

"They All Said Likewise"

A very common argument you hear between parents and kids goes something like this. Say a teenager wants to do something that the parent does not want them to do. It could be anything. Say it's getting a tongue pierced. The teenager might ask their dad for permission and the dad might say no. The teenager might then reply, "But Dad, Billy has his tongue pierced." How does the dad respond? Well, quite often the dad might respond by asking a rhetorical question, "Well, if Billy was going to jump off a cliff, would you jump too?"

The point by the father would be that just because someone else does something, doesn't necessarily mean it's a good idea. Of course, behind that sort of thinking is a more fundamental issue. Who are we going to follow? Even if you are a natural-born leader, even leaders have people who they follow, and even leaders have people who influence them.

You see, a teenage son or daughter might want to follow whatever their best friend is doing. That friend may or may not be a good person to follow. But this isn't just about getting your tongue pierced. All through life, all of us have to make decisions on who we will follow and who will influence us. We have to decide how much we will follow certain people, and to what extent will we follow them. How far are we willing to follow a leader in our life?

These decisions in life can obviously have big impacts on us. If we decide to follow our stock broker's advice and liquidate all our stocks, that might have some large financial implications for us, good or bad, depending on your stock broker's insights. But think about religiously. Some people followed David Koresh and the Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas to their death in 1993. Some people followed Jim Jones and his cult in 1978 in drinking poison, also to their death.

Again, the question becomes: how far are you willing to follow someone? Are you willing to follow someone, even to your death? Well, we know that certainly some causes are worth dying for. That's the theme of many movies, where a hero gives up his life for some greater cause. To follow such a leader to your own death is rightly portrayed a good thing. It's something Christians and pagans alike applaud. But who you are going to follow, and when it is fool hearty to give up your life, and when it is noble, isn't always so easy to see. When it's being wise to back away from following someone, versus when it's cowardly and faithless isn't always so easy to tell.

This tension is behind our passage for today in Mark. The disciples will be instantly confronted with a choice. How far are they willing to follow Jesus? By this point, Jesus had repeatedly told them that his future held suffering and death. At this point, that suffering and death is imminent. It will be that very night that Jesus is betrayed by Judas. The next day he will be convicted, beaten, and hung on the cross to his death. That was Jesus' imminent future.

At that time, as a disciples of someone, it's very typical that you are identified with your teacher. The disciple would often be treated by others with a similar level of honor and respect as they would treat the teacher himself. But of course, that meant that when the teacher fell out of favor, that the disciples would share in that falling out as well. How much more would that be the case for the disciples when Jesus not only fell out of favor, but became arrested and condemned

to death? Would they stand by Jesus at that time? Would they faithfully follow Jesus all the way to the end? Would they stand by him even if it meant that they would be identified with him? If it meant that they might share in his fate? That they might end up in legal trouble too? That they could end up arrested, condemned, beaten, and crucified? What *should* the disciples do? Would it be the noble and loyal thing to do to follow Jesus to his death, and to maybe their deaths as well? Or would that be just foolish, like jumping off the cliff, just because Billy did?

Well, Jesus knows what will happen to his disciples. Verse 27. They will abandon him. They will desert him. That very night they would forsake him and flee. Jesus says that they will be made to stumble. That word, "made to stumble" has the connotation of offense. They will take offense at him. This will cause them to fall away. Something about him as their leader will make them not want to follow him anymore. They had been willing to follow him up to this point. But soon they will change their mind. They will stop following him.

Obviously what will be so offensive to them is his arrest and crucifixion. It seems that they aren't willing to suffer alongside with him. Continuing to stand beside Jesus when he is arrested might mean that they get arrested. It's like at a protest when the police come to shut things down. If you stick around, you might get arrested. But if you run away, you can probably escape and keep yourself out of jail. And so when the authorities come down on Jesus and arrest it, the disciples will obviously change their minds about following him. They are content to follow a glorious Messiah. But a Messiah of suffering? A Messiah that could lead them into suffering. That it seems they will not follow.

And look at the force of this. One little but important word in verse 27. "All." All of his disciples. All of his inner circle. His closest friends. Jesus had called them family even. They were all going to desert him. He'd have no one willing to follow him.

But Jesus says that this too is according to plan. This too was foretold in Scripture. Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 when he says, "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." Just a few verses earlier in this passage from Zechariah, the prophet was talking about how God would use the Messiah to bring salvation from sin. Zechariah 13:1 says, "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." Of course, this promised fountain from the house of David, was Jesus, the Messiah. And the irony is that he will deal with sin and uncleanness by the very fact that he will be struck. And so Zechariah prophesied that the Christ would be struck. The shepherd will be struck. This will ultimately bring salvation from sin. But initially it would cause the sheep to be scattered. Jesus interprets that prophecy here in Mark. He says that it means that when he is arrested and crucified, his disciples will abandon him. They will stop following him, and instead turn and run away.

