

Gospel of Matthew
Chapter 26:31-56
“Zeal, Blunders and Obedience”
All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapel Fellowship of Enid
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The Lord has just completed the Upper Room Discourse and we pick it up this morning with Jesus and His disciples on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Verses 31-32: Jesus was about to allow Himself to be struck down and here He prepares His followers with this prophecy ... that after that ... they would all be scattered.

But then in **verse 32**, He says, “Don’t be downcast because of this ... because I’m coming back and I’ll see you again!”.

It’s honesty followed by instruction followed by encouragement. And it’s a pattern that, if you watch closely, you’ll see the Lord repeat several times in the **remaining chapters of Matthew**; an honest assessment followed by instruction, followed by encouragement.

And, of course, we’ll see the fulfillment of the prophecies Jesus speaks of here ... including Him preceding them to Galilee in **Matthew 28**.

Verse 33: When Jesus told the disciples that one of them would betray Him, they all seemed to genuinely question themselves.

Q. Remember verse 22 where they all said, “Surely not I, Lord?”? -- But here Peter’s words sound so arrogant.

Q. But are they? How can we tell if this really is arrogance or just new-found confidence? – It’s an important question because we’re called to be confident in God, but arrogance is sin.

1st John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God ...

The word “test” here means to compare to a standard. And as Christians, our standard is, always the Word of God.

Q. So what do we find when we test Peter’s words against the Word of God? -- Well, Jesus here quotes **Zechariah 13:7** which says, “**when the Shepherd is struck, the sheep will scatter**” and Jesus Himself says, “**All of you will fall away**”, so, the bottom line is that Peter is boldfaced contradicting the written and verbal Word of God.

Peter's spirit fails the test! And as we'll see ... anytime we oppose the Word of God, we're steering onto a rough road. And Peter's about to walk that road.

Verses 34-35: This is such an important exchange that **all four gospels** record it. They all record Peter's arrogant assertions and Christ's prophecy that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster announced the morning.

But we're not going to tackle the enormity of it's meaning until we get to the fulfillment of that prophecy toward the **end of this chapter**.

Verse 36-39: Jesus approached the garden with all 11 of His disciples (**John 18:1**). Judas Iscariot, of course, is walking with the enemy that this point. But the 11 with Him, all wade through that blood-filled brook at the bottom of the Kidron valley and up the foothills at the base of The Mount of Olives.

But then He left eight of the disciples at the entrance to the Garden and continued on with Peter, James and John. And ultimately, He left those three and went off by Himself to pray.

Luke 22:41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray

Now this brings up several points and more than a few questions ... beginning with ...

Q. Why separate? Why separate the two groups of disciples? And then why did He separate Himself from the three? -- It's interesting to me that the Lord didn't want the whole crowd there and yet He apparently didn't want to be entirely by Himself either.

When Jesus left the three, He instructed them to "Keep watch". If you're like me, your first thought is that they were to be on guard against the Roman army or the Jewish religious leaders, but as the story unfolds, Peter gets scolded when he tries to protect the Lord. So clearly, Jesus wasn't telling them to post sentries.

He uses the Greek word gregoreuo (gray-gor-yoo'-o) which is probably best understood as "lending strength". He was asking them to join with Him in prayer to "lend strength" to His soul.

It emphasizes the importance of like-minded, Christian fellowship, but not to the extent that it crowds out our quiet time with the Father.

So as always Jesus is modeling what we're to emulate.

Q. Another question is ... why Peter, James and John as opposed to the other 8? -- Well if we look for the common link between these men, it strikes me that the two brothers; James and John had been given the title "Sons of Thunder" by Jesus because of the fire and zeal that was within them.

And I don't think any of us would question Peter's fire and zeal. We've seen it over and over and he's not finished yet.

So, I'd propose that the common link that made these three men ... Christ's choice during this most intimate time ... was their "zeal". These men had a fire in their bellies for things of the Lord.

