

**Mark 14: 26-51; “To Stumble over Christ”, Sermon # 111 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.**  
**In the Morning Worship Service.**

Jesus has just finished eating the Passover and celebrating the first Lord's Supper with His disciples. At the close of this time together, they sang a hymn. The hymn, I am told, was the “Hallel”, which the Jews were obliged to sing on the night of the passover. This Hallel”, or song of praise, John Gill says: “consisted of six Psalms, the 113<sup>th</sup> through the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalms . They did not sing them all at once, but in parts. “Just before the drinking of the second cup and eating of the lamb, they sung the first part of it, which contained the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Psalms; and on mixing the fourth and last cup, they completed the “Hallel”, by singing the rest of the Psalms, beginning with the 115<sup>th</sup> Psalm, and ending with the 118<sup>th</sup>; and said over it, what they call the “blessing of the song”, which was Psalm 145: 10 – “All your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you!” “And they might, if they would, mix a fifth cup, but that they were not obliged to, and say over it the “great Hallel”, or “hymn”, which was the 136<sup>th</sup> Psalm. “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!” “For His mercy endures forever.” Now the last part of the “Hallel”, Christ deferred to the close of His supper; there being many things in it pertinent to him, and proper on this occasion, particularly Psalm 115: 1, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.” Gill goes on to say: “This is where the Jews themselves say, that משיח של חבלו, “the sorrows of the Messiah” are contained in this part: that this is the hymn which Christ and his disciples sung, may be rather thought, than that it was one of His own composing; since not only He, but all the disciples sung it, and therefore must be what they were acquainted with...” (end of quote) Little did the disciples know what this night would mean for them. Christ was in one sense always a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But this was the beginning of Christ's greatest sorrows leading up to His death on the cross, for their sins, and for everyone who believes. How good, then, it must have been for the disciples to have had this opportunity to sing with our Lord at this time; when, for the disciples, so much was uncertain.

For, although they did not know it, this was the night in which Jesus was to be betrayed by Judas Iscariot, taken off by the temple guard to face a mock trial, and after that He would be scourged and led away to crucifixion and death. And, this was also the night in which our Lord Jesus would be denied by the Apostle Peter, and in certain ways, denied by all those who were His closest followers. This was something that Jesus knew would take place; that all of them would be made to stumble because of Him that night. This word, “stumble” in the New King James is translated variously in the other translations. In the King James it is translated “All ye shall be offended because of me this night.” In the New American Standard and the ESV it is translated, “You will all fall away...” In Young's Literal Translation: “All ye shall be stumbled at Me this night.” So to stumble at Christ in this situation, was to be offended because of Him, and this stumbling led to their temporarily falling away from following their Lord. Let us ask ourselves this question: Is this something that could happen to us, in our walk as Christians? Could we stumble and fall temporarily from our steadfastness of faith in Him. I believe that it would be possible for any one of us. For any one of us, we may fall temporarily from our steadfastness of faith in Christ. But with Christ as our Savior and Lord we will never fall finally or perish. Let us focus our attention on this subject for a few minutes by asking: What are the reasons for a Christian's stumbling and being offended with their Master? I think that we can easily find 3 of them from our text. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – We may stumble if we believe that our faithfulness to Christ rests upon the strength of our own determination to follow Him. 2<sup>nd</sup> – We may

stumble if we do not pray at the critical time of our temptations. And then, 3rd – We may stumble if we see that our faith in Christ may lead to persecution.

**1st of all – We may stumble if we believe that our faithfulness to Christ rests upon the strength of our own determination to follow Him.**

It is truly amazing how straightforward our Lord was with His disciples at this point. The reason that He could be this way with them was because He knew what was going to happen to Him in the next few hours; they did not. He said 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.” He loved His own, and He would love them to the end. He sincerely wanted them to be prepared to stand with Him in this time of His sufferings. But He also knew, that in this time of greatest sufferings that no man could stand with Him. He would have stand alone and bear our sins in His own body on the tree that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. In Isaiah 59: 15 it is said prophetically of our Lord, “Then the Lord saw it and it displeased Him that there was no justice.” “He saw that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.” He saw that from eternity past in the counsels of redemption with the Father and the Spirit. He saw it here this night that we are studying. And He has seen it, and will see it again, in the history of His Church. We need to see that our whole salvation rests upon the Lord. He was the only one who could deal with the weighty matters of justice, of fulfilling the law and purchasing grace for all of God’s elect people. He alone could face the oppositions of men and overcome them. He alone can bring about the advancements of the Church, through this Church age, and into eternity. He is sustained by who He is – The Son of God; and His own righteousness, it will sustain Him.

