

When You Lose Your Shepherd

The Cross (Part 5)

Mark 14:25-28 (Mt.26:29-32) 5/14/2022

What would you have done if you were following Jesus and one night a lynch mob shows up, arrests him, beats him to a pulp, and crucifies him? We know what the disciples did—what should they have done?

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Harmony

Matthew 26:29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in **my Father's** kingdom." 30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 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 "I tell you the truth," 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.

Mark 14: 25 "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." 26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' 28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." 29 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." 30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." 31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

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Introduction: What Would You Have Done?

What do you think you would have done if you were following Jesus , and one night after supper you follow him to his favorite prayer spot and a lynch mob shows up, arrests him, beats him to a pulp, and crucifies him? And they try to capture you as well. What would you have done? We know what the disciples did. What *should* they have done? Peter tried to fight, but Jesus rebuked him. That wasn't the right response. They all ended up running away—that was no good either. So what should have happened?

The crazy thing is, Jesus says their failure happened because it was prophesied.

Mark 14:27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: " 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

That's from Zechariah. Strike the Messiah down, and all his followers run for the hills. If the Bible says that's what's going to happen, what else *could* happen? If there's a prophecy in Scripture that says you're going to fail, do you have any chance?

If not—if their failure was inevitable, then why did Jesus spend so much time beforehand warning them, “Stay awake. Stay alert. Watch and pray so you won't fall.”

We need to know the answers to these questions because the answer to the question, “What should the disciples have done when Jesus was taken from them?... ” is the same as the answer to this question: What should you do when you find yourself distant from Jesus and you feel like you have no shepherd? So let's see what Mark has to teach us.

The New Party

From Sadness to Singing

Mark 14 is a dark chapter. Literally, it's dark—the whole thing takes place at night. And what happens is dark. It's about three horrible predictions Jesus made about his disciples being unfaithful—first Judas, then the whole group, then Peter.¹

The first one we looked at last time. One of the Twelve would hand Jesus over to the authorities. Jesus broke that news during the Passover meal.

That was a hard conversation. Verse 19 says “they were saddened.” No kidding. Sounds like an understatement. What would it have been like to be with them that night as they left the house? Dead silence? Many churches have a tradition of having everyone walk out of the Good Friday service in silence and sorrow. Is that how it was on the original good Friday?

No, actually. It was the exact opposite.

Mark 14:26 When they had sung, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Singing is what you do when you're happy.

James 5:13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing.

In verse 19 they're all sad; in verse 26 they're singing—what happened in between?

The Messianic Feast

What happened was Jesus said this:

Mark 14:25 I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.

That phrase, “the fruit of the vine,” is an expression that refers to rich, overflowing abundance.² Abundant wine in the kingdom of God—that's the way the Old Testament prophets often spoke about the glorious messianic banquet in the age to come. For example,

¹The rest of the chapter describes the fulfillment of those predictions in the same order—Judas, then the whole group, then Peter.

² The normal Greek word for fruit is *karpos*. This word is *genema*, from which we get our word, generation. When applied to people or animals, it means offspring. When applied to plants, it means produce, and it's mostly used in contexts describing either abundance or scarcity. But the only other place where it's applied specifically to vines is in Isaiah 32:12 where God warns the people that all the fruitful abundance of the land is about to be wiped out.

Isaiah 25:6 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, ... 8 he will swallow up death forever.³

When Jesus comes back in his full glory to eliminate death forever, there will be a party to end all parties. We'll enjoy the best cuts of meat, and lots of fine wine.

You don't hear much about this from prophecy buffs, but I have to say, it's one of my favorite parts about the end times. The kingdom of God will be (and these are two of my favorite words in the English language) all-inclusive.

Drinking the Fruit of the Vine

And it was when Jesus started talking about that banquet that the mood of the whole night changed from sorrow to singing. And yet, of all the communion statements in Scripture, is it fair to say this one is the one you hear about the least?

25 ... I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.

When have you ever taken communion and heard the pastor mention that? And I'm guilty too—I don't know if I've ever mentioned it in communion. And yet, here in Mark, that's the part Jesus draws the most attention to—with his signature, "I tell you the truth" in front of it. If you get anything, he wants you to get this.