And that fire and zeal caused problems. It got them in trouble with the Lord many, many times ... but it also earned them the closest station in the Lord's hour of need.

Think of it this way ... if you were a high-jumper. An up and coming high-jumper trying to make the Olympic team. You know that to get better at anything takes practice so there you are on the practice pad day in and day out.

Now in that situation, two things happen:

1. Every week you get just a little bit better.
2. Every week you knock the bar down ... a lot!

One of the consequences of trying really hard ... is failure. The person who doesn't try ... probably won't fail, but they won't succeed either.

And as we learn in this account ... the zeal and effort mean something to Jesus ... despite the failures. I'm thankful for that!

Q. So, here's a follow up question ... if you'd been with the Lord when He crossed over the Brook Kidron ... where would He have seated you?

Verses 40-46: The Lord comes back and finds these three faithful and zealous followers sleeping.

And note again the pattern of His words ... the facts are stated plainly ... they were sleeping. Corrective instruction is given ... they were to watch and pray. And then encouragement is offered ... "I know how hard it is, but you can do it."

Again, the principle is one that we're to follow when we deal with people who are in the wrong. People who wrong us. Jesus had asked them to strengthen Him, but they failed to do that.

Q. Ever have that happen? –

We're to be honest in our evaluation of other's actions. We're to give godly council and we're to identify with them and encourage them to try again.

We also see here the third time Jesus utters this same prayer ... “Father if there’s another way to accomplish Your will ... let that be done, but above all else ... Your will be done!”.

Three times the Lord asks, **“Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me”**. And we all marvel at His submission to His Father’s will ... as each time He qualifies His request with, “Father ... Your will be done”.

It’s a beautiful example that we should, not only marvel at, but follow.

But don’t overlook the Father’s role here ...

If you’ve ever had school-age children, you only need to remember. But even if you never have, it’s not hard to imagine ...

It’s your three-year old’s first day in childcare. You’ve talked to her all the way from home to the center and she’s prepared ... until you get there.

Now there she is in the front seat crying her little eyes out and saying, “I’m scared! I don’t want to go!”

Q. How easy will it be for you, dad and mom, to turn your head away and say, “get out”?

Think about it ... not only did the Father Send the Son, but He also heard His cries ... and had to ignore them.

Q. I wonder if, at this point, the Father mourned His own omniscience? – Because He knew exactly what it meant when Jesus cried out, **“Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me”**.

Q. What if you knew that when you turned your head and said to your daughter “get out” ... that unspeakable things were going to happen to her that day? -- You knew that you were not going to be there at the moment she needed you most.

Matthew 27:46 ... Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

Verses 47-49: Turn with me please to **John’s gospel** for some additional detail important to our understanding ...

John 18:3 Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4 So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" 5 They answered Him,

"Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. 6 So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. 7 Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." 8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," 9 to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one."

Look closely please at the word "**He**" in **verse 5 of John's record** and you'll notice that it's in italics ... meaning that it was added by the translators for readability. So, as it was spoken ... what Jesus said was ... "I AM".

Taking us back, of course, to ...

Exodus 3:13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, "What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you.'"

Jesus is saying to these soldiers and religious leaders "I am God Almighty". And in the power of that name, these men are literally blown over backward.

And according to **John's record**, Judas was leading a cohort of 600 Roman soldiers and with them, a gaggle of religious leaders.

Interesting because critics and skeptics have tried to explain away the miracles that the Bible tells us Jesus performed by claiming that the only eye-witnesses were the Lord's followers, so their testimony can't be trusted.

Well I love the testimony this passage offers, not from His followers, but from His enemies.

Q. Because tell me ... what could have possibly made these people believe they needed 600 armed soldiers to arrest one man? A man that had never been guilty of violence? -- Here's what ... these men had seen displays of unmatched power!

They'd witnessed things they couldn't explain ... a strong testimony to the validity of scripture.

Verses 50-51: Let's read Doctor Luke's record of this because it really strikes a familiar chord in that it really reminds me of us ...

