

“I WOULD NEVER DO THAT!”
MATTHEW 26:30-35

When Jeremiah declared, *“The heart is deceitful above all else and desperately wicked... (17:9 KJV)*, he wasn’t exaggerating. If anything, he may have *understated* the deplorable condition of the human heart. And if you want to know what Jeremiah meant, read Paul’s personal testimony in Romans 7. Describing his own heart before Jesus got a hold of him, he said, *¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...¹⁸ I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing (Rom. 7:15; 18-19).*

Paul is describing, here, a form of slavery—slavery to sin. Not necessarily the kind of sin that makes him do blatantly perverse or despicable things. For Paul, and probably for most of us, it is sin that can be camouflaged or dressed up to look like something good or noble. Self-righteousness, self-confidence, pride, ulterior motives. Subtle things that are sometimes hard to recognize in ourselves.

You should know that before Paul met Christ, he was oblivious to the fact that his heart was deceitful above all else and desperately wicked, even though he probably quoted the verse in Jeremiah many times. Prior to encountering Jesus, Paul thought God was impressed by his “goodness”. He thought his righteousness qualified him as a spiritual VIP. He thought he belonged to an exclusive club of moral high achievers. It is only after he encountered Christ that he saw himself for who and what he really was—spiritually and morally bankrupt—which compelled him to cry out to Jesus to save him.

Which is precisely the reason Jesus came into this world. In the first chapter of Matthew, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and told him the astonishing news that Mary, his fiancée, was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, he told him to call his name Jesus, a name which means “God is salvation,” because he would save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). As marvelous as the miracles Jesus performed were, as profound as His teaching was, as instructive as His encounters with people were, we cannot fully understand or appreciate Jesus’ life and ministry without knowing that His *primary* purpose in coming to earth was to save us from our sins.

The disciples, who spent three years with Jesus, who heard all of His sermons and saw all of His miracles and who were convinced that He was Messiah, Son of the living God, were just about to comprehend this for the very first time. Not that Jesus hadn’t tried to tell them. But they hadn’t yet grasped the significance of it. That’s because, in spite of spending so much time with Jesus, they still perceived themselves much the same way Paul perceived himself before he encountered Jesus on the Damascus Road.

Yet something happened just a few hours before Jesus died that helped them understand why Jesus came into this world to save His people from their sins, and that they needed to be saved just as much as anyone. Jesus and His disciples had just celebrated the Passover Supper, during which Jesus infused new meaning into the bread and wine. He called the bread His body, and the wine His blood, symbolizing His death on their behalf for the forgiveness of sins. After supper, when they had sung a hymn, they went to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus made an alarming statement. **Verse 31.** *³¹ ...Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’*

Earlier, Jesus had predicted that one of them would betray Him, and of course we know that it was Judas. During supper, Judas had left the meal and was, at this very moment, conspiring with the Jewish leaders to have Jesus arrested. But here He says that *all* of them would “fall away” because of Him that very night. The word translated “you will fall away” is literally, “You will be scandalized.” It has the idea of doing something disgraceful or something shameful. Jesus explains more precisely what it is as He quotes Zechariah. *For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered (13:7).*

Jesus is the shepherd in Zechariah’s prophecy and His disciples are the sheep. Zechariah was predicting a day when Jesus would be accosted, causing the disciples to scatter. That’s what Jesus meant by, “You will all be scandalized.” Later that night, as Jesus was being apprehended, all of His disciples would abandon Him, leaving Him to face humiliation, brutality, flogging, and death alone. It would be something for which all of them would inevitably feel shame.

Why would Jesus tell them this? Was He trying to shame them? Was He letting them know just how shallow their love and commitment for Him was, even after all they had seen Him do and all they had been through together? No. Look at **verse 32**. *³² But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”*

I would submit to you that contained within this short statement is the gospel, which means good news, and that is what Jesus was emphasizing. Yes, He had just given His disciples some bad news—they would all abandon Him that very night. However, that is not the end of the story or the end of their relationship. Even though they would abandon Him, Jesus would not abandon them. He would do what He came to do—save them from their sins—and then He would be raised from the dead and afterward be reunited with them in Galilee.

