

# Sermons on Matthew

## All of you Stumble

*Matthew 26:30-35*

*With Study Questions*

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## All of you Stumble

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And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

*‘I will strike the Shepherd,  
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’*

<sup>32</sup> But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

<sup>33</sup> Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

<sup>35</sup> Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”

And so said all the disciples (Matthew 26:30-35).

## Introduction

On either side of Matthew’s account of the Lord’s Supper are the bookends of human dereliction, negligence and delinquency—the fumbling breakdown of Christ’s followers. Prior to instituting the first communion Jesus predicted the betrayal of Judas. Here Matthew records Jesus’ prediction of the stumbling of the remaining apostles. It’s hard to miss the conspicuous collapse of those surrounding Jesus as He approached the cross—this avalanche of human failure!

Years ago I met a new convert to the Christian faith who was convinced by his mentors that he would never sin again. I must say I admired his resolve. But even as a young Christian I remember thinking what an unrealistic expectation this was. If his view of genuine regeneration (born again-ness) included the complete removal of any future sin, how would he handle it when confronted with his inevitable lapse in morality?

My competitive background made it difficult for me to assure him of some future failure—it didn’t seem very inspirational. What general or coach or pastor, for that matter, predicts the failure of his troops on the field of battle? Jesus’ seems much more encouraging in John, stating:

**\_These things I have spoken to you, that you \_\_should not be made to stumble. -2- \_\_They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming \_\_that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service (John 16:1, 2).**

Yet in this passage, Jesus assures His apostles that stumbling is part of their near future. Why? What value is there in knowing you'll fail? We'll seek to answer that question before we're through.

**And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30).**

## **A Hymn**

After Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, the apostles sing a hymn. A hymn is a song of praise and adoration to God (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Acts 16:25; Heb. 2:12). We sing hymns to celebrate who God is and commemorate what God has done.

**Be exalted, O Lord, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power (Ps. 21:13)**

**I will sing to the Lord, Because He has dealt bountifully with me (Ps. 13:6).**

The centrality of God, when it comes to the redemption of man and the peace of our souls, make hymns rich to God and valuable to those who sing them. We don't have a record of which hymn they sang. But if, as was the custom of biblical worship, they sang according to God's power of deliverance, their pending failure would not damage the value of the hymn—it would be just the opposite. They should be able to continue to sing the hymn in the midst of their stumbling. It would be a hymn they would desire to sing all the more.

**Then Jesus said to them, \_“\_All of you will \_\_be \_\_made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:**

***\_‘\_I will strike the Shepherd,  
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’\_***

<sup>32</sup>- **But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee (Matthew 26:31, 32).\_”**

## Scandalized

Jesus teaches that the apostles were about to fulfill a prophecy from Zechariah 13:7—not exactly the kind of prophecy you’re hoping to fulfill!

Jesus announces their failure—their stumbling—with the verb *skandalizo*. They would be scandalized. It means to be “caused to be caught or to fall...caused to sin.”<sup>1</sup> The noun form of the word denoted a trap—“the means whereby one closes something.”<sup>2</sup> We might think of a stick holding up a box with a piece of meat inside. When the prey approaches the meat the predator collapses the box.

A great athlete once commented on luck. He said, “Luck is when preparation meets opportunity.” Similarly it can be said that to be scandalized is when sinners meet with temptation. The box was about to fall on the apostles.

## Because of Me

Furthermore Jesus announces the cause of their stumbling—Himself. This perhaps is most easily understood as pertaining to their affiliation with Jesus—Jesus would be arrested and they with Him. But it goes deeper. As time went on the persecution which attended any affiliation with Jesus would not cause them to stumble—at least not all of them.

There was something much darker about what was to happen during the next three days. And this darkness would produce at least two things in the apostles: a loftier understanding of Jesus and an elevated perception of their dependence upon Him alone for their peace with God. For those these events—though forged in the workshop of Satan—were initially and primarily the design of God for His own glory and the benefit of His own people.

Their view of Jesus would be tested and it would fail. There was an apparent failure of Jesus for which they were unprepared. Jesus’ statement **“But after I’ve been raised”** is all but ignored. How many of us have

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<sup>1</sup>Arndt, W. (1996, c1979). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature : A translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur* (Page 752). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>2</sup>*Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964-c1976. Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin. (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (Vol. 7, Page 339). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

grown discouraged when we observe the apparent failure of Christ in our lives and culture? When as a life changing, culture changing force, our increasingly pagan culture seeks to crucify Him anew—when our secular culture seeks to entomb Jesus and all vestiges which remind us of Him. Are we tempted to scatter—to question—to consider alternatives?

## The Resurrection

Though it is my conviction that Christ and His kingdom has, and will continue, to be a life changing, culture changing force which will overthrow all adversity through God's word and Spirit—the heart of the Christian faith is the portion ignored by the apostles—the six words (five in Greek) **“But after I have been raised.”**

The effort of Satan to stumble Christians becomes a trifle when their hope in Christ strays from the resurrection. It cannot be more clearly stated by the Apostle Paul:

**-But if there is no resurrection of the dead, \_\_then Christ is not risen. <sup>-14-</sup> And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty...<sup>-17-</sup> And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; \_\_you are still in your sins! <sup>-18-</sup> Then also those who have \_\_fallen \_\_asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>-19-</sup> \_\_If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:13, 14, 17-19).**

Christ would soon be struck—His heel bruised (Gen. 3:15)—and the sheep of the flock would be scattered like thrown seed (Matt. 25:24). But they were still His sheep. And after the resurrection they would reconvene with their shepherd in Galilee.

