

to be the almighty Saviour of sinners, even when realizing what sinners we can be and are, in and of ourselves. Regardless of that fact, He will do all to save us from sin, Satan, death, and hell, and He will rise again and show and prove Himself as the almighty triumphant Saviour of sinners indeed! Oh, how amazing the gospel in verse 32, especially following right after verse 31, and the gospel message in verse 32, seeing what follows in verses 33-46! Though His disciples would prove so untrue to Him, Jesus would prove Himself so faithful and true to them, and, indeed, to all who will seek and serve Him.

Is this not something all God's true people learn initially and repeatedly? If it were not for God and His grace and keeping from beginning to end, what hope could and would there be for you, and for me? This passage in Matthew, you can say, altogether serves to emphasize this point about our human weakness and failure, compared to the Saviour's divine strength and faithfulness. The gospel truth is though, as verse 56 states, "*all the disciples forsook [Jesus] and fled*" yet by God's grace all eleven were saved men and kept in the faith, and we know not one of them perished, but all triumphed in the way of salvation and lifelong Christian service in the church and for the church to the praise of God Triune. When raised from the dead, Christ Jesus also did meet with His disciples and wonderfully provided for them, ministering to them and equipping them with His Spirit and Word, showing to them the graciousness and grandness of His saving work for sinners!

Jesus' resolve to be there for His sheep, no matter what and how His sheep would falter and fail, is so encouraging. Great is God's faithfulness in and through Christ Jesus, and His resolve as Saviour and Shepherd of His sheep! Considering just Jesus' knowledge of His sheep and His resolve concerning His sheep, what reasons to be moved in repentance before Him, and melted in love for Him, and motivated in devotion to Him. Do you hear Christ calling you so to respond to Him, also with this gospel message? Amen.



BEHOLD THE SHEPHERD WITH HIS SHEEP [1]

Jesus' suffering in the place of sinners for the salvation of sinners is the special focus of the Christian Church often in these weeks before Good Friday. It certainly is good to focus on this time and again, and surely none of us reflect on it enough. In this message and the next, we are brought to the heart and center of Jesus as suffering Saviour as told in Matthew 26:31-46 where we learn of some of the events that took place the night before Jesus' crucifixion. The theme for these two messages is 'Behold the Shepherd with His sheep'.

Let me first read this Scripture to you and then, simply going through them, we will look at four gospel truths about Jesus as Shepherd of His sheep. "*Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*"

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)

From this Scripture notice with me, first of all, how Jesus certainly knows His sheep, and what we as people are like. Consider Jesus' knowledge of His sheep looking at several statements He makes in our text passage. Jesus and His eleven disciples had just left the upper room and were now on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. As they walk there, Jesus says, as we read in verse 31, "*All ye shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.*" What is this telling us? Jesus clearly knows before it actually happens even how all His disciples would forsake Him and fail Him. Jesus knew that very night yet how His disciples would stumble and fall. In the events of the evening they would be ensnared by fear and fatigue and, through Satan's wiles, not be faithful to Jesus their Master. The verb "offended" is literally the word from which we get in English the word, "scandal" and the meaning is, they would all fall away, and Jesus knew He would be suffering all alone. Even His closest human companions would not stick by Him. Can you imagine what this must have meant for Jesus? To know you are about to suffer in an inexpressible, immeasurable way, for as the Shepherd He would be despised and struck down, and to realize ahead of time that your best friends on earth won't be there for you then?

But to see more Jesus' knowledge of His disciples and how they would fail Him when in His sufferings, notice further what happens. We are told in verses 33ff how Peter reacts to what Jesus says. Peter assures Jesus, even if everyone else would end up leaving Him, "*yet will I never be offended.*" "I [in the original that "I" is emphatic] will never be made to stumble. You can count on me!" Peter proudly assures His Master. But we know Peter speaks in such vain self-confidence. Jesus forewarns him how even that very night, before the cock crows, Peter would deny Jesus three times. (Notice by the way here the details of Jesus' foreknowledge of the events that would take place.) Peter responds again to the words of Jesus in a most brash, you might say with "swelled head" manner, doesn't he? Ignoring, and even contradicting, Jesus' emphatic, "*Verily I say to you*", Peter boasts louder and more vehemently even that in no way would he deny His Master and, in fact, he was ready if necessary to die for His Master! We are told also that all the disciples echoed what Peter expressed. And the part we really need to realize is that they meant with all their heart what they said. They were earnestly resolved to be there with and for Jesus, their Master, no matter what! Jesus could count on them. It is striking that Jesus doesn't respond again to this....Jesus knew they would find out otherwise. Jesus knew as Son of God, and He knew from God's written Word in the Old Testament, quoting this time from Zechariah 13:7, when the Shepherd would be smitten and struck down, the sheep of the flock would be scattered. They would run away as cowards, afraid for their own lives.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, also, it already becomes evident, doesn't it, how unreliable the disciples were in themselves. We are told coming to the Garden, Jesus leaves eight disciples by the entrance and takes with Him His three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, to go with Him further into the Garden, and Jesus asks them, "*Tarry ye here and watch with Me.*" [v. 38] It is amazing really that also Peter is included in the three closest disciples when he had just so contradicted what Jesus, His Master, had said, and Jesus knew too how Peter further would fail Him so. But Jesus is most kind and tenderhearted and He also had His purposes in taking these three leading disciples with Him.

Yes, these disciples, especially also these leading three, needed to learn and realize there was nothing in themselves they could ever count on. And how did they learn it? What proved to be the case? These three who Jesus asked to watch and pray with Him, to stay awake and be caring with Him and for Him, couldn't do even just that. Each time Jesus came back to them from His own prayers and agonies, He found them sleeping! Look at verse 40 and try to catch the humbling point here. Jesus says to them, but addressing Peter especially, [notice the text bringing that out], "*What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*" The sense or meaning here is, as it were, "So, [Peter], were you men not able to stay awake with Me even for a single hour?" Their spirit was willing, Jesus knew, but their flesh was weak, meaning here man by nature...frail, sinful weak mankind, what are we in ourselves....is this not the point that is being made so clear in this passage?

Jesus' knowledge of His sheep, how He knows what we are like in and of ourselves - is it something that attracts and draws you also to the Saviour all the more? That Jesus was so willing to give Himself for those who in themselves are weak and wayward, sinful, stumbling sinners, prone to wander, prone to fall, that Jesus would give His all and all for suchlike? Is that not overwhelming love and grace, and shouldn't it melt our hearts time and again in humble repentance and adoration before Him?

To see and realize this more even, notice also this next gospel truth we may see and learn. What is Jesus' resolve as Shepherd and Saviour? It is to save and keep His sheep, regardless of how they would falter and fail and be scattered from Him! How does that come out in this Scripture passage? What does Jesus say most beautifully in verse 32? "*But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.*" What does this statement tell us? Do you see here Jesus' gracious and certain resolve to be there for His people, regardless of what it all would mean for Him, and even when they themselves should fail Him so? Do you see here Jesus' trust in God's Word and promise that through His saving work for sinners, He would save His people from their sins, and call and gather and protect His people against all odds? Jesus shows His determination