Jesus won't drink wine again until "that day." What day? The only other time the phrase, "that day"⁴ was used in Mark was in the Olivet Discourse where it refers to the Second Coming.⁵ That's the day Jesus will drink of the fruit of the vine again.⁶

³ Other examples: Isaiah 25:6; Joel 2:23-26; 3:17-18; Genesis 49:10-12; Amos 9:13.

⁴ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης - letter for letter identical to the phrase in Mark 13:32.

⁵ Some commentators have suggested that this was fulfilled when Jesus had meals with his disciples in the 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension, since the kingdom of God existed then in its early mustard seed form. This is unlikely for several reasons:

- 1) Most of Jesus' references to the kingdom in Mark refer to the final, glorious form of the kingdom, so that is the most natural way to take it.
- 2) And the fact that it's connected with the abundant produce of the vine and "that day" points us to the messianic banquet at the Second Coming, not the post resurrection meals Jesus had with his disciples.
- 3) Had the post-resurrection meals been the fulfillment, we would expect some comment in Scripture about Jesus drinking wine at those meals. There is none.
- 4) Wine is often connected with the glorious last day in Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 25:6; Joel 2:23-26; 3:17-18; Genesis 49:10-12; Amos 9:13).
- 5) In Luke's account, Jesus says he will not eat the Passover with them until the kingdom. It wouldn't make sense to take that as a reference to the 40-day period after his resurrection because there wouldn't have been another Passover meal until a year later.
- 6) If Jesus drank normal wine after the resurrection, it's hard to see how that would be a "new" kind of drinking.

⁶ Another implication of the phrase "the fruit of the vine" rather than simply "wine" is that Jesus is referring specifically to the wine at the Passover meal. In Matthew's gospel, he even specifies, "this fruit of the vine"—referring to the Passover. And in Luke, it's even more explicit.

Luke 22:16 For I tell you, I will not eat [the Passover] again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

The Passover was not merely a remembrance of past deliverance. It also pointed forward to a future fulfillment—the time when all the promises of restoration would be fulfilled.

Anew

And the emphasis, grammatically, is on the word “new.”⁷ On that day, Jesus will drink the fruit of the vine in a whole new way. Everything will be new.⁸

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ... 4 There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

Everything will be new, including wine drinking. This isn't your daddy's party. It will be a new way of drinking wine. New how? Maybe it will taste good then—that would be new (for me, at least). In this world, you have to limit how much wine you drink—too much and you get drunk, you get a hangover, it destroys your liver. It's expensive. But on that day, there will be no drawback to drinking wine or any other element of partying. Only upside. And the verb tense Jesus uses for the word “drink” points to ongoing, continuous action, not just a single event. The Messianic Feast goes on forever.

It Is Written

The Messianic Banquet Is an Important Part of the Biblical Story

When you think of the elements of the end times, you might think of the rapture , the Millennium, the Antichrist , the great Tribulation, Judgement Day , the Second Coming —all the stuff we get in debates about. But one aspect of eschatology you never hear much about is the Messianic Banquet. For whatever reason, we tend to neglect it, but the Bible doesn't. The Bible says a lot about it because it's an important component of our future hope. And it plays a very significant role in the story of the whole Bible. And if you want to know what that role is, the place to go is Zechariah.

Zechariah is important not only for understanding that, but for understanding Mark 14. The book of Zechariah comes up again and again. Do you remember last time when we looked at that phrase “the blood of the covenant”? In v.24, when Jesus gave the cup to the disciples, he said, “This is my blood of the covenant”—that came from Zechariah 9.⁹ Skip down to verse 27 where Jesus says, “You will all fall away, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.” That's from Zechariah 13.¹⁰ The king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey,¹¹ Israel mourning over the one they pierced,¹² the thirty pieces of silver , the potter's field,¹³ the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives¹⁴—every one of those is from Zechariah. Jesus

⁷ It receives emphasis because it's odd placement in the sentence. It could mean the wine is new, but more likely it means he will drink it in a new way.

