

Hopelessly Flawed People

Matthew 26

Since today is Palm Sunday (and next Sunday is Easter), we are going to survey Matthew 26, a chapter which describes the events leading up to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. The thing that stands out in this chapter is the complete failure of the disciples. This chapter describes men who had spent three years following Jesus, listening to His teachings, and seeing the power and authority of His life. And yet at every turn their spiritual instincts were wrong. They were hopelessly flawed in almost every way. They exhibited spiritual ignorance, spiritual opposition, spiritual pride, spiritual sloth, and misguided spiritual zeal.

This chapter has great value for us in terms of what it reveals about the human condition. It exposes what is true of every one of us. The disciples really illustrate how *apart from the grace of God* our spiritual instincts are exactly wrong. I have to warn you that this chapter doesn't give a very flattering depiction of the human heart; it's actually rather devastating. But stick with me as we go through this chapter because we are going to see that Jesus understood these things perfectly. Ultimately we'll see that our condition was actually the reason Jesus went to the cross.

Spiritual Ignorance: the disciples' response to the woman's extravagance (26:6-13)

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.

Matthew records that this alabaster vial of perfume was "very costly." The parallel passage in Mark (14:3-9) gives the added detail that it could have been sold for 300 denarii – the amount that a common laborer would have made in a year. A conservative estimate in our day it might be 20 thousand dollars! The woman poured the perfume on Jesus' head as an extravagant gesture of honor. But notice the disciples' response:

8 But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? 9 "For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor."

It's hard to argue with their logic. With all the needs of the poor, this woman's extravagance seemed plain wrong. Think of all the good you could do with \$20,000. You could buy a lot of food and pay a lot of utility bills for people with that much money. To the disciples, the woman's actions were "a waste" and so they were "indignant" (angry). Most of the disciples were legitimately concerned about the poor, but we learn from John 12 that Judas was the one who voiced this concern on behalf of the disciples. John's comment there was that he really wasn't concerned about the poor but that he was a thief. Since he carried the money box he saw selling the perfume as another opportunity for personal gain.

How is Jesus going to reply to the disciples? Presumably the woman is still present.

10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. 11 "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.

Sometimes people use this verse to justify not helping the poor: "Didn't Jesus say that there will always be poor people?" Yes He said that; but Jesus was making the opposite point. He was pointing out that the disciples would never lack the opportunity to help the poor. But their window of opportunity for ministering to Him was rapidly closing; they would *not* always have Him. Notice His further explanation about the woman's extravagance.

12 "For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. 13 "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

This was one of those statements that didn't make sense to the disciples until after His death and resurrection. But the fact of the matter was that the woman had prepared Him for burial. Given who He was and the imminence of His death and burial, the woman's extravagance was fully justified. Only once in all of history would the Son of God be prepared for burial. [Preparing His body for burial seems inappropriate while He is still alive until you realize that the bodies of crucified criminals weren't given the dignity of being prepared for burial after they had died.] In that context, \$20,000 doesn't seem so extravagant. That's what people today spend on cars and weddings.

What do we learn about the disciples? Their spiritual instincts were exactly wrong. Their logic was sound, but they were exactly wrong. They wanted to be cheap when they should have been extravagant. They were ignorant about the unique historical and spiritual significance of the moment.

And this is so often true of us as well. I can't tell you how many times I've been humbled when I've realized that I've gotten it exactly wrong. I find myself in a situation where I'm sure that we know what is good and right. I've got airtight logic proves my point. And yet so often I'm spiritually ignorant of the significance of the moment. And then the words of Jesus and the authors of Scripture come back to mind and I remember that in the kingdom of God things are often reversed; my logic doesn't reign in the kingdom:

- The greatest among you should be the servant of all.
- You save your life by losing it.
- The mature have the faith of a little child.
- Without love all knowledge, gifts, and sacrifice are worth nothing.

Have you noticed that in yourself? Like the disciples, so often we're cheap when we should be extravagant – especially when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit (love, patience, self-control, kindness, etc.).

