



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 26:30-46

Topic

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus lets us know
He is determined to go to the Cross
in perfect submission to the will of His Father

Title

"The Victory Garden"

Introduction

Was it a harmless prank - or misdemeanor battery?

Workers at Intel in Albuquerque secretly taped a "Kick Me" sign to the back of a co-worker as a prank, then kicked the confused man a number of times as fellow employees laughed hysterically.

The employee said that once he suspected something was taped on his back, he went to a senior staffer to ask if something was there.

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The staffer promptly kicked him three times in the buttocks.

The employee felt demoralized and assaulted and he began to cry during his drive home. He initially could not tell his wife because he was so embarrassed and ashamed.

Two of the prankers were convicted of petty misdemeanor battery and ordered to perform sixteen hours of community service. Both also lost their jobs.

In another story, a New York City elementary school suspended a fourth grade student for taping a "Kick Me" sign on another student's back.

When I was a kid, we'd alternate between "Kick Me" and "Kiss Me." Kid's, and adults who act like them, are mean.

You may not have a "Kick Me" sign taped to your back, **but some days it seems like you do**. You seem to be a target for all kinds of abuse and trouble from the world.

In fact, if you are a Christian, **you are** targeted by the devil and the nonbelievers he has taken captive to do his will.

Good thing you are simultaneously safeguarded by Jesus.

While most of what happens in our text is unique to the eleven disciples, there is this general principle of being *targeted* as well as simultaneously *safeguarded*. Let's see if we can make some sense of it.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Said It Was Because Of Him You'd Be Targeted, and #2 Jesus Said It Was Because Of Him You'd Be Safeguarded.

#1 Jesus Said It Was Because Of Him You'd Be Targeted

(v30-35)

We are down to the final 24 hours leading up to the Crucifixion. Judas left the Upper Room to betray Jesus; the Last Supper was instituted; the Lord and His boys headed out to spend the night under the stars on the Mount of Olives.

Mat 26:30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Could you sing praises to God on your way to your betrayal and death? Yes, yes, you could, because God would supply His grace in abundance to you in your time of need.

It was not unusual for Jews visiting Jerusalem for the Passover to spend the night outdoors, camping. Jesus was headed for their regular spot; and Judas was, too.

Mat 26:31 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.'

It's a quote from the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah 13:7. The "I" is referring to God; the "Shepherd" is Jesus; the "flock" are His eleven disciples.

Make no mistake about it: the events leading up to, and including, Jesus death on the Cross were no afterthought. They were necessary.

It was not morally possible for God to atone for sin and redeem lost men and women apart from the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross.

The Shepherd must be struck; He must be killed.

Momentarily Judas would come with the Roman soldiers and the eleven would, indeed, be "scattered."

What does it mean that they would be "made to stumble?" After all is said and read, it comes down to this: the arrest, the trials, and the crucifixion of Jesus would shake these men to the very foundation of their faith.

Think of it like this. Although Jesus had told them repeatedly that He must die at the hands of the religious leaders, the eleven either ignored Him or they misunderstood Him. They were certain He was going to inaugurate the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth, in which they would play a major role and hold positions of honor.

A stricken Shepherd was not part of their equation. It would seem to them as if Jesus were not powerful enough to perform what He had promised.

Isn't that the same problem most people, including Christians, struggle with? If God is so powerful, why all my suffering? Why doesn't God do something?

With perfect hindsight, we see that God **was** doing something. In fact, **He was doing everything**. He was defeating sin and death so men could be forgiven their sins and receive eternal life.

If we had hindsight of our own lives, we'd see something similar. Of course, we can't; but we can walk by faith believing God is the same today as He was then.

I want to call our attention to three words easy to overlook:
"Because of Me."

Jesus was assuming the responsibility for them being scattered. It wasn't because they lacked faith, or some such thing. No; it was all on Him, because of Him.

Think of it this way. If a shepherd was out in the fields tending his flock and was attacked, let's say, by a cougar, and killed, what would we expect his sheep to do?

Would we expect them to rally and present a strong defense against the cougar? No! We'd expect them to run and scatter, because the shepherd was their sole protection.

Jesus said, "because of Me," and it was full of emotion. He had put the target on their backs, as it were. It didn't say "Kick Me," or "Kiss Me." It said, "Kill Me."

Today we, too, are targeted. Jesus told us that since the world hated Him, it would hate us just as much. In such a world we can expect persecution. It's unusual for believers not to be persecuted. It's the exception rather than the norm.

Since it's "because of Him," we can rejoice when we are treated badly, because we are being identified with Jesus.

Mat 26:32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

Besides being certain that death could not hold Him; that He would rise from the dead, conquering death as well as sin; these words contain an incredible promise for the eleven, and for all believers.