⁸ Back in chapter 2 Jesus spoke of the newness that his arrival brought about in the kingdom of God. Some of the old things had to go, because you don't sew a new patch on an old garment and you don't pour new wine into old wineskins. You put new wine into new wineskins (2:21-22). The only other time this word is used in Mark is when the people first hear Jesus preach and say, “What is this, a new teaching? And with authority!” (1:27)

⁹ Zechariah 9:11.

¹⁰ Mark 14:27/Zechariah 13:7.

¹¹ Mark 11:1-10/Zechariah 9:9.

¹² Matthew 24:30/Zechariah 12:10.

¹³ Matthew 27:9-10/Zechariah 11:12-13.

¹⁴ Jesus enters Jerusalem from there, he sits there when he delivers the Olivet Discourse, he goes there after the last supper, and he's arrested there. See Zechariah 14:4.

keeps pointing us back to that book. He wants us to know that we won't understand what he's saying and doing in his final days unless we see it as a fulfillment of Zechariah.

Zechariah's Message: The Restoration Is Conditional

So what's the message of Zechariah? Zechariah was written to answer one basic question: When Israel returned after their 70-year captivity in Babylon, why was the restoration so ... disappointing? Only a handful of people came back, the city and the Temple were in ruins, they were bullied by the people living nearby, and life there was really hard. When they finally rebuilt the Temple, what they built was so lame compared to the old one, it made the people cry. The word "disappointing" doesn't even cover it. If you could see the thoughts of the people at that time, they were probably quoting the great philosopher princess Leah, when she said to Luke, "This is some rescue." The Israelites are looking around and saying, "*This* is our big restoration? Why does it smell like we're in a trash compactor?"

And 500 years later in Jesus' day, the promises still hadn't been fulfilled. Yes, they were back in the land, but they didn't have a king on David's throne. Nor did they have relief from all their enemies. So many promises of restoration hadn't been fulfilled. Why? The book of Zechariah was written to answer that question.

And the answer is this: the restoration from exile was conditional.

Zechariah 6:15 ... This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God.

The people who came back from Babylon were committing the same sins that got their forefathers in trouble in the first place, and so the restoration didn't happen. All they got was a sample.

But Because of the Blood, It Will Happen

So then what? Will it ever happen, Zechariah? Yes. Thanks to the blood of the covenant.

Zechariah 9:11 As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

In verse 9 he says, "Rejoice! God will send a shepherd/king who will ride in on a donkey and bring world peace, there will be abundant food and lots of new wine (vv.15,17). It hasn't happened yet, but thanks to the blood of the covenant, it is going to happen.

Restoration from Exile in the Bible

And when I say that's a key part of the story of the whole Bible, I'm talking about that concept of exile and then restoration —banishment from the place of blessing and restoration to the place of God's presence and blessing. The whole story of the Bible begins with mankind being banished from the Garden of Eden. And the Bible ends with us being restored to the paradise of God where we eat from the tree of life (Revelation 22:2,14,19; 2:7). It starts with banishment and ends with restoration. And everything in between is about:

- 1) promises of that restoration,
- 2) samples of that restoration, and
- 3) what God requires of us to receive that restoration.

That's what Passover was all about because the exodus from Egypt was one of those samples of restoration. Deliverance from bondage and death in Egypt into the place of God's blessing in the promised land. The Passover looked back to that sample and pointed forward to the real thing. And communion is the same thing. We do it to remember the body and blood of the Lord, but we also do it to proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes* (1 Corinthians 11:26), looking forward to that day when we drink the fruit of the vine with Jesus in a whole new way. Zechariah is saying, "The return from Babylon was disappointing because it's just a sample. It's not the full restoration, but don't forget the story of the whole Bible. Thanks to the blood of the covenant, that full restoration is coming." And by pointing back to Zechariah over and over, Jesus was showing us the role he was playing in that whole story of bringing about that ultimate restoration.