Spiritual Opposition: Judas' betrayal (26:14-16, 20-25, 47-50) We won't spend a lot of time considering Judas, but it is worth pondering that he had every spiritual advantage and yet he ultimately collaborated with Jesus' enemies to have Him arrested and killed. He betrayed Jesus with his eyes wide open. The more Jesus talked about His death and burial,

the less Judas wanted to associate with Him. After spending three years as one of Jesus' closest apprentices, we read this in verses 14-16:

14 Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. 16 From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

That opportunity would come the next evening when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas would walk directly up to Jesus and kiss Him on the cheek to designate that He was the one to arrest. Thirty pieces of silver was a modest amount to pay for Judas' betrayal. In the old covenant, if your ox accidentally killed someone else's slave, you were required to pay 30 pieces of silver in compensation (Exodus 21:32 – cited in Carson). And so Jesus' life was basically deemed to be worth that of a common slave.

Judas is a tragic figure in the life of Jesus. He eventually felt such remorse when he saw that Jesus was condemned to death that he committed suicide; he went out and hanged himself (27:5). Even though Judas didn't receive the forgiveness and transformation that Jesus would offer through His death and resurrection, ***Jesus still died for people like Judas.*** Jesus died for people who hate Him and oppose everything He stands for. The premier example of this is Saul/Paul. He described his own condition this way in 1 Timothy 1:

13 . . . I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; 14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. 15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Most people here today have never been blasphemers, persecutors, or violent aggressors. But perhaps some of you have stood or are standing in spiritual opposition to Jesus. Maybe you have taken great satisfaction in mocking Jesus and mocking Christians. Perhaps you have thought and said and done things that shouted out, "Jesus is a fraud." You need to know this morning that Jesus died for you. Jesus died for people like Judas and Paul. Jesus died for your sins too.

We'll return to the account of the "last supper" in verses 17-29 in a few minutes. But let's first look at verses 30 through 35 as an example of "spiritual pride."

Spiritual Pride: the disciples' professed loyalty (26:30-35) Jesus tells the disciples ahead of time that they would fail to stay by His side during His darkest hour. Jesus' wasn't being mean or harsh in telling them this; to the contrary, He was setting them up for recovery after the resurrection.

30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.' 32 "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Jesus uses the OT imagery of the shepherd being killed and the sheep scattering. That, Jesus said, is an apt description of what would happen when He was crucified: they would all fall away from him. But eventually they would meet together again in Galilee. Peter simply couldn't hear what Jesus was saying here. Peter felt it necessary to straighten Jesus out about his loyalty and commitment.

33 But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."

Right in front of the other ten disciples Peter puts forth the scenario that all the others "fall away" (abandon Jesus). In that scenario, Peter says, "I will never fall away." Peter told Jesus flat out, "You are wrong. I am stronger than that. I will never fall away."

34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

We think of "the rooster crowing at the break of dawn." In Palestine in Jesus' day, roosters apparently crowed in the middle of the night (at 12:30 a.m., 1:30 a.m., and 3:30 a.m.). Jesus is saying that in a few short hours Peter would deny Him three times. Peter just couldn't not protest one more time:

35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

Jesus had taught that "the mouth speaks that which fills the heart" (Luke 6:45); our words really are a reflection of what is happening in our hearts. Peter voiced a type of spiritual pride that filled the hearts of each of the remaining disciples. They all believed that they would be loyal to Jesus to the death. They thought they were stronger than they actually were. But Jesus, of course, was right. Down in verse 56 after Jesus' arrest we'll read, "Then all the disciples left Him and fled." And Peter did deny Jesus three times.

Perhaps our spiritual pride isn't quite as overt as Peter's, but it's there nonetheless. We don't typically go around making pronouncements about how loyal and righteous we are; we're much more subtle than that. But we very easily look down on others for their sinful attitudes and actions. We're shocked at the depravity we see in others, and we feel fully justified in talking about it. In effect we're saying, "I am so much more spiritually mature than you." That's just a variation of Peter's spiritual pride. That's why Jesus said that before we pass judgment on others, we should first take the log out of our own eye, then we'll see clearly to take the speck out of our brother's eye.

Spiritual Sloth: Peter, James, and John in the Garden (26:36-46)

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

In verse 38 we read Jesus' very simple, direct command to Peter, James, and John:

38 Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

During this hour of deepest distress Jesus wanted His closest disciples to remain spiritually and mentally alert. He would be alone on the cross, but He didn't want to be alone during that hour in the Garden.

