Lord, Keep Us From Stumbling

Mark 14:26-31
September 23, 2026
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[26] And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. [27] And Jesus said to them, "*You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*.' [28] *But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee*." [29] Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." [30] And Jesus said to him, "*Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times*." [31] But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

My sermon title this morning is "Lord, Keep Us From Stumbling"

John Bunyan, perhaps doesn't need any new introduction. But here is a refresher. John Bunyan was a 17th century preacher who was born into poverty, the son of a craftsman. He had minimal education and yet had become one of the most prolific authors in history. He is known for the book, 'The Pilgrims Progress' which is an allegorical description of the Christian life. John Bunyan's conversion, was not like the apostle Paul, who, overnight turned from being persecutor to being persecuted for his faith. John Bunyan was someone who rather stumbled, who doubted, who went back to his old ways, and eventually became a faithful Christian.
John Bunyan's life was one of doubt, setbacks, failures, weaknesses, and strength.

Perhaps, you feel that way when you look at your own Christian life. Do you struggle with weaknesses, failures, doubts, setbacks, superficiality? Have you come to to grips with the unavoidable fallen nature of your own flesh? Have you claimed you will never fail or stumble or turn from Jesus, only to find out that your Christian journey is littered with ups and downs, bumbling and stumbling?

If there's anyone among Jesus' disciples who stumbled more than others, it was Peter. Jesus called Peter 'Cephas' or The Rock. Peter was the first among the inner most circle of the followers of Jesus. Peter had a first-hand account of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus took Peter everywhere. To the home to Jairus to raise his daughter from the dead. To the mount of Transfiguration. To the garden to pray.

- Peter received high commendation from Jesus when he confessed, "You are Christ the Son of the Living God". Jesus tells Peter "Blessed are you Bar-Jonah". Matthew 16.

- Peter also received the strongest rebuke from our Lord. Jesus called him 'Satan'. Jesus called Peter a 'stumbling block'.

And in this passage, Jesus foretells that all his disciples will fall away or will stumble. Now, this stumbling or falling away does not mean the disciples will permanently abandon Jesus or apostatize.
This stumbling has a redemptive purpose in the lives of the disciples and has implications for you and I. We'll see what that looks like as we expound this passage.

To give you a context for this passage, let's back up to verse 26.
[26] And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus had finished giving his disciples the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. You heard from that passage last week. After taking part in communion, the disciples sing a hymn. The disciples sang a hymn. Singing a hymn was usually associated with the Passover festival. Psalm 113-118 gives a picture of what they might have sung. It was praise and singing to God.

And after they sing, they head out to the Mount of Olives.
Where were they going? To a garden. Jesus often met his disciples at that place (John 18:2). And there Jesus drops a bombshell on his disciples.

[27] And Jesus said to them, "*You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*.' [28] *But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee*."

To fall away is to stumble, cause offense or sin.
Stumble comes from the word *scandalizo*. We get the word English scandal from this word. It has a slightly different meaning depending on the context.

- In the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught if your eye causes you to sin or *stumble*, tear it out. Matthew 5:29
- When John the Baptist was in prison and sent word to Jesus to ask if he was the Messiah, Jesus said blessed is the one who is not offended or *stumble* because of me. Matthew 11:6
- Jesus taught in the parable of the Sower that the soil that does not endure when persecution comes will *stumble* or fall away. Matthew 13:21
- When Jesus taught in his hometown of Nazareth, the people took offense at him or *stumbled* because of him.
- Talking about little children or believers, Jesus said "*whoever causes one of these little ones to stumble it is better for to have a large stone around his neck and*

thrown into the depth other sea." Mark 9:42

Here Jesus is near his hour of betrayal. Jesus told his disciples at least three times that he would have to suffer and die – Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33. Peter did not fully comprehend why Jesus would have to suffer and die. But now that time for Jesus to be betrayed has come near. And Jesus foretells that all his disciples will fall away. Another translation says "You all will be made to stumble because it has been written 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter' (Zechariah 13:7)
The phrase "you all will fall away" is in the passive future tense.
And Jesus says that their falling away or their stumbling has been prophesied by the prophet Zachariah.