The Importance of Future Hope

This is important, because keeping future hope in view is a crucial part of living the Christian life. If your perspective collapses into just the present, you won't have the joy God wants you to have. You'll never have adequate amounts of happiness in your life unless you have joy pouring in from three sources:

- 1) the past (through remembering),
- 2) from the present (through fellowship with God), and
- 3) from the future (through hope in the promises).

You have to have all three. If you cut off the flow of joy from future hope, the other two won't be enough.

Wasn't it that future hope that enabled Jesus to endure the cross?

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus ... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, thinking little of its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It doesn't say he was able to endure it by thinking about how much good he was accomplishing by saving millions of people. That might have encouraged him some, but it was that future joy that pulled him through.

Vow of Abstinence: Jesus Is Working on It

And when Jesus says, "I won't drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it anew in the kingdom," he's not just saying it will happen someday. He's saying he will *make* it happen. The statement is in the form of a vow of abstinence. "I'll abstain from X until Y." People would make vows like that to show their commitment to bringing about Y. An example of that is in Acts 23.

Acts 23:12 ... the Jews ... bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

That's the kind of vow Jesus is making here. It's not just, "I won't drink until it happens." He's saying, "I won't touch a drop of wine until I *make* it happen. From now until that day I will be working on that project. And I'm fasting from wine until I get it done." And he's still on that fast. Everything Jesus is doing now through his body, the Church, is Jesus' effort to bring that day into existence.

No wonder they were singing. We don't know how much Jesus said about the messianic banquet because the gospel writers condense things to just give us the gist of it (especially Mark). But we know the Passover meal lasted for hours. And Jesus evidently talked about it long enough to shift the mood from the sadness of verse 19 to the whole group wanting to burst out in song. Jesus is teaching them how to do that “for the joy set before you” thing—present joy through future hope.¹⁵

Jesus and the Present

And it wasn't just the disciples who were singing—Jesus was happy too. That's amazing, because this is the worst night of his life. And as he's well aware, the last night of his life. An hour or two after this he will be flat on his face in the dirt crying out in agony while his closest friends can't even be bothered to stay awake. He knows for a fact that's going to happen. And yet, here he is singing—with a grateful, happy heart, giving thanks repeatedly (for the bread and again for the cup), and singing praises with his disciples.

God Doesn't Hold Our Future Against Us

Luke 22:15 I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

Jesus thoroughly enjoyed this evening of fellowship with his disciples. But how could he enjoy being with these guys when he knew that later that night they would all abandon him? How does God do that? How does he draw near to us in our morning devotions or at church when he knows later that day we'll commit some awful sin?

I don't know. I don't know how God does that—I certainly couldn't. If I knew for sure someone was about to stab me in the back, I don't think I could enjoy an evening of fellowship with him. I don't know how God does it, but aren't you glad he does? Aren't you glad God somehow manages to turn a blind eye to our future sin in the present? God may be outside of time, but he deals with us inside of time, and so he doesn't hold us responsible today for tomorrow's sins. Can you imagine if he did? We would never be able to draw near to God.

Jesus knew they would all desert him later, but he also knew that right here, in this moment, they fully intended to stay faithful to him. And that was enough for him to enjoy fellowship with them.

The Disciples' Collapse

Leaving the House

So Jesus talks about that day, he lifts their mood, by the time he's done everyone is singing, and

26 When they had sung,¹⁶ they went out to the Mount of Olives.

They left the house—on Passover night. That stands out because Exodus 12 says, “Don't leave the house.”

¹⁵ This is the only place in the gospel where music is mentioned. The gathering of the saints to remember the Lord is to be a time of singing.

¹⁶ The NIV makes it sound like just one hymn, but that's not in the Greek. Literally, it says, “Having hymned, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Exodus 12:22 ... Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. 23 When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

Remain in the safety of your house. Don't dare go outside all night because the destroying angel is out there striking people down. This night, as soon as they finish the meal, Jesus goes out of the house into the night.¹⁷ Will he get struck down?

This whole scene is about to turn dark again. Jesus exits out into the night, and the physical darkness is an illustration of the bigger picture of the deep, deadly darkness Jesus was plunging into. It's time to get on with this horrible night.

