



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No.
1286-66
Luke 22:24-38
Mark Mitchell
June 11, 2006

God's Provision for Our Weakness

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

Have you ever experienced a family meal that for one reason or another goes sour? I'm not talking about the food, but rather the conversation and the atmosphere surrounding the food. Maybe someone doesn't mind their manners and the others jump all over him for it. Maybe two of the children begin to squabble, or even worse a husband and a wife. Or perhaps an unpleasant subject comes to the surface and all of a sudden tension covers the whole affair like cold gravy.

We know that Jesus so looked forward to spending what we know as the Last Supper with his disciples. We saw last week that he began that meal by saying: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Again, it wasn't the food he had looked forward to, but the fellowship and the opportunity to offer them some last minute instruction and encouragement. Yet, what if I told you that it ended up being one of those meals where it seemed like everything went wrong. First of all, someone was there who should have been crossed off the invitation list. His name was Judas. Not only that, but the other disciples got into a major argument over what Jesus believed was a pretty stupid topic. But don't blame it all on the disciples! Jesus himself spoiled things by bringing up some issues that nobody really wanted to talk about.

One of the things we see in this passage before us is that Jesus wasn't the kind of guy to sweep uncomfortable issues under the rug. The same thing holds true today. He's very willing to bring up and deal with areas of weakness and immaturity in all of us, but he doesn't leave us there. He also gives us help in dealing with these things. You see, he wants us to grow. He wants us to change. He doesn't want us to be stuck in a spiritual rut. That's why, when nobody else will, he'll acknowledge and identify the elephant in the living room. Maybe you're in that place today, where life has become very uncomfortable because God keeps exposing issues that you have to face.

In the passage before us, three areas of weakness and immaturity are exposed in the disciples.

I. The disciples exhibit three areas of weakness and immaturity.

A. Dissension: The first area is seen in v.24. "And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest." Here

their immaturity is manifest in a dispute over which of them was regarded as the greatest. Notice how Luke puts it: "regarded as the greatest." Not who was the greatest but who did others regard to be the greatest? The issue was over what others thought of them. What's rather shocking is the context in which this dispute took place. Jesus had just finished with the Lord's Supper. He's given them this solemn visual illustration of how he'll offer his body and his blood for them. Yet here they're totally self-consumed about what others think of them. What knuckleheads! Perhaps it was because Jesus had just got done announcing that a betrayer was among them. As they discussed which of them it might be, that could have sparked their egos a bit. I kind of imagine they were trying to hide it from Jesus, but he knew. This was an argument that had been going on for some time because we saw the same thing back in chapter nine. And no doubt they had plenty of bad examples around them to feed their immaturity. Jesus says the mentality of that day amongst pagan kings was to domineer and lord it over people, all the while giving themselves pleasant sounding titles like "Benefactor" or "Your Grace" or "Your Royal Munificence."

Of course, we don't have this problem today. Yeah, right! We haven't changed at all. This same scene is played out in board rooms and gymnasiums and university campuses and churches all the time. And just as we see here, pride and ego and a selfish preoccupation with how people view us will always manifest itself in dissension and disputes. I coach a baseball team of 13 and 14 year old boys and one of the things I love about that age is that they're so up front about their egos. They don't try to hide it. They argue all the time about who can hit the ball farther or throw that ball faster or who has the biggest biceps. They're just really up front about it. I kind of like that. We adults have far more subtle and manipulative ways of preening.

Recently I was at a graduation ceremony and someone introduced me to someone else as the pastor of this church. I kind of figured she would know who I was; she would have heard of me and she would have known what I did and what an important guy I was. And then she asked me, "Don't you work construction on the side?" I couldn't believe it. I pretended to be unfazed, but my ego was bruised. I could hardly finish the conversation. I thought to myself, "She should know that a guy with my responsibilities doesn't work construction on the side!" I sat down and the Holy Spirit whispered, "You're so proud." I

get what the disciples are doing here. I'm just like them.

B. Denial: The second area of immaturity is found in Peter. Look at vv. 31-34. **"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'** But he said to Him, **'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!'** And He said, **'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.'**" Jesus calls him "Simon" twice to underscore the importance of what he's about to say. "Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat." We saw Satan back in v.3 when he entered into Judas. Now we see that he's going after the rest of the disciples. When he says "sift you like wheat" he is using the plural, which means he was asking to sift all of them, not just Simon Peter. And we know that all of them would fail Jesus in the crucial hour.

By the way, notice who is in charge. Who is asking for permission? Satan. Who is he asking? God. Who is in charge of what happens to you? God. And by the way, what does the Enemy want to do? Sift you like wheat. In other words, he wants to take you apart (spiritually). God sifts you in order to get rid of the useless chaff. Satan sifts you in order to get rid of the wheat. He wants your faith to fail. He wants to pick you off. He'll do everything he can to get you off track in your walk with God, but don't forget, he's not in charge!