Do you understand what this means? Jesus looks beyond their impending cowardice and faithlessness. His relationship with them is not going to be defined by their imminent failure. Jesus would remain faithful to them. He would continue to believe in them. You know why? Because Jesus did not see His disciples on this night for what they were, but for what they would become. In the same way that He knew they would abandon Him that night, He also knew that they would go on to steadfastly and faithfully serve Him and speak for Him and do great things for Him and be persecuted for Him, and that eventually all of them would be martyred because of Him. But He knew that for them to become those faithful and devoted men He would first have to die for their sins and be raised from the dead.

Indeed, Jesus was determined to save them from their sins, even if He had to die alone, for He knew that they could never become the kind of men God wanted them to be, or even the kind of men they themselves wanted to be, unless He died for them and rose from the dead. He also knew that they would eventually become the reward of His suffering—that, in the words of Isaiah, Jesus would consider the anguish of His soul on the cross, look at them, and be satisfied.

That is what I mean by verse 32 containing the gospel. But Peter did not hear the gospel in Jesus’ words—the good news; he only heard the bad news. **Verse 33**, *³³ Peter answered Him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”* Or, literally, “I will never be scandalized.”

Jesus’ prediction that they would all fall away was a blow to Peter’s ego, and he immediately gets defensive. “Lord, how could you say such a thing! I know you! I’m the one who gave the correct answer when you asked all of us, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ Remember, it was me who said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!’ I was with

you on the Mount of Transfiguration and saw your awesome glory! And you *know* me! I'm the only one of us who had the courage to get out of the boat and walk on water! I can maybe see the other ten going AWOL, but not me."

I assure you that Peter was never more sincere in his life when he told Jesus that even if everyone else abandoned Him, he would never do such a thing. And I assure you that he actually thought he could prove Jesus wrong, even though he knew that Jesus, up until now, had always been right. That's because Peter had not yet come to the realization that his heart was deceitful above all else and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). Peter could not yet say of himself, as Paul did, ¹⁵ *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... (Rom. 7:15).*

Jesus knew that. He also knew that Peter's imminent failure would be a catalyst to help him understand just how desperately wicked his heart was, and just how much he himself needed the salvation that Jesus' death provided. And so, He doesn't argue with Peter; He doesn't tell him how self-deluded he is. He simply says, **verse 34**, ³⁴ *"Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."*

Peter had just claimed that he would be the last man standing. Jesus tells him that, in reality, he would fall further than any of the rest of them. Not only would he abandon Him like the other ten, but he would deny ever knowing him, not once, but three times before morning. Peter, on that night, would prove to be more cowardly than all of them.

Which, for Peter, was preposterous. **Verse 35**. ³⁵ *Peter said to Him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.*

The Greek is emphatic, and could be translated, *"I most certainly will never deny you!"* Peter did not know the depths of which he was capable and saw it as inconceivable that he should ever deny Jesus. He argued that he would follow Him even to his death if necessary. And the others swore their allegiance as well. Of course, we all know what happened. In just a few hours, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, they ran. They left Jesus alone.

I have titled this message, "I Would Never Do That!" I didn't come up with that title to be facetious, or to ridicule Peter and the disciples for their cowardice and disloyalty to Jesus. The fact is, we are no different from the disciples. They represent all of us, because we are all part of the same family tree that started with Adam and Eve. By nature, our hearts are deceitful above all else and desperately wicked. We are slaves to sin. We cannot help but sin. It doesn't matter how sincere or well-intentioned we are. It doesn't matter how determined or strong-willed we are. It doesn't matter how repulsed we are by the sin in others. We still do it. It's in our nature.

Mindy and I befriended a girl who came from as troubled a home as I have ever seen. She had never met her father because he wasn't interested in her. Her mother had come from an abusive family with a dad who was an alcoholic, and her trauma made it difficult for her to hold down a steady job, so she became a stripper to pay the bills. To cope with her shame, she escaped into a world of prescription drugs and smooth-talking men who would use her, then leave her high and dry.

Her daughter, even at the age of 8 or 9, saw all of this and vowed, "I will never do that! I will never let men treat me that way! I will never bring alcohol or drugs into my home! I will never expose my kids to the things I've been exposed to or raise my kids the way my mom has raised me!" And Mindy and I believed her. She was gifted, determined, intuitive, and intelligent. If anybody could do it, she could.