They clean up the dishes, put things away, go down the stairs, out the city gates, and walk in the darkness down into the Kidron valley, then up the slope to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus says it.

You Will All Fall Away

27 You will all fall away.

It's not just one betrayer. The word, "fall away" is *skandalizo*. It means to run into an obstacle, it stops you in your tracks, you say, "I give up" and turn away. Jesus is saying, "You guys are about to run into something that's going to make you all give up on me." Right after the first communion, Jesus predicts the total collapse of his entire movement.

Shallow Roots

Jesus has used this word before. Back in chapter 4 he said the people who fall away (*skandalizo*) when they face opposition are people with shallow roots. They are the weedy soil.

And in chapter 9 he said this:

Mark 9:47 If your eye causes you to turn away (*skandalizo*), pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.

This is a kind of turning away that can result in going to hell.

No Promise of Recovery

Now, as we read this in hindsight, we know that the disciples didn't go to hell. They recovered from their fall. But when they heard Jesus says this, all they had to go by was what Jesus said in chapter 9, where the *skandalizo* results in damnation. And Jesus doesn't throw in a caveat saying, "Oh, but don't worry. You guys will recover." He leaves the question of whether they will recover wide open.

He left it open because it was open. That's why Jesus keeps giving them warnings, because if they don't watch it, they very well could all end up like Judas. They're going to deny him. And remember what Jesus said about that.

¹⁷ That was the original Passover. I don't know if that was still observed in Jesus' time, but it's striking to think about the picture it paints.

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me ...the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Think of how this would have sounded to them. These guys have stuck with Jesus through thick and thin. They stayed by his side in times when people were trying to kill Jesus. All through his ministry they have watched other people follow Jesus for a while, then run into some obstacle and turn away. Like the rich young ruler. Or after his sermon in John 6.

John 6:66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

Everyone else left, but the 12 stayed. They gave up everything to follow him and they stayed when it was hard, when it was dangerous, when everyone else left—they stuck by him. And their reason was simple.

John 6:67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

They stayed because they knew there was no alternative. Their attitude was, the worst circumstances with Jesus are still better than the best situation without him.

Strike the Shepherd

So if that was their attitude, what obstacle could possibly be enough to turn them away now? The answer, again, is in Zechariah. Zechariah said, "The restoration is coming, but not until something else happens—something ... unthinkable.

27 "You will all fall away, for it is written: " 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

That's from Zechariah 13. The word "strike" refers to a lethal blow. God says, "I will strike the shepherd dead."

They figured they could handle anything as long as they had Jesus. That's what you think too, right? You can handle anything as long as you have Jesus. But what if Jesus is struck down? What if Satan somehow rose up and destroyed Jesus—then how well do you think you'd do?

You say, "That's absurd. Jesus can't be destroyed." That's exactly what they thought. They couldn't conceive of it happening, it didn't compute, so they simply dismissed the idea.

But it's in the Bible. Zechariah 13 says it will happen.

Scattering

And when that happens—when the shepherd falls, the sheep won't be able to handle it. It will be too much for them, and they will scatter. And that's a dark day for them because not only does that separate them from their shepherd, but it also isolates them from one another. That's what "scatter" means. If you picture a bunch of sheep all scattering, the farther they run, the farther they get from each other.

Imagine what it was like for the disciples. It would be one thing to lose Jesus and spend the most terrifying night of your life huddled with your friends somewhere, but this night, they were each alone in whatever hiding place they each found to escape the lynch mob. No friends and no Jesus.

That's what happens when you lose touch with Jesus, and that's a principle for us today. The farther you wander from Jesus, the more isolated you get from God's people. And that's a

vicious cycle because that's when you need God's people the most to help you move closer to the Lord.

And that's important to remember when you're helping other people with broken relationships. If Christians are at odds with each other and you have a church split or fractured relationships among brothers or a marriage problem, the solution is always to bring both sides closer to the shepherd. If two Christians are fighting, the goal isn't to get them to meet halfway. The goal is to bring both of them to repentance so they can move back toward Christ. And when they do that, their relationship with each other will take care of itself.

