Mark Lesson 49 (2023)

**JESUS’ ARREST AND THE FRAILTY OF HIS DISCIPLES**

Mark 14:43-72

Key Verse: 14:72

*“Immediately, the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will disown me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.”*

Good morning. I want to start today with a story about a moment in life when everything seems to be falling apart, when fear and doubt creep in, and when we question the strength of our faith. It’s a story that takes us to a dark and challenging night that would test the loyalty of Jesus’ disciples and reveal the incredible depth of Jesus’ love for each of us. This passage is a powerful reminder of the complexity of our faith, loyalty, betrayal, and human frailty in challenging circumstances. This morning, let us explore this passage together and draw some valuable spiritual lessons for our faith journey.

In our previous study in 14:32-42, we explored how Jesus demonstrated his readiness to face the impending suffering and crucifixion through his intense prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Today’s passage begins with the shocking betrayal by one of Jesus’ disciples, Judas Iscariot.

Look at verse 43. “Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.” This verse introduces us to the pivotal moment when Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, arrives, accompanied by a group of armed individuals dispatched by religious authorities intending to arrest Jesus.

Look at verses 44-46. “Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.’ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Rabbi!’ and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him.” Judas Iscariot played his part by coming to Jesus in a friendly manner, addressing him as “Rabbi,” and giving him a kiss. However, this kiss was not ordinary; it was deceitful, symbolizing the betrayal of trust and friendship. Judas’ betrayal reminds us of a Korean saying, *“믿는도끼에 발등 찍힌다 (Be chopped in a foot by a trusted ax.”* (Pic#1A) *Have you ever been deceived by your trusted friends?* Immediately after the deceitful kiss of Judas, the men seized Jesus and took him into custody.

How did the disciples respond? Verse 50 states that everyone deserted Jesus and fled. But verse 47 illustrates one of them tried to defend Jesus. Look at verse 47. “Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.” According to John’s account, it was Simon Peter who took action to defend Jesus by drawing a sword. How did he do? Not so good. While his act appeared courageous at first glance, it ultimately revealed his underlying fear. But what more can we expect from him? We know that Simon Peter was not a knifeman like the Japanese Samurai (Pic#1) but a fisherman from Galilee.

Peter could not execute a decisive strike and unintentionally harmed the man by cutting off his ear. Peter’s intentions were good, driven by the desire to protect Jesus. But his impulsive reaction made the situation worse. According to what we learn from Luke’s account (22:50), Jesus didn’t appreciate Peter’s impulsive behavior. He reprimanded Peter by saying, “No more of this!” And Jesus had to heal the man’s ear miraculously. This episode reminds us that our hurried and impulsive decisions can cause more trouble. Therefore, we should first recognize and manage our fears before acting impulsively. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of managing our emotions and thoughts. Proverbs 4:23-25 states, “Above all else, guard your hearts, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from it. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.”

In verses 48-49, Jesus told those who had come to arrest him that their arrest would only fulfill God’s plan. “‘Am I leading a rebellion,’ said Jesus, ‘that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day, I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.’”

Look at verses 50-52. “Then everyone deserted him and fled. A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving garment behind.” One can imagine that as Jesus was arrested, a profound fear enveloped those present. Even though they had previously pledged to stand faithful to Jesus (31), all eleven disciples succumbed to fear and ran away. It’s disheartening to see how they abandoned their teacher, prioritizing their own safety. Additionally, the identity of the young man who fled without his clothing remains a puzzle. “*Who do you think it was?* There is speculation among Bible scholars that his individual might have been the author, Mark, himself.

In the following verses, verses 53-65, the author provides a detailed portrayal of Jesus’ interaction with Jewish religious leaders in the courtyard. Look at verses 53-56. “They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There, he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they didn’t find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.” The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin members were eager to find evidence against Jesus for his execution. Yet, their efforts yielded no consistent proof. Although many presented false testimonies against Jesus, their accounts were inconsistent, as shown in verses 57-59.

Subsequently, in verses 60-61, the high priest pressured Jesus to respond to the unproven accusations. Despite the relentless pressure, Jesus maintained his silence, thus fulfilling the prophecy found in Isaiah 53:7, which states, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.” However, his decision to remain silent went beyond fulfilling a prophecy. Jesus knew that the trial was unjust, and the allegations were baseless. Therefore, his silence served as a testament to his innocence. Many people engage in heated arguments to vindicate themselves when falsely accused. It’s exceedingly challenging to stay calm and composed. But Jesus possessed the wisdom and ability to control his emotions, anger, and frustration. It reflected his divine character and habit.