Of course, what a fitting image. Jesus is described as the shepherd and the disciples are described as the sheep. You see that's what we are like. Sheep just following the shepherd. Sheep don't usually question the shepherd. They just for the most part blindly follow the shepherd. If the sheep have a good shepherd, then that is good for the sheep. Of course, Jesus is the good shepherd. And yet, that's the ultimate problem with the disciples. They are like sheep, but guess what? The shepherd will be struck. That night Jesus would be arrested. Their shepherd will be removed from them. Without their shepherd they instantly go astray. They instantly scatter. They instantly turn and go in different directions. Their own denial of them is related to the fact that their shepherd

has been struck. That doesn't remove the guilt of their actions of course. They shouldn't have deserted Jesus. They shouldn't have ran away like startled sheep. But it does explain their dilemma. They have need for a shepherd to lead them.

And so Jesus clearly predicts that disciples will fall away when he is arrested and condemned to death. How do the disciples respond? Do they agree with Jesus' prediction? Not at all. Of course, right here they in a sense deviate from his leadership. They say surely not. It can't be. Jesus predicts how they will abandon him. They return by vowing loyalty.

But their vow of loyalty is represented here by Peter. Peter seems to be the first to speak up. Peter can be so bold can't he? He always seems to be the voice of the disciples, the first to speak and act. Here he jumps up and promises to remain faithful no matter what. In one sense, this is a sign of growth in Peter. If you recall back to earlier in the book, we see Peter speak up when he shouldn't have. Back in Mark chapter 8, Peter makes a glorious confession that Jesus is the Christ. But he should have stopped right there. Because then Jesus goes on to tell them how that meant as Messiah he would have to suffer and die. How did Peter respond to that picture of the Messiah? He rebuked Jesus. Peter at that point did want anything to do with a Messiah who would have to suffer. Peter didn't think that was what the Messiah's mission should be. So he rebuked Jesus. That of course resulted in Jesus then rebuking Peter, telling Peter that he did not have in mind the things of God but of men.

But this is a different Peter, isn't it? There's been quite a change hasn't there? Peter has obviously seen a lot more. Jesus has been telling them about his suffering and death more and more. Peter's beginning to realize that suffering must come first, before the Messiah would usher in glory. And so Peter here confidently vows to remain loyal to Jesus. He vows to remain loyal to a Messiah that has an imminent mission of suffering and death. What Peter before couldn't even dream of, a suffering Messiah, here he promises to go the distance. In verse 31, Peter says he will even die with Jesus, if necessary. Before Peter wouldn't conceive of the Messiah dying. Now Peter is willing to even die *with* the Messiah.

And yet for Peter, though this is certainly a sign of growth in him, it's also a sign that he still is under construction spiritually. He still needs growth. You see Peter's response is a bit prideful here, isn't it. He distinguishes himself from the rest. He essentially makes himself better than the rest of the disciples. Verse 29. Even if all of them fall away. Even if all of them are offended and abandon you, I, I, won't abandon you. That's of course where Peter goes wrong. You can't follow the shepherd very well if you make everything about yourself. Peter's vow and desire is a noble one, but it falls short because he essentially made himself his own shepherd.

And Peter's vow of loyalty ultimately falls short because he doesn't keep the vow. Certainly at the moment Peter had good intentions. But Jesus predicts to him of his own denial. Verse 30. That very night, Peter would deny him three times. Jesus says that Peter won't keep that vow. He would break it imminently - that very night. And he would break it completely - *three times* he would deny Jesus. His own abandoning of Jesus would be quick and thorough. Jesus even gives him a sign - the crowing rooster. That of course shows how quickly Peter's denial would come. But it also is a loving sign to Peter. It will signal to Peter his sin. It will convict him of his sin. Later in this chapter we'll that when the rooster crows the second time, it leaves Peter broken and weeping. But that is sometimes what we need. Sometimes we need to be broken in order to take the focus off of ourselves and put it on the Lord who alone brings true healing.