For Peter, the immaturity wasn't in his being a target, but rather in his overconfidence. He says, "Satan can't get to me. I'm ready to go to prison and even to death for you, Jesus!" That's where the real problem lies. When you think you're strong; when you think you could never fall; when you think you're beyond the Enemy's reach because you're just so committed to Jesus, watch out. 1 Cor. 10:12, **"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."**

When I do premarital counseling, I like to find out how much idealism this couple has about their future marriage. One of the questions I like to ask is whether or not they believe that anything could happen to cause them to question their love for that person. Far too many of them say, "No way. Nothing could ever happen to cause me to question my love for her." When they say that, I'm like a lion chasing down an antelope. I go after that because there are a lot of things that can happen and will happen in even the best of marriages that will cause them to question.

You see, that was Peter's problem and that's our problem. "Nothing could ever happen, Jesus, to

cause me to fail in my commitment to you." Jesus says, "Yeah, well, before the night's over you will have denied me not once, not twice, but three times!"

C. Dullness: The third area of immaturity is seen in vv. 35-38. **"And He said to them, 'When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?'** They said, **'No, nothing.'** And He said to them, **'But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, "AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS"; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment.'** They said, **'Lord, look, here are two swords.'** And He said to them, **'It is enough.'**" On two earlier occasion, Luke has told us that Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the gospel with no provisions. And as Jesus suggested, they were provided for by receptive listeners. But now with his trial, arrest and death on the horizon, he knew that their ministry experience would change. Just as he was treated like a transgressor or an outlaw, so would they be. So he tells them that they may need a purse and a bag and maybe even a sword. He wants them to be realistic about the new situation. Notice that in their response, the apostles focus on the sword, "Look, here are two swords." And then Jesus says, "It is enough." Do you know what that means? It means, "Drop it!" You see, we know that Jesus was not being literal here about taking a sword because later when Peter drew a sword and cut off a guy's ear, Jesus ordered him to stop and healed the guy. But these guys just didn't get it and Jesus has had it up to here with them. One commentator says "It is enough" might even be rendered, "I give up!"

This third area of immaturity is what I would call dullness. They just don't get it! So often, we just don't get it either. We think we can use the world's weapons to fight a spiritual battle. We misconstrue the Lord's words to fit into our own preconceived notions of what he should be doing. He says, "Ask and you shall receive" and we think that means we can have a fatter bank account. He says, "Not a hair on your head will perish," and we expect the world to come to our defense. He says, "Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," and we think we should go buy a shotgun. Talk about dullness!

So we have seen three areas of immaturity: dissension, denial, and dullness. Do you see any of this in yourself? Because that's what this passage is trying to do. It's supposed to be a mirror in which we look and see something of ourselves. And it's kind of like that first look at yourself when you get out of bed; it's not a real flattering picture! But the great thing about this passage is that in each case Jesus gives us the antidote; he tells us something of his own provision for our own weakness. So let's go back through this and see what that is.

II. The Lord explains his provision for their weakness and immaturity.

A. His provision for dissension is his promise:

First of all, what does he offer us as an antidote to our ego-centered disputes and maneuvering over who is the greatest? Look at vv.25-27. **“And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called “Benefactors.” But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.’”** He clearly says “it is not to be this way with you. With you the greatest is to be like the youngest and the leader like the servant.” That’s pretty clear. He doesn’t mean that to rise to great heights in the church or the world you have to start at the bottom, but rather that taking the lowly place is in and of itself true greatness. And he uses none other than himself as an example. We all know that the one who reclines at the table is greater than the one who serves the food. But, Jesus says, “Here I am serving you. Are you greater than me?”

I have to tell you this illustration hits home for me. While I was in seminary in Denver I worked as a waiter. I served tables. And to be honest it was some of the hardest work I’ve ever done. Part of what made it hard is that it was so humbling. You really have no rights as a waiter. The person at the table is always right. They get whatever they want. You’re at their mercy, even for a tip! But I have to tell you, the education I got waiting tables was every bit as important as the education I got studying theology in the classroom. And, honestly, I try to think of what I do as a pastor as just waiting tables. During the week, I’m getting the food ready. On Sundays, I’m serving it up. And when I start to think I’m something special, I just try to remember what it felt like to be a 30 year old waiter having teenagers boss me around (I’m still mad about it!).

Let me ask you, would the people in your family say you’re a servant? Would people at work see you as a servant? Would your neighbors see you as a servant? How about your church? Are you better than Jesus? How about in your marriage? Do you compete over who can out serve one another? Think of how few marital problems there would be if that were the case. “You are leaving your husband. Why is that?” “Well, he serves me too much.” I’ve never heard that!

