

Every commander is familiar with this military tactic: to scatter and weaken an army, bring down their leader. No earthly commander is as cunning as the devil himself. And so, in Gethsemane, we see him using this tactic to perfection.

Jesus saw it coming. Not because He was able to look ahead into the future, but because He knew the Scriptures. Zechariah had prophesied five hundred years earlier, "*Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*" And so it would happen, for the Scriptures cannot be broken. They declared that one of the Twelve would betray the Shepherd, and that all the others would fall away from the Shepherd.

Let God be true and every man a liar. But Peter would reverse this proverb. "What I say is true, and so what the Scriptures say is a lie. *I will not fall away,*" he tells Jesus. "Even if James and John do, and the others, *I will not.*"

Pretty bold to say such words as these. Have you ever said them? I have heard them said from church members who should know better. "I will never fall away from Jesus." Another proverb tells us that pride goes before a fall. It is inevitable, for again, the Scriptures declare it. "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*"

But not me. I will never lose my faith. I will never fall away. To say such words as these, that one is already falling. Their eyes are not on Jesus but on themselves.

This was Peter and all the others that night in Gethsemane. And so, after the devil comes in with Judas and the crowd wielding swords and clubs to strike the Shepherd, what happens to His disciples is told to us in these few words, "*they all left Him and fled.*"

"*Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*" Is there any doubt that these words come from the devil's own playbook? Oh, but they don't. They come from God's. For just before these words in Zechariah, we hear this, "*Awake, O Sword, against My Shepherd...declares the Lord of hosts.*" But this is absurd! What king would give orders to have his own general struck down in the field of battle? God is such a king. It is in His playbook, if we dare call it that, to have His beloved Shepherd struck so that the sheep are scattered.

But why? Because this is the only way to save the sheep. If Jesus is not struck, that leaves us to be struck. If Jesus does not drink the awful cup, then you and I must drink it.

This goes against every military tactic in the book. Yet even the devil knew it was coming. For in a different garden, God told him, "*You shall bruise His heel. You will strike the Shepherd. You will kill Him. But His wound will not be fatal. It will be only a bruise to His heel, for He will rise again.*"

And so, in Gethsemane we see Jesus delivered into the hands of sinners to be struck. And the sheep scatter. They fall away. Do not be surprised, therefore, to see the sheep fall away today. It happens. It happens in every congregation. It is happening here. It happens among our loved ones. It can happen to any one of us. If Jesus' closest disciples could fall away, what makes us think that can never happen to us? "*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*"

Do not be alarmed. Three times we see Jesus coming to His disciples. Three times they fail to watch and pray. And so He prays for them. And He prays for you. Even more, Jesus prays to His Father that if there is no other way to save His precious sheep then, yes, He will suffer and die for them. And not for them only, but for all sinners.

Yes, Jesus' sheep are sinners. It's why we become overconfident. It's why we think too much of ourselves. It's why Peter boasted, and why he fell away. But Jesus loves sinners. Even boastful sinners. Even sinners whose pride often gets in the way. Jesus was struck for every sinner. Also for you and your loved ones.

So, yes, this means that the sheep are scattered. But it also means that the sheep have a Savior. One who dies for them but rises again. One who calls to His sheep and brings them back to Himself, back to their baptism. One who forgives His sheep for everything.

Wherever the devil has scattered you in your life, Jesus searches for you until He finds you. Whatever sinful things you have done in your life, Jesus forgives you fully and completely. There is no sin He refuses to forgive. There is not one of you who is not forgiven.

And there is not one of you who needs to be afraid. Yes, our flesh is weak. Yes, we can fall. But you have a Savior into whom you are baptized. So even if you fall, His nail-pierced hands are there for you to fall into. You always have in your baptism a place to where you can return. A place with Jesus. Amen.