And yet each of His own disciples must come to see that their salvation rests entirely upon Him and not upon themselves. This is easy, to think the thought, but harder in many ways for strong men to comprehend. We must come to see that all of God’s sovereignty was proved during this time of Christ’s sufferings; and that God’s honor and His glory were at stake in the way that He providentially unfolded what He would do, the way that our salvation would be obtained. It would be obtained by the Father’s striking the Shepherd of the Sheep. You will notice the language of verse 27: “Then Jesus said 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.’” This is a quote from Zechariah Chapter 13, verse 7 – “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the man who is My Companion, says the Lord of hosts.” “Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” You will notice here that the Shepherd is described as God’s Companion or His Fellow. The ESV has it – “The man who stands next to Me.” Now, no one stands next to God except God the Son, the second Person of the Divine Trinity; the One who became a man, and as such could fulfill all righteousness and justice.

This whole matter of Christ’s going to the cross was the Father’s will for Christ, and He would not deter around it. This is why He who existed from all eternity came into this fallen world of woe; it was to show us the way to God, and suffer and die on our behalf. He knew that He would be struck by the Father; He knew that all of His Father’s righteous wrath would be poured out upon Him, beginning in just a couple of hours in the Garden of Gethsemane in the Mount of Olives. Jesus must go alone to suffer on our behalf. He alone was the righteous substitute for our sins. He alone was the sinless sacrifice that God would accept. But you will also notice that even though our Lord knew that He had to give to His disciples this brief explanation of His sufferings, that He wanted them to know, that He would successfully be able to bear them. He wanted them to know that through His death, He would come to obtain the victory over death and the grave. He says: “But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” Ah, what good news this should have been to Peter and the rest, but Peter is really quite indignant about Jesus’ having said that “all would be made to stumble” that night. That

included him. And he did not believe that he would be made to stumble. He says to Jesus – “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.” Now this is something that should not have come out of Peter’s mouth, especially seeing that he had once before been rebuked for using this kind of language when Jesus had mentioned His going to the cross. In Matthew 16: 21, after Peter had rightly declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God; after he had been commended for this by Jesus and was told by Him that He would build His Church upon Peter’s confession of Him as the Christ; it says: “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” It says: “Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” But Jesus saw this for what it was; an attempt by Satan, to try to use Peter’s love and respect and loyalty for Jesus, to deter Him from the great purpose for which He came: to die for our sins. “Get behind Me, Satan!”, Jesus said to him, “You are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

Here we have a similar situation. Peter was minding the things of men instead of the things of God. Peter could have said: “Lord, why is it that I and the others here cannot go with you?” “Why won’t we be able to stand with you?” “Why can’t we suffer for you and with you; even at this hour?” “This is what we want to do.” But instead of saying that, he says, “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.” He might as well have said: “Not Thy will, but mine be done.” And so Jesus has to tell him the truth about himself in verse 30 – “Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” We must ask ourselves what was wrong with Peter’s zeal for Christ at this time? What was the problem? The problem I believe was two-fold. He did not know himself; and he did not know that spiritual strength is different than fleshly strength. He reasoned this way. This is a situation where I can declare my loyalty to Jesus. I know that I am a strong fisherman. I have come to know the value of diligence, determination, and perseverance. I know that I stand with Jesus no matter what his enemies might try to do. He was going to be the foremost in loyalty. Was that a bad thing? No, not at all. But what Peter did not understand was that it was God who was orchestrating these events behind the scenes. He had determined that Jesus would die on the cross. Yea, it was His pleasure to bruise Him and to crush Him for our sakes; yes and even for loyal Peter’s sake.

Peter did not know himself, I said to you before. I believe that this is true. Peter loved the Lord, but he did not yet have the humility that he needed, to be able to say to the Father in prayer: “I would like to help my Lord Jesus, Father.” “Please help me to help Him in the way that you would want me to; not in the way that I might be prone to do, according to my fleshly wisdom and my fleshly strength.” I want to tell you this morning that this is the message for every strong man here today. There is nothing wrong with physical strength, but there is everything wrong with fleshly wisdom when you are trying to do the will of God. Not all the wisdom in the world, is God’s wisdom. There is also a human wisdom which fleshly, and which can even be demonic. In this case Peter was vehement: “Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny You!” And so said all the disciples.” (Matthew 26: 35) We have to admire Peter’s loyalty, and his resolution, from a human standpoint. But if we as a Christian men do not see the problem here, we will at some point make the same mistake as Peter. We will think that we are strong enough in ourselves to face any difficult situation. We may think that we are helping Jesus, when really we are only showing off our fleshly wisdom or our fleshly strength; that which comes from our pride and our self-sufficiency, and not from God.