How not to Lose Jesus: Follow Him

So what's the purpose of this passage? What does God want us to gain from reading about this event? Sometimes people study this and say, "Of course they all fell away. Without Jesus, no one could persevere. It just goes to show how much we need our Shepherd." I don't think that's the point. They didn't fall away because they lost their shepherd. They fell away because their shepherd led somewhere they didn't want to go. They didn't *lose* Jesus; they *left* Jesus.

What should they have done when the crowd came for Jesus and tried to arrest them too? Fighting for Jesus was wrong, fleeing was wrong—what would the right response have been? It's no mystery. They knew exactly what they should have done. They say it down in verse 31.

31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

What was the right thing to do? Fight? No. Flee? No. *Follow*. Follow Jesus wherever he leads. That's what he's been telling them all along, that's what they've been doing up to now, and that's what they claimed they would do even to the death. But when it came down to the moment of decision, they weren't willing.

Throughout the gospel, Jesus has been rebuking the disciples for failing to understand. But at least they kept following him. Now they will fail to do even that. Eventually failure to understand will result in failure to follow.

So what about you? Would it be possible for you to lose Jesus? You can't lose him, but you can leave him. It happens to some degree every time he leads somewhere we aren't willing to go. I snap at my wife and I know for a fact that I should humble myself and go confess my sin to her and seek her forgiveness—I know for a fact that's where Jesus is leading me, but I don't want to go there. So I stop in my tracks. Meanwhile Jesus is still moving ahead, and so now I'm distanced from him. Every time he makes it clear where he wants me to go and I refuse to go there, I fall behind and sacrifice closeness to him. You can't lose Jesus, but you can leave him.

Does that ever work out well for us? No. So why do we do it? Why would anyone in his right mind leave Jesus' side? Why did the disciples leave him? Unbelief. Jesus told them God's plan was for him to die. But that plan was unacceptable to them—it was a nonstarter. They wouldn't even consider it. And so the promise of resurrection meant nothing to them. You can't gain comfort from God's promise of restoration if you refuse to accept God's plan of suffering.

Why? To Refine Them

Now, in their defense, God's plan was pretty extreme. The Messiah being killed? Why? Why would God the Father strike down his own shepherd and allow the sheep to be scattered?¹⁸ Why not have the sacrifice of Jesus be in private or do it some way that wouldn't result in all the disciples falling away and turning on Jesus?

The answer is in Zechariah. Remember, the message of that book is the restoration wouldn't happen until they were faithful. And for that to happen, they would have to be purified. And the reason for the ordeal of the sheep being scattered was to accomplish that purification.

Zechariah 13:7 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. 8 ...two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. 9 This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

As we're going to see in the verses that follow, the disciples still had way too much pride to be useful to the Lord. As often as Jesus had taught them about humility, it hadn't sunk in. Every one of them says, "Even if all fall away, I will not. I'm not like those people who collapse and turn away from you." Luke's gospel tells us that they were again arguing about who was the greatest at the last supper!¹⁹ That pride had to be broken.

Why does God allow us to fall into situations where he knows we will fail? He allows us to fall flat on our face and do horrible things and make terrible mistakes because that's what it takes to purify us from our pride. That's why it's so important not to respond to our failures with rationalizations and self-justification. Or with self-condemnation and self-destruction. The right response is to let the failure teach us humility.

How does that happen? How can I make sure my failures result in my purification rather than my destruction? What's the key to recovering from failure? That's where Jesus goes next.

I Will Go Ahead of You

27 "You will all fall away, for it is written: " 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' 28 But ...

That word "but" lets us know that what follows is the solution to the problem of the sheep being scattered. You'll fall away and be scattered, but "**after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.**" That's the fifth time Jesus has predicted his resurrection in Mark.²⁰ And he says, "I will go ahead of you." He speaking as a shepherd—"After I have risen, I will regather you and once again lead you as your shepherd."²¹

¹⁸ In Zechariah, it just says, "Strike the shepherd ..." But when Jesus quotes it, he makes explicit what is implied in Zechariah—that God is the one who strikes him down. And God describes the shepherd as "the one who stands close to me" (Zech.13:7).

