

Jesus does not mince His words in the upper room. He can hardly be compared to a football coach in the locker room at halftime giving his players a pep talk. Not, “You can do it! You can make it! Just give it all you’ve got and you’ll hang in there with Me!” But rather, “*You will all fall away.* Every one of you will stumble and fail.”

And when His star player replies, “*Even though they all fall away, I will not,*” Jesus looks him in the eye and says, “*This very night before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.*” You will not win, He tells them, but you will lose. You will all lose.

And in the end, we see that Jesus is right. They all do fall away. Peter does deny Jesus three times. They do stumble and fail miserably. They lose. But actually, only one of them loses. Only Judas Iscariot. He loses everything. But the other eleven, Jesus will go before them to Galilee after He is raised from the dead, and their loss He will restore to them.

It is not easy for us to look at the disciples in this their darkest moments. Yet it is necessary. Even to look at Judas is necessary. What Jesus says to him is frightening. To no man, ever, were words like these spoken. “*Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.*”

To say of Judas, “*Better if he had not been born,*” is dreadful. But there is another way to understand these words, perhaps even more frightening: “It would have been better for Judas if Jesus had not been born.”

This fits with the Greek words here in Mark 14. But consider the seriousness of them. Had Jesus, the Son of Man, not been born, Judas would have no Savior and he would perish forever. Yet that would be better for Judas than to betray Jesus and perish forever.

What makes his sin so horrible? All the disciples here commit sin. They all stumble and fall away from Jesus. Peter denies Jesus three times. Why doesn’t Jesus say of them, as He says of Judas, “Better for all of you had I not been born!”

In betraying Jesus, Judas places himself with the enemy. He stands against Jesus, and not with Him. Yet, to deny Jesus does the same thing. So does falling away from Jesus. In fact, every sin, no matter how slight we think it is, is rebellion against our Lord, pitting us against Him.

Jesus speaks to Judas the way He does because Judas will not repent. He will confess his wrong, his sin, but he will, nonetheless, die in unbelief. For all eternity, Judas will be marked as “he who betrayed Jesus.”

But not Peter. He denied his Lord, but he repented. He received mercy; he was forgiven. Peter’s sin would not follow him to the grave. Nor would the sins of the other disciples. They would not be marked, for all eternity, as “disciples who fell away from Jesus.” They repented. Jesus forgave them. Their loss, He restored to them.

As we look at the disciples of Jesus, we cannot help but see ourselves in them. We stumble and fall in the same ways. But, just like them, we are over-confident. We think we can hang in there with Jesus; that we can end up being winners.

No, my friends. To repent is to admit that we do not have what it takes. To repent is to say with Paul: *"I count everything as loss...for (Jesus') sake, I have suffered the loss of all things."*

You and I are losers as Peter and the others were losers. Yet not in the same way that Judas was a loser. For in losing yourself, you gain Christ. In giving up on yourself, you have One who takes hold of you and refuses to let go.

Do not be afraid to confess your utter sinfulness. You have a merciful Savior who forgives you. Jesus took your sins to His grave, and so, your sins will not follow you to yours. You will not be marked, for all eternity, as a sinner who rebelled against God. But rather, you are marked forever by your baptism into Christ. Upon your forehead, and on your heart, is the mark of Christ the Crucified, and that mark cannot be taken from you. No sin that you have done can remove that mark. Instead, the Crucified One removes all the sin you have done.

One drop of His blood is more than enough to cleanse you of all sin. Into that blood you are baptized. And into His cup that blood is poured out for you to drink for the forgiveness of your sins.

This is no pep talk tonight. This is the time to repent; to give up on yourself and lose, but to lose yourself in Jesus, for in Him you win. Amen.