It's a promise - an absolutely rock-solid promise - that all eleven guys would be regathered after Jesus rose from the dead.

They'd be scattered... Stumbled to various degrees... Reduced to a sort of hopelessness. But hope there was in abundance in these word of Jesus.

No matter how hopeless your situation may get; no matter how helpless you become; the Lord will gather you to Himself, and He will regather all of His church together, to always be with Him.

The guys didn't really hear that last promise. They objected.

Mat 26:33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."

Mat 26:34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

Mat 26:35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples.

We'll talk about the rooster's crowing when it happens. For now concentrate on Peter, and "all the disciples," thinking there was no way they could stumble.

We sometimes, perhaps most of the time, use the word "stumble" to describe falling into sin. What I'm talking about today, from this text, is a different kind of stumbling.

As I presented it earlier, it's more like doubt of the Lord and of His Word on account of the tribulation that you suffering. It's the "Why, God?" or "Where is God?" kind of stumbling.

And it can be crippling. I know people who never recover from some tragedy. They blame God and cease to walk with Him.

I know it hurts to realize God could have kept you out of your trouble rather than letting you go through it, but how does it help you to turn your back on Him?

It doesn't. Instead look full in His wonderful face. Look at Jesus Who suffered for you, and Who promises to never, ever leave you nor forsake you.

#2 Jesus Said It Was Because Of Him You'd Be Safeguarded

(v36-46)

In the Gospel of John Jesus prays to His Father for His disciples before they left the Upper Room to go to the Mount of Olives. He says to His Father, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one (John 17:12-15).

Jesus was asking His Father to safeguard the eleven disciples. But He didn't ask just for them.

Joh 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;

Jesus had kept them; now His Father would keep them, and all believers, safeguarded on earth as the "evil one" seeks to rob, kill, and destroy us.

Let's talk about God safeguarding us. We already know it doesn't mean we will never suffer. It seems to mean that we will, or at least we can, always be victorious in our suffering.

Take Peter for an example. In the Gospel of Luke we read,

Luk 22:31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

Luk 22:32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

Peter was going to be sifted; he was the target of the enemy. Jesus' prayer would safeguard Peter; he would "return," and he would serve, "strengthening his brethren."

One commentator said this:

We can imagine a picture like this: Satan has a big sieve with jagged-edged wires forming a mesh with holes shaped like faithless men and women.

What he aims to do is throw people into this sieve and shake them around over these jagged edges until they are so torn and weak and desperate that they let go of their faith and fall through the sieve as faithless people, right into Satan's company. Faith cannot fall through the mesh. It's the wrong shape. And so as long as the disciples hold to their faith, trusting the power and goodness of God for their hope, then they will not fall through the mesh into Satan's hands.

We're going to be sifted, but we are safeguarded by God and can always be victorious.

Mat 26:36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."

I approach this section, this story, with real caution. One commentator duly noted,

No man can rightfully expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heartbroken meditation, more than for human language.

"Gethsemane" means *oil press* - appropriate as this was the Mount of Olives.

Jesus strategically leaves eight disciples near the entrance. He would take three others further.

Mat 26:37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.

The "two sons of Zebedee" were James and John. These three were a sort of inner circle, often witnessing events the other disciples were not privileged to.

We shouldn't assume they were more spiritual; or that they had earned these positions. God chose them to this service. Period.

I'm told these last words, "sorrowful and deeply depressed," are among the strongest word in the Greek language to express a depth of emotion.

Have you ever been hit with a wave of emotion? Been overcome to a point you can't really function?

Jesus was fully God; but He was also fully human, and in His humanity, waves of emotion were billowing over Him.

Mat 26:38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

Have you ever muttered the words, "I feel like I'm going to die?" You mean that you feel awful, emotionally. Beat up and left for dead spiritually.

Shifting gears, have you ever been around someone else who felt that way? If you have, you certainly wanted to help them, encourage them, strengthen them. You probably didn't know what to do or say.

Jesus tells you what a person in that state needs more than anything else: For others to "watch" with the sufferer. As the scene unfolds, we'll see what that means.

Mat 26:39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Here is what the person intensely suffering ought to do - pray, falling on his or her face, seeking the Lord for relief or for the resolve of accepting His will.

Regarding Jesus' prayer, it establishes that there was no other way for God to forgive sin and save a lost race. Jesus, as the God-man, must drink the "cup," a picture from the Old Testament to describe God's wrath against sin.

Jesus was determined to go to the Cross, but here, in Gethsemane, He decided He would. One commentator said,

‘Not your will but mine’ changed Paradise to desert and brought man from Eden to Gethsemane. Now ‘Not my will but yours’ brings anguish to the man who prays it but transforms the desert into the kingdom and brings man from Gethsemane to the gates of glory.