How should we understand this rather paradoxical statement of Jesus. It's paradoxical, because Jesus knows that they will stumble, that they will fall away, they will sin by abandoning him and denying him. Yet, Jesus tells the disciples he will go before them to Galilee after he is raised from the dead.
Answer: Jesus knows that even their future sin will be covered by his death on the cross. Isn't this wonderful news?
God struck his Son and raised him to strike out all our sin even future sin.

Here a few things to avoid when you live your Christian life:

1. Avoid fatalistic thinking. A fatalist will say "I sin because I was meant to, I was destined to sin". Therefore, I am bound to stumble and sin. Wrong thinking. So, avoid fatalistic thinking.
2. Avoid pessimism. A pessimist will say "I don't do much good anyways. Therefore, I don't have much hope". No, you have hope. Believe in the promises of God. Jesus does not want you to stumble. God does not tempt anyone. With the temptation he will provide a way of escape. "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*" 1 Corinthians 10:13. It's easy to blame God and others when things don't go your way. But your way may not be God's way. God's way is usually a way to walk through a trial or challenge.
3. Avoid exaggerated confessions or assertions of faith. Your confession of faith must be tempered by the sobering awareness that it will tested.

You see when the disciples heard from the mouth of Jesus, that they would all stumble, and scatter, their claims were overblown. Little did they know that they will be tested soon.

Verses 29 through 31.

29 Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” 30 And Jesus said to him, “*Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times*.” 31 But he said emphatically, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same.

In the parallel passage in John 16:31-32, the disciples all said they had faith and they believed in him. And yet Jesus tells in verse 32, “*Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone”*

Peter makes a tall claim that he will never stumble or abandon his Lord. But Jesus makes yet another stunning personal prediction for Peter.
What does Jesus tell Peter? Tonight you will deny me not once, not twice but thrice!
And yet Peter makes his claim even more assertive. He *emphatically* says, “No never” That is a double negative. Peter says I will *never ever* deny you. And they all said the same.

How should we reconcile the fact that Jesus knew everything about the disciple’s failure, and their assertion that they would never abandon him?

1. Observation number *one* – Resist every urge to stumble into sin. Resist the devil. Resist the flesh. “*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*.” James 4:7
2. Observation number *two* - Trust in the interceding work of Christ. Luke 22 gives us a clearer picture of Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial and restoration. Verse 31 and 32 “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*.” You see Jesus looks beyond Peter’s failure. Jesus looks beyond you stumbling as well. Jesus knows Peter will stumble and deny Jesus. But Jesus also sees his future repentance. Jesus is sovereign in Peter’s life. Jesus does not need Peter’s assertion that he will never abandon him. Jesus will suffer alone. Peter’s faith does not rest in any of his accomplishment but on Jesus’ accomplishment on his behalf by his death and resurrection. The redemptive part of Peter’s denial and repentance is what Jesus tells him – “*when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers”.* Use your turning from sin to strengthen others so that they not fall into it.
3. Observation number *three* – Know that the testing of your faith is for you to persevere.
   a. “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you

know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" James 1:2

b. "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" Romans 5:4

It was said that John Bunyan spent many years in life doubting himself. He thought to himself that he may have sinned too much or he may have committed a sin too grave that he would ever be forgiven. Is it possible, he wondered, that sinners have strayed too far from God to be ever brought back into the fold?
After much internal debate in his own soul, John Bunyan concluded that, yes, Christ does extend his grace even to the chief of sinners.
If Peter could be restored to faith in Christ, surely anyone can be restored to faith. Unlike Judas, his stumbling was not a permanent stumbling.

In conclusion, your spiritual journey of faith is not an easy one. It may be fraught with pain, torment, anguish, and fear. And yet you can take comfort in knowing that Christ has conquered the world. Labor in your relationship with Jesus Christ, not just in the confession, or in the assertion of your claims of faith.

"*Great sins do draw out great grace*" – John Bunyan

"*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,* [25] *to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen*." Jude 1:24-25

---------- Discipleship Questions----------

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Lord, Keep Us From Stumbling. Mark 14:26-31
HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What did Peter and the disciples not yet understand about their faith? Read john 16:31-32, Luke 22:31-32. What does our Lord tell Peter knowing in advance that he will would fail and also repent?

2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

    - Do you believe your claims of faith should be tempered with the realization that it will be tested? Who is our help in times of trouble, trial and testing?

    - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HANDS For personal reflection: What will you do to keep yourself from stumbling or falling away?