On that night the apostles would be like the armies of Israel who stood paralyzed with fear in the face of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:11). But when David, the anointed one of God, crushed the head of their enemy (1 Sam. 17:49), “the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines” (1 Sam. 17:52).

The apostles, after the Anointed One of God (the Christ) won the battle, would go forth boldly proclaiming the gospel. But their immediate future contained nothing but failure—a failure which they were not eager to accept.

**-Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.”<sup>-34-</sup> Jesus said to him, “\_Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”<sup>-35-</sup> Peter said to Him, “\_Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!\_” And so said all the disciples (Matthew 26:33-35).**

## **The Resolve of Peter**

We have not yet answered this morning’s question, which is “What value is there in knowing you’ll fail?” We’ll get to that shortly, if you haven’t already discerned. But first we observe the confidence of the apostles.

Peter would have none of this “stumbling” talk! “Even if they all fail, I will not!” Even after Jesus specifically prophesies the number of denials and how a rooster will remind him of what he’s done, Peter boldly declares that he will not deny Jesus, even if he must die. And all the disciples chime in.

If anyone had a right to this boldness it was Peter. He had left all to follow Jesus (Matt. 19:27). He had stepped out of a boat into a stormy sea in obedience to Jesus, and for a short time, walked on water (Matt. 14:29). And Peter’s sincerity revealed itself in the Garden when Jesus was approached by a **“great multitude with swords and club”** (Matt. 26:47). When they laid hands on Jesus, Peter drew his sword **“struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear”** (Matt. 26:51; John 18:10). How many of us would have such courage?

It is valuable to observe that in Luke’s account of this, Jesus gives Peter a peek within the veil. Jesus prefaces His prediction of Peter’s failure by revealing a Job-like (Job 1:8-12) discussion between Himself and Satan.

**\_And the Lord said, “\_Simon, Simon! Indeed, \_Satan has asked for you, that he may \_\_sift *you* as wheat.<sup>-32-</sup> But \_\_I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, \_\_strengthen your brethren (Luke 22:31, 32).**

Peter would soon be sifted like wheat—thrown up and down, tossed to and fro. Jesus assures Peter of something that we didn’t see with Judas (just the opposite with Judas—John 17:12). Jesus had prayed for Peter. But if Jesus had prayed for Peter, why did he fail? Because Jesus did not pray

that Peter would not fail, He prayed that his faith would not fail. Hence the prediction, “when you have returned to me.” One might ask, ‘returned from where?’ No doubt, from failing. Peter would fail. But his faith (which itself is a gift from God [Heb. 12:2]) would not fail.

### **Why the Failure/ Why the Prediction? -**

But why this failure and what value is there in knowing you’ll fail? Though the answer I’ll give is merely implicit in this text, it becomes explicit when the work of redemption is examined throughout Scripture. The answer, simply put, is that nobody goes to the cross with Christ. Redemption would not be a group effort or some cooperative ministerial pursuit.

It was Christ alone who would face the horrors of hell—not the apostles nor the church they would form—not the righteousness of any saints deposited in any treasury of merit. The salvation of man would be no cooperative effort between the goodness of God and the willingness of man. The fall of the one man, Adam, through which all are condemned, would be remedied by the One man Jesus. As Paul explains:

**-Therefore, as through \_\_one man’s offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through \_\_one \_\_Man’s righteous act *the free gift came* \_\_to all men, resulting in justification of life. <sup>-19-</sup> For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by \_\_one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).**

Perhaps the apostles began to notice the uncharacteristic consternation of Jesus in the Garden when He explained: “**\_My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death**” (Matthew 26:38). Whatever it was, the apostles, most of whom would later courageously face persecution for their faith, would fail miserably at the prospect of approaching the cross.

Some argue that the New Covenant offered a post-Pentecost power the apostles had not yet received. But the author of Hebrews offers a list of Old Covenant saints who faithfully faced torture and death (Heb. 11:35-40). And perhaps there was a post-resurrection confidence and knowledge which buttressed the resolves of the apostles. Again, many believers would suffer martyrdom—but not this kind of martyrdom.

When men seek to crawl onto the cross with Christ, they will fail. And it is an act of God’s kindness to inform us time and time again that it

is a foolish pursuit to seek to add one scintilla of human work or will to that which can only be achieved by Christ and Christ alone. It has been said that it is wise to know our limitations. And that is never more truly applied to our own salvation. Calvin's good advice is,

...therefore, whenever any temptation is presented to us, let us first remember our weakness, that, being entirely thrown down, we may learn to seek elsewhere what we need; and, next, let us remember the grace which is promised, that it may free us from doubt. For those who, forgetting their weakness, and not calling on God, feel assured that they are strong, act entirely like drunken soldiers, who throw themselves rashly into the field, but, as soon as the effects of strong drink are worn off, think of nothing else than flight.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels : Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

## Questions for Study

1. What events does Matthew record on either side of Christ instituting the Lord' Supper? What question does this raise (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is a hymn? Explain the value of a hymn (page 3)?
3. What does it mean to be "scandalized" (page 4)?
4. What are different ways Christians can stumble because of Jesus (pages 4, 5)?
5. What message is at the heart of the Christian faith (pages 5, 6)?
6. Make observations connected with Peter's failure and eventual success (pages 6, 7)?
7. Why, do you supposed, Jesus predicted the failure of the apostles (pages 7, 8)?