But what I want you to see here is that Jesus gives us a promise that I believe is the key to learning to be a servant. It’s in vv.28-30. **“You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** That’s a promise. So the reason you can serve now; the reason you can take the

lower place now; the reason you can take it even when you’re treated like dirt is that you know the day is coming when you will have status and authority in his kingdom. I believe there is a profound psychological insight in this. Usually, it’s the most insecure people who are the most ambitious and self-centered. Their insecurity drives them to fight for their position, just like we see the disciples doing here. But Jesus says, “Look what you have to look forward to. Look how important you are in my kingdom.” So I can let go of my need to be recognized as great on earth because of who I am there.

B. His provision for denial is his prayer and restoration:

Second, he offers us his provision for our denial. He says to Simon Peter, “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail...” Notice he does not offer Peter advice. He doesn’t say, “Peter, here are three tips to keep you from falling.” No, he says, “I have prayed for you.” And we know that one of the present ministries of Christ on our behalf is that he intercedes for us to the Father (Heb. 7:24-25). It’s worth asking, “Was this prayer for Peter answered?” You might say, “Well, no. He denied Christ. His faith failed.” But there is no question this prayer was answered. Peter’s faith faltered, but it didn’t fail. He didn’t lose faith, like Judas. After Peter faltered he turned back to the Lord. That’s why Jesus goes on and says, “...and you, when once you have turned again, will strengthen your brothers.” Not only does Jesus say, “I’ll pray for you,” but he also says, “You’ll turn back to me and when you do you’ll be restored to ministry. You’ll strengthen your brothers. You’ll be a greater help to them in your weakness than you were in your strength.” So Peter’s failure would become the raw material for a real ministry. Why? Because through his failure he would become not self confident but God confident. He’d know the secret, “When I’m weak, then I’m strong.”

Failure can be the best thing that ever happened to you, even spiritual failure. Fred Smith wrote, “Anything is possible with God, even failure.” Failure can become the foundation for a whole new way of living. Failure can become the very thing that propels you into the strong arms of God. Failure can launch you into a life of dependence on his power rather than your own. It will make you more compassionate with those who are struggling. If you’ve failed the Lord in some way, you’re in good company. You’re right there along with Moses, Abraham, Sarah, David, Elijah, Solomon, Mary and Peter. I’m not telling you to go out and fail. I’m telling you that you will fail, but your failure doesn’t have to be the end. Christ prays for you, that even in your failure your faith would not fail, and that in your failure you would turn back to him, and you would strengthen others because your strength is in him.

C. His provision for dullness is his death:

Finally, he offers his provision for our dullness. The disciples wanted to take up swords, but Jesus provides the antidote to that in v.37. He quotes from Isaiah 53:12, **“And he was numbered with transgressors.”** If we go back to Isaiah 53 we can see why this whole passage was on his heart. It’s all about what we call the passion of Christ. Verse 3 says, **“He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief”** (v.3a). And then he goes on and says, **“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth”** (v.7). Finally, v.12, **“Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.”**

The disciples say, “We’ve got two swords here. We’ll use them!” Jesus says, “I have a different way. It’s the way of death. And through my death, victory will come.” The whole point of saying that, the whole point of going back to Isaiah 53, was to remind them that they would be treated the same way that he was. They would be considered transgressors and outlaws. But the promise of victory is for them as well, “He who loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will find it.”

The antidote for the dullness of mind that says, “We can expect fair treatment in this world,” is to remember that our Master was considered a transgressor. The antidote for thinking that we should take up a literal sword instead of the sword of the Spirit is to remember that Jesus was a like a lamb that was led to slaughter, and a sheep that was silent before its shearers. Should we be any different?

Let me ask you, is there anyone at all who doesn’t like you because you’re a follower of Christ? Anyone who excludes you? Anyone who ignores you? Anyone who slanders you? Anyone who hates you? You don’t have to try to make them do those things. Just follow Christ, and sooner or later you too will be numbered with transgressors.

CONCLUSION

You can’t read this passage without being struck by two things. First, we’re incredibly weak. In our insecurity, we jostle for recognition. In our self-confidence, we deny the Lord we love. In our dullness, we think we can defend ourselves with the world’s weapons. Let me encourage you, in light of this shocking revelation of our shared immaturity and weakness, let’s humble ourselves before him and one another. Stop playing games. When you see any of these things in your life, be honest to call it what it is. Whatever is denied, can’t be healed.

But the second thing is this: He’s incredibly sufficient. In our insecurity, he’s given us a promise that we will eat at his table and exercise judgment in his kingdom. In our failure, he has given us the promise of his intercession and restoration. And in our dullness about what to expect from this world, he has invited us to join him as one numbered with transgressors.