Of course, this wasn't just Peter's need. And this wasn't just Peter's vow of loyalty. It wasn't just Peter who vowed to remain loyal and then broke that promise. Our passage ends with all of the disciples making the same vow. Verse 31, "And they all said likewise." They all agreed with Peter. Of course what else could they say to Jesus' words? Who would want to admit that they'd soon desert their beloved teacher? Well, I guess they could have pleaded with him for help. But instead, they all denied that they would deny him. They all followed after Peter. Did you catch that? Already they have chosen a new person to follow. They don't follow Jesus here. They disagree with him. Instead they choose to follow Peter and Peter's vow. And follow him they will. Peter will soon deny Jesus three times. And they will all follow suit. They will all abandon their Lord and Teacher. The shepherd would be struck, and the sheep will be scattered. And once they are scattered, they'll have need for their shepherd to gather them up again.

You see, that's what the disciples could have done. Instead of disagreeing with Jesus, they could have picked up on the words of hope that Jesus did offer. In verse 28, Jesus offers hope of a resurrection. Though the shepherd will be struck, though he will die, that will not be the end. There will be new life. Jesus is offering the hope and promise of resurrection. Jesus doesn't say "if." No, verse 28, "After I have been raised." His resurrection is as certain as his imminent death. That alone should give the disciples hope. The sadness of the cross will be met with the joy of the resurrection. Good Friday is only the precursor to Resurrection Sunday. Jesus would rise again!

But the hope Jesus offers the disciples here is more than just about his resurrection. The future he offers as hope includes *them*. Part of the plan includes the disciples. You see, the disciples had just been told that they would forsake Jesus when he needed them the most. They would abandon him at his death. And yet the hope of his resurrection would only be somewhat comforting by itself. You see, by itself it wouldn't say what would happen to disciples. Should they expect to return to Jesus as if nothing happened after the resurrection? Maybe after Jesus rises again, maybe Jesus wouldn't want to have anything to do with them? You know if a friend deserts someone when they are down and out, and then comes back to them when their fortune improves, we call that friend a "fair-weather friend." If someone deserts you, are you quick to trust them again? Not usually. Even the Apostle Paul wasn't quick to trust John Mark again after he deserted them previously (you can read about that in Acts 15). And so just the hope of the resurrection alone wouldn't have been the best of news. In fact it might have even scarred them. Maybe the resurrection would signal Jesus coming back to judge the world, and maybe he would start with his old friends who were so quick to desert him.

But Jesus doesn't give them any time to think about that. No, his love and compassion won't let that happen. You see verse 28 doesn't say, "But after I have been raised, you better watch out." That's actually what you might expect if this was anyone other than Jesus. But no, Jesus says, "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." The angel at the empty tomb will send a message to the disciples reminding them of these words - that he would go before them to Galilee. Why was he going before them to Galilee? Very simple. That's where they will be reunited. Jesus is giving them the promise of a reunion! Not a reunion to an angry Messiah. No, a reunion to a Messiah that is gathering back up his wayward sheep. A reunion to the shepherd that was struck for their salvation. He will go to Galilee to counteract the very thing that would happen that evening. That evening they would be scattered. But after he is raised he will go to Galilee to gather them back to himself. You see, after the resurrection, Jesus doesn't see

the disciples as fair-weather friends. He seems them as sheep without a shepherd and he has compassion on them.

Of course, this promised reunion and restoration was only possible because the shepherd was struck. The disciples abandon Jesus as an expression of their sin. And all humans are also like sheep that have gone astray. All of us have sinned against God. We all need to be forgiven of our sins. But that's why God struck the shepherd.

You see, God struck the shepherd, he abandoned Jesus, his only begotten son, to the death of the cross. On the cross God forsook Jesus. Jesus was completely alone as he endured the cross. No disciples. No friends. Not even his Father in heaven who loved him so much. For the first time he was completely abandoned and forsaken, even by the Father. Of course, it was a sinful action when the disciples forsook Jesus. It was something different for God the Father, however. For God the Father to forsake Jesus it was the just wrath of God. It was the righteous wrath of God upon Jesus. Not for Jesus' sin. No, he was without sin. But on the cross he took on the sins of God's people. When God delivered the punishment to Jesus for our sins, that necessarily included the Father forsaking Jesus. That's part of God's wrath. His removal of his good pleasure and presence. That is why Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus Christ suffered completely alone on the cross. He was stricken and afflicted. All for us. All so that our sin could be atoned for. All so that people who have denied him and abandoned him and ran away from him could be reunited and restored. That's what Jesus did for the disciples. That's what he does for each of us who belong to him by faith.

You see the reunion which Jesus promised the disciples is a promise for all Christians. Jesus says that he is the good shepherd and that he doesn't lose his sheep. All of his sheep, all of his chosen people, he will gather up. That's what he had said back in chapter 13, isn't it? When Jesus prophesied of his second coming, when he would come in glory, he said that he would "gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven" (13:27).