Mat 26:40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?"

Before we form an opinion, something Luke says in his Gospel should be remembered. He says that their eyes were heavy from sorrow (Luke 22:45). Jesus had just told them some disturbing things: One of them would betray Him (Mark 14:18); He was leaving them (14:25); they would all fall away (14:27) and Peter would deny Jesus three times (14:30).

They weren't sleeping as the result of normal weariness at the end of the day, but because they had been rocked by reality.

It has also been suggested that there were evil forces at work here - a demonic attack. It makes sense that Satan would want to hinder the prayers of the disciples in order to try to undermine the decision of Jesus to obey His Father.

I'm not making excuses for Peter, James and John - only pointing out that praying is work, and it's warfare.

Mat 26:41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

"Flesh" is more than the physical body getting tired. "Flesh" is that propensity we find within us to fulfill our physical needs in sinful ways.

Again, this was more than mere tiredness after a long day. This was warfare. In actual warfare, you don't want to be asleep when the assault comes; and neither can you afford to slack off in spiritual warfare.

Note, too, that, even though the disciples' praying could have comforted Jesus, He was concerned for them. "Temptation" here means *testing*. A test, a trial, was coming, and they needed to be ready to meet it head-on.

Mat 26:42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Jesus' prayer has changed. He acknowledges the "cup cannot pass away from" Him; that He **must** "drink it."

The wages of sin is death. Jesus would die as Substitute for every member of the human race that our sins might be forgiven, and that we might have life - eternal life. There is no other way to deal with sin, and to be saved.

Mat 26:43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

Jesus checked on them a second time.

Are you the kind of person who constantly checks on a baby, to make sure he or she is OK when sleeping? I am; I'm a fanatic about it. It's so hard to tell if a baby is breathing; so I've been known to touch, or to poke. Then they stir, and cry.

Jesus was poking His disciples, in a sense, to see if they were spiritually active.

Mat 26:44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

In the Gospel of Mark you learn that Jesus woke them a second time (14:40).

Watch; pray. It seemed so simple, but it proved so hard.

Here's what I mean. When the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, Peter is going to draw his sword and cut-off a guys ear. It's easier to wield a sword than it is to yield to the sword of the Spirit.

We want to think we are doing something, and watching and praying don't seem to us to be as important as taking action.

Mat 26:45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Mat 26:46 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

From one perspective, the disciples had failed. They had been in a spiritual skirmish, and had been overcome by the flesh, and by whatever demonic forces were at work. When Jesus seemed to need them the most, their own needs overwhelmed them.

When they could have been ministering to Jesus, He must minister to them.

Now the Lord wakes them, and leads them into the mouth of the roaring lion. They will all be scattered, just as He predicted.

But they will nonetheless be safeguarded, will they not? They will be regathered; none of them will be lost; they are safe, spiritually speaking.

You and I will face the roaring lion - the devil - as he goes about seeking whom he may devour.

- We will be readier for some troubles than we will for others.
- We will have varying degrees of spiritual success and failure.
- We will sometimes sleep when we ought to be awake, aware, watching and praying.

Through it all, remember these words of Jesus:

Joh 17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.

Our heavenly Father will "keep" us; He will safeguard us. We can break-through to victory, even after failure.

Make no mistake - we will not be kept from trouble or testing. Because of Jesus, we have "Kill Me" targets taped to our backs. But as we watch and pray, we are reminded that all our enemies have been defeated.

- Our sin was atoned for by Jesus' death, and we receive in its place His righteousness.
- Death was defeated on the Cross and we expect to be raptured without ever dying. If we die prior to the rapture, we are immediately absent from our bodies, and present with the Lord in Heaven.
- The devil may roar, but we can resist him and need not fall into sin.
- If his roaring is to bring persecution and suffering, we can endure it by the sustaining grace of God.

Thinking about being safeguarded, I came across some information about disaster preparedness. Experts identify four phases in a disaster plan: Prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Now I don't want to force this disaster preparedness outline on spiritual things; but we can note a few parallels.

- As to prevention, you *can* prevent many of your potential troubles by simply obeying God, and yielding to the Spirit rather than the flesh.
- As to preparedness, it's more than just a suggestion that you stay in fellowship, read your Bible, pray, and share your faith. These build you up spiritually and keep you *awake* rather than *asleep*.
- As to response, this is going to vary. As I said a moment ago, some trials will seem like smooth spiritual sailing, but others may seem like you've been shipwrecked.
- Recovery, however, is promised you by the fact Jesus prayed, as is still praying, for you.

We are all in one of those categories today. Whichever one it is for you, know that you can break through to victory, no matter how badly you've failed or are failing.