The fleshly nature within the Christian sometimes lusts against the motions of the Holy Spirit within his heart, so that he at times might not see his need of God’s grace in order to do God’s will in every particular situation that he faces. It is very true that you are a New Creature

in Christ, and that you have a New nature. It is certainly true that when you were converted that Christ gave the death blow to the Old man's having dominion over your mind and heart. But still, you very much need the Holy Spirit's on-going work day by day to give you wisdom. Only the Holy Spirit can give you the right kind of wisdom in every situation, and that wisdom is based on correctly understanding the truth of the Bible. That wisdom is having the humility to think about what is said here in the Scriptures. You see, there is a human and earthly wisdom which is selfish, and it is based upon your own human observations and logic apart from the instruction of the word of God. Some men are very good at this. But even a Christian, can sometimes walk in flesh. And when the Christian is walking in the Spirit, there in his heart, he finds the wisdom which is from God; the wisdom that is from above, as it says in James 3: 13-18. The person who is truly wise and understanding will show forth that wisdom by good conduct. He will show forth the fact that his works are done "in the meekness of wisdom." This Peter did not have at this time. And because he did not have it, he brought nothing but confusion to a very difficult situation. He ended up trying to kill the men that were coming to take Jesus, and he succeeded in cutting off the high priest's servant's ear. This, Jesus even took the time to heal in the midst of His being taken.

There is a great deal of difference between fleshly wisdom and the wisdom of the Spirit. I want you to examine your own hearts, O strong Christian men among us, and ask yourself whether the wisdom that you are working by is God's, or your own? Because there is a difference. Are you a meek man in the Bible sense; or are you strong in self-assertion. Meekness is not weakness. Actually self-assertiveness is. But that is not how it looked to Peter at that time. Peter was strong in self-assertion, but it led to his denial of Christ. This can happen to any of us if we allow our fleshly thoughts and reasoning to control our mind and heart. But since you have received grace, dear Christian, our God and our Christ will teach you the better way if you will let him. And if you will not let Him, He will teach you anyway; because He is faithful even when you are faithless.

**2nd – We may stumble if we do not pray at the critical time of our temptations.**

We will now begin to see the outcome of Peter's having stumbled into thinking that fleshly wisdom and fleshly determination would be enough to meet what was coming. Peter and the other disciples are about to be tempted in a very unusual way. They are going to be tempted to think that prayer is not the answer when their greatest difficulties come upon them. What could be a greater difficulty for them than to think that their Lord being arrested and falsely tried? They were men of action. But notice Jesus' words of instruction to them. Our Lord walked His disciples into Gethsemane and all that He said to them was the words of verse 32 – "Sit here while I pray." I wonder if you realize that it takes spiritual strength to pray when you know that you are coming into the greatest trial of your entire life? I think that they sensed this. But Jesus knew what was coming, and here we see that He still took the time to pray. He did not become fretful, worried, or anxious. But He was indeed "troubled and deeply distressed". There was not a sinful thought or emotion that arose in his breast. And He certainly did have the right thought at the right time: I must pray. Peter had said, "Even if all are made to stumble, even though all may fall away, yet I will not." And yet he fell. Jesus did not have such self-confidence. It says in verse 35 – "He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him." He said: "Abba, Father, All things are possible for You." "Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." What a difference that prayer made, at that very moment, and what a difference it would make in Jesus' heart, as He continued all the way through His sufferings, and all the way to death, when He prayed and cried out to God.

Let me ask you, my friends, whether you by God's Spirit, have learned this important lesson; to pray in the time of your deepest distress? This is not just a one-time lesson. In verse 32,

Jesus said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." "And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed." You would think that this would have been a very simple thing for them to do; to sit with Him for a little while, in the time of His distress. But as we look at it more closely, we find that it was terribly hard for them, even to do this very simple thing. What was it that Jesus was asking them to do? Well, look at verse 34 – "Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.'" "Stay here and watch." He was only asking them to watch, and yet in verse 37 it says that He came and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping?" "Could you not watch one hour?" "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." You can see here that Jesus knew that Peter and James and John were very willing, but that their flesh was weak. We should understand that the word "flesh" here is used in different senses in the Bible; sometimes of the body, but often it is referring to our sinful flesh, the remnants of our Old Man and Old nature which are still with every believer. The Flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are set in opposition to each other in order that you will not do, as you would naturally in your flesh, desire to do. (Galatians 5: 17) Flesh here in this instance means that principle or law which the Apostle Paul found in himself, when he said in Romans Chapter 7, verse 15 – "For what I am doing, I do not understand." "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." And verse 18 – "For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." That is the language of a believer and not an unbeliever.

