

When Faith Isn't Easy - Mark 14:27-42

Introduction:

- You know, we have been very blessed in Canada that we have the freedom to worship Christ the way that we do. Even to gather together freely like this is a huge blessing, one that I think we often take for granted.
- That hasn't always been the case for the church.
- If you look throughout history, there have been many periods where Christians have experienced incredible persecution.
- There are even countries today where to say that you're a Christian comes with a great amount of risk.
- And this shouldn't really surprise us. Jesus himself even promises this in John 15, he says:

"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." - John 15:20b (ESV)

- Jesus promises that being a Christian won't always be easy. He tells us that the world will hate us because they hated him first.
- Even here in Canada it's becoming less and less comfortable to say that you're a Christian. It's becoming less comfortable to live according to the Word of God.
- And that doesn't always have to mean that we're facing a life threatening situation. I'm sure that most, if not all of us could think of a time when we were in a situation where it would have been uncomfortable to claim to be a Christian for one reason or another, whether that's at work, with our friends, our family, etc.
- But I'm sure we've all been in situations like that, where we start to get uncomfortable, and secretly we're hoping that people don't find out that we're "one of those Christians".
- So that leads us to a question.
- What do we do when faith isn't easy?
- When the rubber hits the road, and suddenly we're in one of those uncomfortable situations, how do we respond?

Peter gives us a picture of faltering faith when times are hard:

- In this passage I think we see two different examples of what faith under pressure can look like in difficult moments.

- And we're picking up exactly where we left off in our passage last week, and the tension that existed in that passage, is just continuing to build as we're getting closer and closer to Jesus' death.
- Now that the passover meal is done, Jesus leaves the house with his disciples, going now to the Mt. of Olives to spend some time in prayer together. And when Jesus comes back from this place, he will be coming back as a prisoner going to his death.
- But as they're going, Jesus continues speaking to his disciples, warning them of what's coming. In V. 27 it says:

“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.’” - Mark 14:27 (ESV)

- He tells them that in the test of faith that was about to come, each and every one of them would fail, and be scattered.
- And you have to imagine how this would have felt for the disciples to hear. This would have been so confusing and discouraging for them, having just come from a meal where Jesus said one of them would betray him and his blood would be poured out, now they're hearing that all of them would fall away. There must have been so much going on in their hearts in this moment.
- But then Peter pipes up in V. 29, and says:

“Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not.’” - Mark 14:29 (ESV)

- And so starting here with Peter, who really represents all of the disciples, we get our first example of what can happen when our faith is put to the test.
- Peter gives us a picture of faltering faith when times are hard.

Peter displays an attitude of pride

- And that picture begins here as Peter displays an incredibly prideful attitude.
- If you're familiar with Peter's story, you know that he's never one to shy away from sharing what's on his mind, and when faced with Jesus' words that all of the disciples would fall away, he jumps in to say that even if all of the other disciples were weak enough to fail Jesus, he would be the one who wouldn't let him down! (I'm sure the other disciples loved that). So Peter is very quick to defend himself here.
- But Jesus responds to him and says:

“Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”
- Mark 14:30 (ESV)

- And you’d think after that, Peter would back down. Knowing that Jesus has clearly displayed that he knows everything that is about to happen, you would think that Peter would respond with a humble and broken heart at what Jesus says will happen, but look at his response in V. 31:

“But he said emphatically, ‘If I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And they all said the same.” - Mark 14:31 (ESV)

- *“He said emphatically”*, I imagine that the conversation was getting a little heated at this point as Peter is getting frustrated and continues to deny that what Jesus was saying would happen, even though we’ll see Jesus’ words here come to pass very shortly.
- And the other disciples jump on board here with Peter, claiming that no matter what Jesus said, they would never fail him.
- For Peter, it did not even enter into his mind that he could possibly fail Jesus. Even if his heart was in the right place of wanting to remain faithful to Jesus, he responds to his words with an attitude of pride, and his pride blinded him to his own weakness.

Peter neglects prayer

- So the conversation kind of ends there, and as the passage continues on, Jesus and the disciples arrive at the garden of Gethsemane. Then the end of V. 32 says:

“he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’” - Mark 14:32b (ESV)

- Jesus leaves most of his disciples, and then takes three of them, who were the closest to him, a little farther, asking them to keep watch and pray as he goes on to spend some time in prayer in private. The three that he brought along being Peter, James, and John.
- You’d think that considering these same disciples were just saying they would happily go to their deaths if that’s what Jesus needed, that this wouldn’t be that difficult of a task, to sit watch and pray during Jesus’ time of need.
- But look at the beginning of V. 37:

“And he came and found them sleeping,” - Mark 14:37a (ESV)

- Despite all their talk, when Jesus needed them, they failed at something much simpler than they had claimed to be willing to do. Rather than stay awake and keep watch, like Jesus asked, they fell asleep.
- And as Jesus finds them asleep, he gives Peter an important warning. Look at the rest of V. 37:

“and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’” - Mark 14:37b-38 (ESV)

- So Jesus calls them out, and warns them that they need to spend this time in prayer in order to face the temptation and trials that are coming.
- And the temptation that Jesus is referring to there is the temptation that they will face to compromise and let Jesus down, abandoning him. To be scattered, and deny him, just as he’s told them that they would.
- So you would think, “ok, so they slipped up, but Jesus has given them this warning now, and they’re going to get their act together” right? I mean Jesus has told them already that they would fall away, abandon and deny him, and now he’s telling them to pray so that they won’t enter into that temptation. You would think that would be a warning they would take incredibly seriously.
- But after giving his warning, Jesus goes to pray again, and look what V. 40 says:

“And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him.” - Mark 14:40 (ESV)

- Then in V. 41:

“And he came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’” - Mark 14:41-42 (ESV)

- Despite Jesus warnings throughout this chapter, rather than listening to him, keeping watch, and spending time in prayer, on two other occasions Jesus comes back to find the disciples fast asleep.
- Not only did they respond to Jesus’ first warnings with a prideful attitude, believing that they could never fall away, they also neglected to do the one thing that Jesus warned them to do to protect themselves from temptation. They neglected to pray.
- Now just like Judas last week, it’s easy to look at the disciples here with such frustration. What Jesus is asking of them here isn’t hard! They said they were willing to die, and all he asked of them was to stay awake with him.

- But honestly, when we look at Peter, and the other disciples, and their failure here, doesn't this give such a pointed picture of our own hearts?
- It's easy to look at them and talk about how badly they messed up, but I think we're all prone to mess up in the same kind of ways.
- For example, how many of you look at this story and think "I would never do what they did! I would have stayed awake!"
- Maybe: *"Even if they all fell, I wouldn't!"* That sounds a little bit familiar right?
- And think about the disciples' failure to pray in this time of need. How many of us get to the end of a day where we haven't spent any time in the Word, haven't prayed at all, and look back and think, "I just ran out of time today"?
- You see, we're prone to doing the same thing as the disciples. We think that we could never fail, no matter how hard things get, yet we neglect to do the very things that would help and protect us in hard times.
- For some reason, the things that we've been given to keep us from entering into temptation seem to end up on the bottom of our priority lists.
- I want to read you a quote from James Edwards:
 - *"Jesus warns the disciples to guard against the kind of sinfulness of which most of us are most guilty: sins of weakness and irresoluteness rather than sins of intention. We do not plan on sinning, but neither do we hold the fort when we ought."*
- Jesus tells us that we will face persecution and difficult times. We read that verse from John 15 *"If they persecute me they will persecute you"*.
- But we also see that Jesus' warning to his disciples in the face of the greatest challenge they will ever face, is to keep watch and pray so that they would not enter into temptation. So why do we fail to do the same things that Jesus warns his disciples to do to protect themselves?
- You and I are susceptible to the same kind of weakness as the rest of the disciples. We are not above failing in the same ways that they did.

Jesus gives us a picture of enduring faith when times are hard:

- Looking at their example gives us a pretty uncomfortable mirror to our own hearts, and if Peter and the other disciples were the only examples we were given in this passage, our situation would be looking pretty bleak.
- But there's another example in this passage of how to respond when faith and obedience is no longer as easy as we'd like, and that example comes from Jesus himself.

- As we consider what Jesus was doing in all of this, we'll see that in every way that Peter and the other disciples fail, in every way that we're prone to fail, Jesus remains faithful.
- While Peter showed us faltering faith, Jesus gives us a picture of enduring faith when times are hard. Let's take a moment to consider what that looks like in this passage.

Jesus shows us perfect humility

- And it's important to note first and foremost that as we look at Jesus in this passage, the Jesus that we're seeing here, is Jesus as we've never seen him in any other part of Scripture. There's such a brutal honesty in this passage, and it may even feel kind of shocking to read.
- We often think of Jesus as a very calm kind of person, always at one level and unfazed, no matter what's going on. But in this passage we get a picture of Jesus deeply wrestling through the weight of what he was about to go through.
- As Jesus and his disciples come to the garden to pray, V. 33 gives us a look into Jesus' heart in that moment:

“And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.” - Mark 14:33 (ESV)

- And going on to V. 34, look at these words that Jesus shares with his disciples:

“And he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.’” - Mark 14:34 (ESV)

- He was sorrowful, even to death.
- Jesus is not presented here as someone who was completely calm and collected. We have a picture of someone struggling on the deepest level with what he's about to do.
- And he didn't hide that struggle. He didn't try to put on a brave face and act like there was nothing wrong to keep up appearances in front of his disciples. He was honest with them, telling them what was going on in his heart, and asking for their support.
- While Peter displayed an attitude of pride, Jesus shows us perfect humility.
- And I want to point out that the struggle that we see Jesus going through here isn't a bad thing. The fact that Jesus wrestled so deeply with what he was about to do doesn't mean that he failed. It doesn't mean that he sinned in this moment, and didn't have enough faith. It means that he understood fully the weight of what he was about to do.
- He understood the weight of what it would mean to go to the cross, to lay down his life. To take on himself the wrath, and the rejection of God for the sins of the world.