But by the age of 15 she went on a downhill spiral and descended into a darkness that was even more dangerous and destructive than her mom's.

The reason I tell you this is not to condemn her or belittle her, but to illustrate that sincerity and good intentions and determination and resolve are not enough to save someone from themselves. We need a Savior. Don't ever be deceived into believing the notion that God helps those who help themselves. The fact is, God helps those who cannot help themselves and who know that they can't. That's why Jesus came into this world—to save His people from their sins.

Jesus is not the least bit surprised by your miserable failures, your broken promises, your moral ineptitude, or your scandalous behavior any more than He was surprised that his best friends would abandon Him at the time He needed them most. He had not yet died for their sin, and they had not yet been transformed by His death on their behalf, which, by the way, would release them from sin's power and dominion so that they would no longer have to be slaves to sin.

Don't forget, even though this passage seems depressing because Jesus predicted his disciples' failure, He was emphasizing the good news, **verse 32**, ³²...*After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.* Jesus wasn't condemning or rejecting His friends because they were about to abandon Him. He was assuring them that He was going to win a huge victory on their behalf, and that after His death and resurrection they would be reunited.

That is the gospel. "I am not going to abandon you even though you will abandon me. I am determined to go to that cross and die for you, even if I have to go by myself, so that you (and all of my followers) can be saved from your sins and have eternal life.

As we close our time this morning, I would like to do a little theological reflection regarding Jesus' attitudes and behavior, particularly as His own death is imminent. I'd like to note is that because of Jesus' unique nature—the fact that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, was fully God, and that He was born of a woman and, therefore, was fully man—He was capable of perfectly obeying His Father's will even unto death. He was sinless. That's why He was able to express His love for His disciples by washing their feet earlier that evening, even though He knew that night that one would betray Him, one would deny Him three times, and all would abandon Him. That's why He didn't shame or condemn or reject His disciples that night but looked ahead to their reunion in Galilee. That's why He would continue His journey to the cross, even though He had to go alone.

Jesus was able to do these things because He did not come from the seed of man, but the seed of God. He did not have a sin nature. Therefore, He is the only one of whom it *cannot* be said, *"The heart is deceitful above all else and desperately wicked"* (Jer. 17:9). There was not an ounce of deceit in His heart. Yes, according to the writer of Hebrews, He was tempted in every way that we are but did not succumb to any of those temptations. I'm not suggesting that was easy for Him; I'm simply saying that He was capable of obeying God perfectly because His heart was not corrupted or controlled by sin. Therefore, unlike what Paul wrote of himself in Romans 7, Jesus could say, "For I do understand my own actions. For I do what I want, the very thing I love. I have the desire to do what is right, and the ability to carry it out."

The disciples were bound and determined to stay with Jesus, but they couldn't. Jesus was bound and determined to go to the cross and die for their sins, and He could. He did.

And He died for your sins and my sins as well. He did it knowing full well that our hearts are deceitful above all else and desperately wicked. "But God demonstrated His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He was the only one who could do it. We owed a debt because of our sin that we could never pay, because we are incapable of making ourselves good. So, God became a man so He could pay the debt

for us. Jesus, the sinless God-Man, our Savior and our King.

“I Would Never Do That!”

Matthew 26:30-35

Main Idea: When Jesus predicts that His disciples will abandon Him later that night, they vehemently protest, asserting that they would even die for Him.

Jesus informs His disciples about some impending events (31-32)

All of them will abandon Him that night (31)

What this reveals about Jesus

His foreknowledge

His love and grace

His determination

What this reveals about the disciples

What this reveals about Scripture

They will be reunited in Galilee after the resurrection (32)

Peter is appalled by Jesus' prediction (33)

He defends his honor and integrity

He asserts that his commitment is stronger than the rest

He ignores the real significance of Jesus' proclamation

Jesus will rise from the dead!

They will be reunited!

Jesus will not abandon them for deserting him

Jesus asserts that Peter will deny Him three times that very night (34)

Peter argues that he would die for Jesus before he would deny Him (35a)

The disciples make the same claim (35b)

Application: What this reveals about Jesus

1. He is the sinless Son of God who is able to keep His promise to die for us and save us from our sin

2. He was willing to die for us and His Father was willing to crush Him because He loves us so much