Let us remember that Peter and James and John were already saved men. They had been given regenerate hearts. They had the power to do what was right, with them. But in this particular case it was exactly true, what Jesus said to them. It was not simply that their bodies that were tired. There was something more going on here than just this. It was that their sinful flesh was craving to be released from this all-too-difficult situation; of having to go through this trial, where they would lose Jesus to death. They didn't want to believe it, and they didn't want to face the reality of it. And because they did not pray, they could not stay awake. Sorrow had filled their hearts. They had heard that Jesus must be struck, that Jesus must die, but they could not reconcile it with all of the promises of God's word that the kingdom of the Messiah would triumph. And therefore, in their weak and sinful fleshly thinking, they thought (even sub-consciously I am sure) that it was better to sorrow and to sleep, even when Jesus needed them the most. I am sure that in their redeemed minds, later on, it was something that they hated; to sleep when Jesus needed them the most.

So again Jesus went away and He prayed again, it says in verse 39, "and He spoke the same words". That is, He made the same requests to God. He still needed to be strengthened in His own heart, even though there was no sin there in His holy heart; still, He yet needed a greater supply of Divine strength given to Him by the Father, to be strengthened to do God's will. That is where you find the strength to do what is right; it is found in earnest, fervent prayer to God, seeking Him for what only He can give. James chapter 5, verse 16, says that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much". Hebrews chapter 5, verse 7 says that the Lord Jesus, "in the days of His flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

Verse 40 then states, "And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him." In Luke's gospel chapter 22, verse 43, it says that "an angel appeared to him from heaven, strengthening Him." "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly." "Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to

the ground.” “When he rose up from prayer, and came to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow.” Verse 41 of our text relates, “Then Jesus came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting?’ “It is enough!” “The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.” “Rise, let us be going.” “See, my betrayer is at hand.” You see here, that it was Christ alone who was able to pray and to face all that was coming upon Him. See His strength to save you from all of your sins. See Him pray where you would fail to pray. See Him bear the grief, the shame, and the suffering which is due to your sins. See Him sweat the sweat which was like the drops of blood, that He would shed for you. Where does the power come from to do what is right, and to suffer for what is right and true? It comes from our Lord Jesus who is the Savior of the World and the Savior especially of those who believe. “Now to Him who is able to keep from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceedingly joy; to God our Savior who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.” (Jude 24 and 25) These disciples came to learn how they could suffer for Christ by His example first, and then by His grace as they went on to live their lives for Him. This is the right order for you as well. Look at Christ and how He sorrowed, but He still continued to pray. Look at what a disciple is like apart from Christ’s grace, and you will see sorrow and you will see sleep, but you will not see prayer. If you would learn to pray, look to Christ in faith and pray for grace. And He will surely give it; grace that is greater than all your fears, grace not to enter into temptation; grace even to suffer persecution.

### **3rd – We may stumble if we see that our faith in Christ may lead to persecution.**

When the disciples of our Lord failed to pray, neither were they prepared for what would follow. When Judas came with a multitude of men armed with swords and clubs, what could be done by a small band of men who only had 2 swords? Not much. But this did not deter Peter. The moment that Judas kissed Jesus, and Peter saw that they were going to take Jesus away, he stepped forward and stuck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Our Lord Jesus was very calm during this exchange, and even healed Malcus’ ear. He very calmly said to them: “Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me?” “I was daily with you in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me.” “But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” The next statement is very significant from the standpoint of what the disciples were not able to do. It says: “Then they all forsook Him and fled.” Even a certain young man, was it John Mark who wrote this gospel? I think so. Why did he mention these unusual and personal circumstances here? Why did he mention that he had only a linen cloth thrown around his naked body, and that he fled naked, leaving that linen cloth, his only garment, behind? I think that it was to show us that neither the youthful careless disciple nor the older more mature disciples could stand with our Lord Jesus when it came His time to suffer. All would have suffered with Him if they had stayed. But God the Father had determined, and had placed it in the Scriptures, that Jesus would have to suffer for them all by Himself. Even the serious and committed disciple could not stand. And the young curious on-looker could not stand. Both were identified with Christ, but neither could yet suffer for Him. The commentator Lange says: “Whitefield has properly pointed out the action of this youth as the emblem of a late reception of Jesus, though others have praised it as the emblem of an early following of the Lord, as belief in youth.” Both are to be found in it: a beautiful enthusiasm of belief, and a fanatical self-dependence and over-estimation of personal strength.”

Let us not be hard on these disciples; I think that they all loved their Lord. But salvation could only come through Christ suffering alone. The Scriptures must be fulfilled, and God’s just judgment of our sins had to fall on Christ. But let us also realize that everyone who identifies with the Lord Jesus shall, in one way or another suffer persecution. (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3: 12) Back in Zechariah 14, when it says “Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered,” it goes on to say: Then I will turn My hand against the little ones.” This is speaking of Christ’s disciples, who

will learn by grace to so identify with Christ that they are willing to suffer persecution. But this is only learned by grace. Let us not trust in our own wisdom or strength to serve our Lord.