¹⁹ Luke 22:24.

²⁰ 8:31; 9:9; 9:31; 10:34; 14:28.

²¹ Apart from the parallel passage to come in 16:7, the use in 10:32 is the only other transitive use of "go ahead" (πρόαγω). In that passage Jesus is striding forth boldly into Jerusalem, the place of opposition, with his frightened flock following.

That's important. If you wonder how important, the book of Mark ends with an angel repeating this statement.²² It's the only place in Mark where Jesus says something and God sends an angel later to repeat it, and that statement ends the book.

Galilee

Jesus will regather them, and he'll do it in Galilee. Why Galilee? Why not Jerusalem? Ever since the time of David, Jerusalem has been the central focus of God's dealings with his people—why doesn't Jesus make his big comeback there?

Because Jerusalem rejected him. Galilee is the gateway to the gentile world. We've seen that in Mark—when Jesus' ministry extended beyond the ethnic boundaries of Israel and touched the nations, it happened up in Galilee. Isaiah 9:1 even refers to Galilee as "Galilee of the Gentiles."

Isaiah 9:1 ... in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles ... 2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest ... 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

Yes, he will reign on David's throne. But the place where that light will fire up is in Galilee of the Gentiles. The new flock will include the nations.

Failure to Hope in the Promises

So that will be the solution to their fall—meet up with Jesus in Galilee. Not everyone who falls does return. That's the point of the one third in Zechariah—they all scatter, two thirds are destroyed and one third are purified.

So the solution to spiritual failure is to return to following the risen Christ. That's their hope for restoration. And if they had placed their hope in that, they wouldn't have even needed a restoration because they could have avoided falling in the first place. Remember, the reason for their failure was their world had collapsed into the present. Instead of living on future hope in Jesus' promises, their hope was in making the present work out the way they wanted it to. That's what happens when you try to get all your happiness from present circumstances working out rather than getting a good portion of it from God's promises of future glory.

I say "a good portion" because it is right to derive joy from the present. You draw near to Christ and enjoy fellowship with him right now—that's wonderful. But there are deserts we go through—times when for whatever reason, our communion with Christ is hindered. And in times like that, if we haven't learned how to derive happiness and joy from future hope, our happiness dries up and we're left with despair.

You can't hope in God's promises if you reject God's plan. If they just would have accepted the dark night they were about to face, that would have freed them up to set their eyes on the joy set before them like Jesus did.

²² Mark 16:7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

That's exactly what they did after the resurrection. In Acts 1, when Jesus ascended into heaven, they once again lost their physical access to Jesus. But this time, they didn't scatter. Nor were they a bunch of cowards this time. Now they were willing to follow Jesus to the death, and they did.

Even though Jesus wasn't with them physically, they still had access to him spiritually. And that was true when Jesus died as well. The difference was, after the resurrection, they believed. Before the resurrection, they didn't. When Jesus died, they didn't lose their shepherd. They still had a shepherd, but they were scattered because they didn't believe they had a shepherd.

One way God refines his people is by allowing situations where it seems like you have no shepherd, even though you do. It's a way of testing what you really believe.

Conclusion

What should we take away from this passage? Here's what I'm taking away: two things.

- 1) Avoid spiritual failure by deriving a good portion of my joy from future hope, rather than trying to derive all my joy from the present.
- 2) When I do fail, instead of trying to justify myself or minimize my failure—or going the other way and destroying myself with self-condemnation; respond by allowing the fall to teach me humility. Then return to Jesus and follow him wherever he leads.

Summary

Jesus transformed the sadness of the betrayal announcement to the joy of singing by talking about the Messianic Banquet and his commitment to bringing it about. Future hope is essential for having enough joy. And amazingly, God does not hold our future sins against us now.

Jesus predicted the disciples' fall citing Zechariah, which says that fall must happen for purification. Let your failures purify you from pride. They didn't fall because they lost their shepherd. They didn't lose him; they left him. He led them somewhere they weren't willing follow (to death). When you fall, recover by letting it teach you humility and avoid falling by deriving joy from future hope.