That's what will happen on the last day. The last day of this present age is described in terms of reunion. Jesus will gather up all his saints from throughout the earth. But the preparation for that final gathering has already begun hasn't it? It began when the disciples were reunited with Jesus in Galilee after the resurrection. It continues as God's people are currently gathered up right now in faith through the preaching of the gospel. As the gospel is preached throughout the world, people are reunited with the God that they've denied. They are reunited with their creator whom they rejected. They come into spiritual union with their new Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And so this reunion promised to the disciples is a promise for all Christians. All of God's elect are being gathered up throughout the world into faith in Jesus. And when Jesus returns he will bring them all to him for a glorious final reunion. That will be an eternal reunion into our resurrection life and into heavenly bliss with our Lord.

So who has been doing this gathering here and now before the final gathering? The church, by the power of Christ, of course. And who were the first people to start bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth when Jesus ascended up into heaven? The disciples of course. The eleven disciples who had been reunited with Christ were then commissioned. Jesus commissioned them to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. And that's what they did. Jesus sent the disciples out to begin the gathering process, reuniting souls with their maker through the blood of Jesus Christ. And as they started that process, guess what? They suffered for Jesus.

They bore the same reproach as Jesus. Church history records that all of them suffered for the gospel, and that all but one tasted a martyr's death. Think about that for a moment. What did Peter boldly claim to be willing to do? What did all the disciples then follow suit and say? They all vowed to suffer with Jesus and even die for him. On that night before the cross, they'd fall short of that promise. But one day they would have opportunity to fulfill it. One day their words would come true. They each would have opportunity to suffer, and most, even die, for their Lord and Savior.

What was the difference? Why were they not able to keep that promise the very night they made it, but would be able to finally keep it months or even years later? What was the difference? The shepherd was struck. They faltered in their obedience that night because for the first time their shepherd was taken from them. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. This should remind us all that our obedience flows out of Christ's work in our life, and not out of ourselves. They couldn't keep their promises without Jesus in their life. But after they were reunited and restored, they would never be without the shepherd again. Yes, Jesus did ascend up into heaven. He left them physically. But it was at that time he sent them out to gather up his elect. And it was at that time that he told them he would always be with them. The shepherd would always be with them, even until the end of the age, until his return at the resurrection. Even while away, Jesus would be with them spiritually, because he sent his Holy Spirit to live inside them. The shepherd would lead them. The shepherd would uphold them, even under suffering, even under death. You see, ultimately it was not Jesus who needed us to be with him in his hour of need. It's us who need Jesus to be with us in our hour of need. Even in those hours when we suffer for his sake. Especially in those hours. And he is.

Saints of God, isn't the problem that we so often have in following Christ is that we don't know ourselves? We don't know ourselves and our depravity enough. You see Peter and the disciples thought they knew themselves. Just a short while before in our passage we saw them self-reflecting and examining themselves over the Passover dinner. They had been warned by Jesus that one of them would betray him, and so they each looked inward and asked, "Surely not I?" And then just this short while later we come to this moment where Jesus tells them that they will all abandon him and desert him. After just having self-reflecting on their relationship with Jesus, they all boldly declared, "No!" "We'll never leave you Jesus! We'll even die with you if necessary!" Oh how they thought they knew themselves. But even after inward reflection, they were wrong. They didn't know their own hearts. They didn't know their own depravity as well as they thought. And so like Peter, they all confidently trusted in themselves.

That can be us as well. Our pride can get in the way. Peter thought too highly of himself. He thought he, by his own strength, could stay faithful to Jesus. He thought his own strength would carry him through suffering and persecution. He tried to follow himself instead of Jesus. We have to be on guard against the same attitude. We live in a society that praises independence. It's a good thing to be able to do things on your own without help. But we can take that attitude into our Christian living. Part of us can be so willing to suffer for Christ's sake. But another part of us can want so badly to just run away, to forsake Christ, to just want to pretend to be a part of the world. If we are going to have strength to stand up and suffer for Christ, even to the point of martyrdom, it will only be because Christ is with us. And because Christ was struck for our sake.

And so let us follow the Good Shepherd. Because even though we may not know ourselves, *he knows us*. He truly knows us. And since he knows us better than ourselves, we can trust him as our leader. He's a leader we can trust to follow.

No mere human leader can warrant that trust. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who knows us better than ourselves, knows the perfect path for our life. It might include for a time suffering for his sake. It could even include martyrdom for his sake. But no matter what trials he leads us through in this life, we trust that he is not leading us astray. He restores our soul. He leads us in righteousness. And he is leading us home. To dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Amen.

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