- We often think that in order to have faith in difficult times we can't struggle. And if we do struggle with what we're facing, it means we've failed somehow, or that we didn't have enough faith. But look at Jesus' example here. That's not true! He struggled deeply, he was sorrowful, even to death.
- That struggle is not bad. Sometimes we face really difficult things, and struggling with that is ok. The important thing to consider is how we respond to those struggles.

Jesus shows us perfect honest prayer

- Because as we see Jesus' very real and honest struggle in this passage, we also see where that struggle leads him and how he responds. And this is so key.
- Look at V. 35:

"And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him." - Mark 14:35 (ESV)

- Jesus responds to this intense struggle by falling on his face in desperate prayer. It's what he warned the disciples to do. Remember his words in V. 38:

"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" - Mark 14:38a (ESV)

- Jesus is taking his own advice here. In a moment that he is struggling with the weight of what he came to earth to do, he goes to God in earnest and honest prayer.
- And not just once, three times he goes to pray, and we're told that each time he prays the same thing. Look at his prayer in V. 36.

"Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." - Mark 14:36 (ESV)

- This is such a profound prayer. Again, this is Jesus as we've never seen him before.
- He is struggling so deeply to the point that he actually asks God to "remove this cup" from him, "make it so that I don't have to experience this".
- Did you know that Jesus prayed that? That he prayed that he wouldn't have to die on the cross? Because that's what he's doing here.
- But despite the honesty that Christ displays, both to his disciples, and his own Father, there is still a perfect submission to the will of God at the end of this prayer "not what I will, but what you will."

- He trusts that, if God wills it, all of his suffering could be avoided, yet he displays such a willingness to submit to his Father.
- Then this section of the passage concludes with Jesus gathering his disciples to go and face Judas, his betrayer, and the mob of soldiers he brought with him.
- Here, Jesus' words are put to the test, and we see that rather than running or trying to avoid what was coming, Jesus gets up and willingly goes to meet those who've come to arrest and kill him, perfectly submitting to the will of his Father.
- Jesus gives us a picture of such perfect and honest prayer in the face of challenging circumstances, and ultimately Jesus gives us our picture of enduring faith when times are hard.

Conclusion:

- So we've got these two examples in this passage, and looking at both of them, we want to say that we're like Christ and that our faith is strong enough to endure no matter what. But like I said earlier, if we're honest with ourselves, we will more often than not find ourselves in the position of Peter, believing there is no way we could ever fail, but finding more weakness in ourselves than we expected when our faith is actually put to the test.
- So returning to our question from the beginning, what do we do when faith isn't easy? How do we keep ourselves from being like Peter and the other disciples in this passage?
- I think we strive to follow the example that Christ set for us in this passage, of perfect humility and honest prayer, and we remember the words that he spoke to his disciples.

“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” - Mark 14:38 (ESV)

- That is how we endure, even when faith isn't easy. Be honest about your struggles, but take those struggles to the Lord in prayer.
- And the great news is that we don't have to do this alone!
- Jesus came to succeed in all of the areas that we fail so that, through his death and resurrection, we can find our strength and hope in him, rather than ourselves.
- **When faith seems hard, look to Jesus' example of perfect humility and honest prayer, and find your strength in him rather than yourself.**
- But maybe you're here and you feel like you've already failed at this. You're looking at the way that you've responded when your faith has been put to the test, and you're sitting here wrestling with the guilt of feeling like you've already failed.
- Well if that's you, I want to end with a word of hope that we find in V. 28. Right after Jesus tells his disciples that they will all fall away, he says these words.

“But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” - Mark 14:28 (ESV)

- In this verse we see that Jesus saw the weakness of his disciples, but he loved them anyways, despite their failures. He even loved them enough to willingly go to the cross for them.
- And even in this verse, we see the great promise from Jesus that, even though he’s about to die, he will return, and he will go before his disciples to Galilee. Even though every one of them would fail him, he would never fail them.
- If you’re in a season where faith feels easy, watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation. If you’re in a situation where your faith is being tested, turn to Christ and find your strength in him. If you’re in a position where you’re wrestling through the guilt of feeling like you’ve failed, turn to Christ in repentance, and find hope in the love that he has for you.
- No matter who you are, the Gospel has the power to be a message of such incredible hope for you.
- **When faith seems hard, look to Jesus’ example of perfect humility and honest prayer, and find your strength in him rather than yourself.**