounded in the Word, we will be more likely to stand our ground against sin. God's Law can give us an arsenal of truth to combat the enemies' lies. The allurements of the world aren't so attractive when our minds are filled with the Word. We have an awesome weapon in the Bible. Paul rightly called it "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). When used faithfully and correctly, it can fend off all the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Unfortunately, the disciples did not apply Jesus' words to their lives. When the temptation to flee presented itself, they were powerless to stand strong.

Verse 29

In verse 29, Peter denied Jesus' prophecy, saying, "Even if everyone falls away, I will not." Mark most likely intended to encourage his original readers. Many of them were being tempted to deny Jesus. Peter was given as an example. If the "rock" of the church (Matthew 16:18) was susceptible to denying the Lord, believers in Rome needed to be on guard.⁵ It is for this reason that Jesus' abandonment at the cross was such a dominant theme in Mark's gospel (Mark 14:5 and 15:29-32).

Peter's claim in our verse was certainly a bold one. He actually corrected Jesus, denying that what Jesus had said would come to pass. The boisterous apostle had similarly

⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 99.

⁵ Brooks, [CD-Rom].

refuted the words of Jesus back in Mark 8:32. The man's actions stand as a warning for us. When Jesus speaks, we should heed His words.

Verse 30

Jesus responded to Peter's bold declaration by saying, "Truly I tell you...today, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times" (Mark 14:30). The word rendered "truly" was a solemn interjection that emphasized the certainty of a statement. It was the term from which we get our word "amen." For Jesus, Peter's denial was certainly going to happen.

The act of denial was an ugly one. The original language of the text used a word that was an antonym for confession. The act of denying was the act of refusing to acknowledge any association with a person or doctrine.⁶ Disciples were supposed to confess allegiance to their rabbis. Peter would do the opposite. Out of fear, he would reject the idea that he had any personal acquaintance with Jesus.

Mark is the only gospel account that mentions the rooster crowing two times.⁷ Some believe Jesus used some sort of proverbial expression that is unknown to us today. Maybe He meant to figuratively refer to a certain timeframe. Others believe Jesus' words referenced the Roman bugle call that marked the changing of the guard.⁸

It seems best to regard our Lord's words as literal. At the very moment at which Peter made his denial, a rooster would crow within earshot.⁹ The crow would have been the customary noise that usually marked the coming of the morning dawn.¹⁰ Jesus' pronouncement concerning the rooster crow was a prophecy. The fulfillment of His prophecy demonstrated that He was an otherworldly individual. The original readers of Mark's gospel should have taken Jesus' claims and teachings seriously.

In addition to serving as a confirming sign of Jesus' divinity, the twofold rooster's crow served as a warning for Peter. At the first sound, he should have remembered the Lord's warnings. In grace, Jesus provided a signpost to warn Peter. He should have embraced a spirit of prayerful vigilance.¹¹

King David was one who failed in this regard. When he set his heart on numbering the people, Joab attempted to check the king, saying, "May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times more than they are—while my lord the king looks on! But why does my lord the king want to do this?" (2 Samuel 24:3). In His grace, the Lord sent a messenger to warn David. The king didn't listen.

A lesson is found for modern believers. God often sovereignly sends warnings to His children concerning temptation and sin. His Holy Spirit convicts and corrects (John 16:8). It is wise to listen to His admonitions.

Verse 31

Despite Jesus' warnings, Peter doubled down in his profession of allegiance to Jesus. The other disciples joined him. Mark said, "But he kept insisting, 'If I have to die with you, I will never deny you.' And they all said the same thing" (Mark 14:31). The word translated "insisting" is a strong compound adverb in the original language of the text. It gives the idea of

⁶ Schnabel, 360.

⁷ Robertson, 383.

⁸ Brooks, [CD-Rom].

⁹ Brooks, [CD-Rom].

¹⁰ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 99.

¹¹ Brooks, [CD-Rom].

an exceedingly vehement refutation.¹² Peter was bold, forceful, and unequivocal. In his mind, there was absolutely no way he would deny Jesus. Maybe he assumed Jesus, in this particular instance, was talking about the prediction made earlier during the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:17). For Peter, treachery and treason against Jesus were impossible.

Peter emphasized his belief that he would never deny Jesus by saying, "If I have to die with you." The original language of the text denoted a possible necessity. Anticipating a Messianic battle, Peter believed death was probable. His fervor for war would later be displayed in Mark 14:47. It has often been said that it is easier to find men willing to die for Christ than to find men who are willing to live for Him. Peter fit the profile of that axiom. He gallantly professed his willingness to give his life for Jesus, but he would fail to profess allegiance to Jesus before a small crowd.

Notice the way in which Peter used the word "never." The old cliché "never say never" would have served the apostle well. He gave into the folly of spiritual overconfidence. Perhaps Peter was sure of himself because of the Lord's past commendations. In Mark 9:29, Peter had correctly professed that Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew's account revealed that Jesus responded to Peter's profession by making a grand pronouncement of His own — "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18). Maybe Peter let the Lord's commendation go to His head. He thought he would never fail.

Scripture regularly warns believers of the danger of being overly confident. Solomon said, "Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Paul said, "So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Never believe the lie that you are impervious to a certain sin or struggle. Once you say "never," you are susceptible to the gravest of sin.

Verse 31 ended with commentary from Mark — "And they all said the same thing." The word translated "all" was significant. It appeared later in Mark verse 50. In that verse, it would be used to describe the way "all" the disciples deserted Jesus and fled. A touch of irony is found in Mark's account. Though each disciple boasted that he would die for Jesus, each would eventually forsake Him. Overconfidence in spiritual and moral matters is indeed foolish.

¹² Robertson, 383.