Nevertheless, Jesus broke his silence when the high priest questioned whether he was the Messiah. Read verses 61b-62. “Again, the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” The question the high priest asked Jesus was a dangerous one because anyone claiming to be the Messiah could be charged with blasphemy, a crime deserving of capital punishment. Even though Jesus was acutely aware of this fact, he did not avoid the question with ambiguity by saying, *“I don’t know”* or *“Maybe.”* Instead, he responded with clarity, **“I am.”**

Despite the danger that his declaration as the Messiah would make him the target of hatred, rejection, and death, Jesus did not hesitate to affirm his identity. By declaring **“I am,”** he boldly disclosed his divine nature as the Son of God and the Messiah. Remarkably, however, it was the first time in Mark’s Gospel account that Jesus openly proclaimed himself the Messiah. He didn’t keep the messianic secret any longer. He even went one step further by offering a prophetic glimpse into his future return after his death, resurrection, and ascension, declaring, “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Now, how did the Jewish leaders react to Jesus’ declaration? Look at verses 63-65. “The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard blasphemy. What do you think?’ They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophesy!” and the guards took and beat him.” The high priest reacted with deep distress, tearing his garments, and accusing him of blasphemous. Other religious leaders unanimously condemned Jesus as deserving of death. Their treatment of Jesus became increasingly hostile and brutal. Some people spat on him, while others blindfolded him, struck him with fists, and ridiculed him.

The agony Jesus endured is indescribable. He was in complete isolation, enduring countless beatings, and cruel mockery. Even his closest disciples had abandoned him, leaving him utterly alone. It’s nearly impossible for us to fathom the thoughts and feelings that raced through his mind and heart during those traumatic moments.

Because he had openly declared himself as the Son of God, the Messiah, can we say he felt no fear, anger, regret, or desire for revenge? I don’t believe that’s the case. If it were, it would imply that he was not truly human. However, what is certain is that, despite the overwhelming darkness surrounding him, Jesus never succumbed to the temptation to complain, cast blame, or utter curses. He endured excruciating torment of suffering, pain, and shame by absorbing all the bitterness of that darkness. It was like drinking a cup of poison.

*So, why did he choose to endure such unimaginable torture and pain?* The answer lies in his profound love for us. So, how deep is his love? Is it this much, as depicted in Picture #2? (Pic#2) Absolutely not. It goes far beyond that. His love knows no bounds. Out of his boundless love for fallen humanity, he took all our iniquities, shame, and pain, offering his life as a ransom. Jesus said to his disciples, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn 15:13) (Pic#3). Romans 5:7-8 affirms this love: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” *Why did Jesus endure suffering and sacrifice his life for us?* It’s to grant us God’s mercy and the gift of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the focal point. Countless individuals continue to experience sorrow because they withhold forgiveness from others.

In verses 66-72, the focus shifts back to Peter, who was in the courtyard. There, he encountered a servant girl of the high priest. Look at verses 67-68. “When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. ‘You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,’ she said. But he denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said and went out into the entryway.” In a moment of fear, Peter denied any connection to Jesus and hastily left the courtyard. Nevertheless, the servant girl persistently followed him and insisted he was indeed a follower of Jesus. Peter denied it again, even invoking curses to emphasize his denial, as seen in verses 69-71.

Let’s read verse 72. “Immediately, the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will disown me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.” The most emotional moment came when the rooster crowed, just as Jesus had predicted. Realizing his denial, Peter was profoundly saddened and wept. According to Luke’s account, as the rooster crowed, the Lord looked straight at Peter when the rooster crowed (22:61). Peter most likely couldn’t dare look at Jesus directly, acknowledging his failure to remain faithful.

But why do you think Jesus looked directly at Peter? Was it out of contempt for Peter’s grievous mistakes? No. It expressed his unwavering love for Peter despite his human frailty and weaknesses. Jesus’ love for Peter didn’t diminish. Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial reminded him of the reliability of God’s promises and his unwavering faithfulness.

Peter’s faith journey didn’t end with his denial and failures. Instead, he grew in faith and became a shepherd for God’s flock in the early Christian church. (1 Pe. 5:2-4) Likewise, when we acknowledge our own vulnerabilities and weaknesses, we’re more inclined to lean on God’s power and grace to carry us through challenging times. This aligns with the wisdom shared by the Apostle Paul, who stated, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

In conclusion, today’s passage offers encouragement to those who may be feeling weak. Even the strongest individuals, like Peter, can experience self-doubt and denial. It highlights the transformative power of forgiveness, the strength of relying on Christ, and the potential for personal growth and resilience in our spiritual journey. Like Simon Peter, all of us can encounter moments of failures and weaknesses. Even in our most significant failures and vulnerability, however, we must trust that God’s love remains steadfast and his divine plan will ultimately prevail. We must also know that our weaknesses and failures do not define us; rather, they can guide us toward a deeper and more reliant relationship with him.

May we remember that our faith may be tested occasionally but can also be strengthened through Christ. So, let us draw close to him, relying on his grace to sustain us in our moments of weakness. May we never forget the power of faith and the boundless love and forgiveness of our Savior, Jesus Christ.