Luke 22:49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus

answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

John tells us that it was Peter who lopped off this fellow's ear. Now you might be thinking, "That doesn't describe us ... or, at least, not me ... I've never cut off someone's ear". And I'm sure you haven't ...

Q. But when's the last time you took an issue before the Lord in prayer and then acted ... never waiting for His answer? -- "Lord should I buy this car? ... I'll take it!"

The disciples ask Jesus, "Shall we strike with the sword?", but Peter-the-impatient doesn't have time to wait on Jesus' answer and he whacks off Malchus' ear.

A great example of what not to do ... and yet ...

Q. He didn't lack for zeal did he? -- So, consider the end of the story.

Grace, as you know, is defined as God giving us what we do not deserve. And here we have a powerful example of God's Grace. Peter acted outside of God's will and yet God, did not abandoned him.

Jesus just cleans up the mess and heals the man's ear. No doubt shaking His head as He did so ... thinking "Oh Peter".

Verses 52-54: Back in the **5th chapter of Matthew**, Jesus described the attributes of a Christian submitted to the Holy Spirit ... saying in ...

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. NKJV

The best definition of the word for meek being "power under restraint" and the best example of meekness, may be the one we're looking at.

Jesus says that He has, at His disposal, 72,000 angels ready to fight on His behalf. And if you know anything about the biblical description of angels ... then you know that that's a lot of fight!

But Jesus didn't call upon a single one of them. He opted to endure. He chose saving us over Himself. He was saying with His actions ... "If blood must be shed for the forgiveness of all this sin ... then let it be My blood!"

That's power under restraint.

Verses 55-56: "**Then all the disciples left Him and fled**".

Q. Did you find yourself frowning at the disciples when you read that? – Let me reread a passage from **John's record** that I personally, found to be a bit convicting ...

John 18:7 Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." 8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," 9 to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one."

“**If you seek Me, let these go their way**” Jesus says ... and as a result, the disciples got away safely.

I was convicted of my judgmental nature. I had the disciples condemned as cowards and deserters before I even knew the facts.

I'm convicted because if I judged the disciples so prematurely and wrongly ... I worry that I do it to others as well.

Conclusion: You know ... the highest goal of any Christian is Christ-likeness. To be like Jesus. And I think this passage shows us the height of that goal.

But we can never allow the level of its difficulty to discourage our effort.

I titled the message of this passage ... Zeal, Blunders and obedience because that's what it says to me ... and maybe it says something similar to you.

If I had to sum up the Lord's example in this passage ... I'd sum it up as "selflessness".

He preferred to be abandoned by His closest friends for the sake of their wellbeing.

He was being falsely accused.

He knew, all too well, what He was about to endure ... and yet He was more concerned about His brothers than He was Himself. Selfless!

I think we all tend to stand in awe of the selflessness of His death, but what He asks us to emulate is not His selfless death, but His selfless life.

I mean ... I could ask "Would you die for a brother or sister?" ... and I really believe that many of you would say, in all honesty ... "YES". But, dying is always easier than living. It's a moment verses a lifetime.

So, as you evaluate your Christ-likeness in this area of Selflessness ... evaluate it in the everyday, day-to-day, not some imaginary scenario of martyrdom:

1. Q. When you have the choice of serving or being served ... which do you choose? Not which do you prefer, but which do you choose?

2. Q. When the trashcan's overflowing do you see it and say "I wish someone would empty that", or are you the someone who empties it?

3. Q. On Saturday mornings ... are you the spouse that sneaks out of bed as quietly as possible to keep the kids quiet or put on the coffee ... or are you the spouse that elbows the other in the ribs until they get up and get cereal for the kids?

Selflessness in everyday life ... that's Christ-like!

Zeal, Blunders and obedience ... means go and try ... try hard and as you do ... know this ... you will blunder ... but the way of forgiveness has been forged and Jesus stands ready and anxious to walk you down that pathway.

Try hard ... don't fear the blunders nearly as much as you fear complacency!