39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

We can't fathom the anguish Jesus experienced as He anticipated going to the cross to bear the accumulated sin of the world. As the sinless Son of God, Jesus had been in perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit from eternity past. And now He faced the reality in real time of the Father forsaking Him and the reality of bearing the sin of the world. And so Jesus inquired of the Father about the possibility of avoiding the cross. He asked for an alternative to drinking the cup of suffering on the cross. And yet His highest priority was doing the will of God. And so He prayed, "yet not as I will, but as You will." Jesus ultimately wanted to do the will of God if it meant going to the cross.

What about the disciples during Jesus' anguished prayer?

40 And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? 41 "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The disciples' themselves would soon face temptations – the very temptations Jesus had predicted. They were spiritually willing ("Even if I have to die, I will not deny You."), but their flesh was weak.

After Jesus' exhortation, were the disciples spiritually alert and prayerful? No, twice more Jesus goes a short distance away to pray alone and comes back and finds them sleeping. In Jesus' hour of deepest distress, they were spiritually slothful. Their flesh was weak. They didn't have the spiritual stamina to watch and pray.

How often are we spiritually slothful? We want to do the right thing. We have the best of intentions. But so often we fail to be spiritually vigilant in the lives of the people we care about – praying for them and caring for them.

Misguided Spiritual Zeal: Peter's swordsmanship (26:51-54)

There's one more incident that illustrates how Peter's (John 18:10) spiritual instincts were completely wrong. After Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, we read this in verse 51:

51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

Peter had told Jesus that he wouldn't deny Him! This was his chance to prove it. The only problem was that Peter got it exactly wrong.

52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. 53 "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

Peter's zeal is misguided. The kingdom of God was not going to be established by the sword; it was going to be established by Jesus being arrested, dying on the cross, and then being raised again.

Again, I can't help but think how we too tend to get zealous about the wrong things. This is the case both inside and outside of the church. Like Peter we're so zealous for what we believe to be right that we're apt to lop off somebody else's ear. At that point, whether we're right or wrong isn't the issue; the issue is misguided zeal. How much better to channel that zeal into compassion, prayer, servanthood, and speaking the truth in love - things that God says can transform the lives of others! Misguided spiritual zeal.

Matthew 26 gives a rather devastating depiction of the human heart. Apart from the grace of God, the human heart is characterized by spiritual ignorance, spiritual opposition, spiritual pride, spiritual sloth, and misguided spiritual zeal. In light of this reality, we need to ask the question, "Is there any hope for people who are so hopelessly flawed?" Was there hope for the original disciples? Is there hope for us? I love the fact that in the very center of Matthew 26 (in verses 26-29) that question is answered in the account of the "last supper."

The Only Hope for Hopelessly Flawed People: the body and blood of Jesus (26:26-30).
While celebrating the Passover meal, Jesus deviates from standard protocol by relating the bread and the cup to His body and blood.

26 And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

The Passover meal celebrated God's deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The Lord's Supper celebrates how Jesus' body and blood have delivered us from slavery to sin. Situated where it is in the middle of Matthew 26 Jesus is saying that he would give His body and blood to pay for the sins of people whose spiritual instincts are exactly wrong. Jesus would die for people who are spiritually ignorant, who are full of spiritual pride, who are spiritually slothful, whose spiritual zeal is very misguided. Jesus would even die for people like Judas who actively oppose the purposes of God.

This is incredibly good news for every single one of us today. Perhaps you've always thought that your sin disqualified you from being accepted by God. Or perhaps as we've looked at Matthew 26 you have recognized yourself in the disciples. You have recognized that you are hopelessly flawed. Understand that Jesus' body and blood was given for you. He died on the cross to pay for the sins of people just like you. Jesus understood the heart of His disciples, and Jesus understands your heart as well. You will never find anybody

who understands your condition like Jesus. You will never find anybody who can address your condition like Jesus. In a minute I am going to pray a prayer that expresses the desire to receive Jesus' love and forgiveness. If you want your sins forgiven and if you want to become a follower of Christ and begin learning the type of life that He described in Matthew 26, you can pray along with me.

Perhaps you are already a follower of Christ. And yet you see yourself in the disciples. You see spiritual pride or spiritual sloth or misguided spiritual zeal. The solution for you remains the body and blood of Christ. Through his death and resurrection, you and I can receive the grace we need to live differently. As we abide in Christ, He will teach us to be spiritually discerning, to be humble, to be faithful, to be spiritually vigilant, to be zealous for the right things. Because of the body and blood of Christ, this type of life is possible!

Please pray with me and then we'll celebrate the Lord's Table together.