

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-16 The Garden of Gethsemane

When someone you love deserts you, it can be one of the worst experiences of your life. Satan's temptations in the Garden of Eden resulted in the first desertion, when Adam and Eve ran away from God and hid. Judas, a disciple Jesus loved, also ran away from him. We may find it easy to condemn Judas for deserting and betraying Jesus, but the other disciples also abandoned Jesus at his arrest. In this lesson you will learn the details of how they failed in the hour when Jesus most needed them.

After the Passover meal Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn. Then they went out the eastern gate of the city to the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron valley. From there they could look back and see the temple. They believed that soon Jesus would rule over all they saw. Though he had told them plainly, they still did not grasp the fact that Jesus was about to die.

Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." By quoting this prophecy from Zechariah, Jesus was telling them what soon would happen. He was the shepherd and the disciples were the sheep. But the good news was he would rise from the dead and meet them in Galilee. They still did not understand this part of God's plan, which Jesus described.

Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice, you yourself will disown me three times."

But Peter insisted, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same thing (Mark 14:26-31).

Peter declared his loyalty to Jesus. He couldn't imagine ever denying that he knew his Lord. Jesus told him it would happen before the sun rose the very next morning. There would even be a sign to remind Peter of his words. A rooster would crow a second time, after Peter had denied Jesus three times. These were very strong words from Jesus, and all the others agreed with Peter that they could never desert their Master.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to an olive garden called 'Gethsemane,' which means 'oil press.' It was on a quiet hillside, a place Jesus had often gone to pray. He said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Jesus took the three men with him a little farther into the garden. These three, Peter, James and John, made up his inner trusted circle. Now they would share in his agony as he faced

the cross. Peter was the chief apostle and the brothers had affirmed they could endure anything for Jesus. They had the chance to back up their words with action, but they failed.

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The temptation here was to be unfaithful in face of the threatening circumstances facing them.

He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing (Matt 26:36-44).

Luke, in his Gospel, tells us that an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:43-44).

The first prayer asked that this judgment be taken away. The picture of God’s wrath against human sin and rebellion as a cup to drink was a frequent picture used in the Old Testament. The cup Jesus had to drink refers to divine punishment of sins that he bore in place of sinful mankind. Even as Jesus asked for another way to purchase salvation, he surrendered to the Father’s plan. He knew the kind of terrible physical pain and death he would suffer. But worse, he dreaded taking on the guilt of all the sins of the whole world. The second time, his prayer changed and he accepted that he had to drink the bitter cup. The third time he prayed, it was for the same thing, for the Father’s will to be done.

Jesus understood the continuous battle between the spirit and the flesh of people. The Spirit of God working in people desires to do God’s will and strives against human weakness. The desires of the flesh, however, are often more powerful. As a human, Jesus experienced all the temptations common to people. When he came back to the disciples, he again found them sleeping. He said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” (Matt 26:45-46).

Even though Jesus did not want to face this struggle alone, the disciples failed to understand what was happening. They disappointed him. Their spirits were willing, but their flesh was weak. They did not discern his sorrow and could not stay awake to pray. He let them sleep on, while he struggled alone in prayer. After a while, Judas arrived with the soldiers to arrest Jesus. The time of spiritual battle was finished. After a short struggle and arrest, Jesus would again be alone, deserted by the disciples.

This story is **important** because it shows the humanity of Jesus as he faced the cross. He desired the disciples to be near as he struggled with fulfilling the plan of God. We need to support one another in prayer, during times of difficulty and pain.

The **main truth** of this story is that though Jesus struggled with facing the cross, through prayer he was able to receive strength to do God's will. In the same way, through prevailing prayer, God will give us the strength to follow his leading.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why did Jesus separate three of the disciples from the others as he prayed in Gethsemane?
A. [Pause] If you answered Jesus took Peter, James and John separately because they were his inner circle of closest disciples, you are correct.
2. What did Jesus say to Peter, James and John when they slept instead of praying with him in the garden?
A. [Pause] You are correct if you answered that Jesus said, "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?"
3. What was the greatest struggle Jesus endured as he faced the cross?
A. [Pause] If you said, "The greatest struggle Jesus faced was not physical death itself, but how he would take on the guilt of all the sins of the whole world," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. After you tell it to a fellow believer, ask them these questions, "What part of God's plan for your life has been most difficult for you to surrender to? How did you overcome in this struggle?"