

Jesus in the Garden

(Matthew 26:30-56)

Introduction

Have you ever denied Jesus? Have you ever lived as though He is not important to you, or that you don't know Him? Have you ever pretended to not be a believer when you're around certain friends? Did you know that every one of Jesus' disciples did this right before Jesus died?

All the disciples swore that they would die before disowning Jesus. But just a few hours later, they all ran away. Talk is cheap. It is easy to say we are devoted to Jesus, but our words are meaningless if our faith is not strong.

Opening Prayer

Father, we want to walk our talk. We want our faith to be strong enough to stand up under intense trial. Please give us the strength of character to mean what we say when we express our love for You. Give us the strength we need to remain always faithful and true to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Lesson

Review....

For the past few Sundays, we've been learning about the last week of Jesus' life. One week before His death, Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. He and His disciples had come to town to celebrate Passover. As He rode in, many people thought he was riding in like a king, so they waved palm branches at Him and laid

down their clothes for the donkey to walk over like a red carpet. They shouted, "*Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

The night before His death, Jesus and His disciples had the Passover meal together. Jesus knew it was His last night on earth. He knew He would return to God the Father from where He came. Before going back to heaven, He wanted to give His disciples some last-minute instructions to get them ready for His death. He got them all together in the upper room and had the last supper with them.

Before dinner the devil spoke to Judas' heart and told him that this was the night to carry out his plan to betray Jesus. But before Judas did that evil deed, Jesus established what we call the Lord's Supper when He asked His disciples to eat broken bread and drink wine in remembrance of His sacrifice on the cross.

After that Jesus got up, took off His robe, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet and to wipe them with the towel He had around Him. He wanted to teach them an important spiritual lesson: If He, their Lord, was willing to humble Himself and be a servant by washing their feet, then they should be willing to serve others, also.

After supper, Judas left to tell the priests where they could find Jesus.

Then, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn and went out to a garden on the Mount of Olives. This was a special place for Jesus; He often went there to pray.

Matthew 26:30

Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

On their way to the garden, Jesus told His disciples a shocking thing...

Matthew 26:31-32

On the way, Jesus told them, "Tonight all of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say, 'God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' (32) But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there."

The disciples had faithfully followed Jesus for three years. Certainly, they would not leave Him now; they would be loyal!

Sometimes it is easier to say you're a loyal, faithful follower of His than to *be* one. To be loyal means to be true to those who deserve your faithful love and support. At times it is very difficult to be loyal.

Can you think of times when it's hard to be a loyal follower of Jesus? How about when you're around people that are making fun of Christians? You might be tempted to act like you don't know Him.

People can tell if you are a true follower of Jesus by the way you dress and talk and act. Your attitudes and actions will reveal whether you follow Jesus or not. It is by God's grace that you and I can have courage to keep from denying the Lord Jesus.

The best way to guard against turning from Jesus at a difficult time is to pray. God promises special strength "*in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16). Be on guard and pray for strength to be loyal to Jesus.

I know that you who love the Lord Jesus want to be loyal to Him. That is how the disciples felt, too. They would surely not turn away from Him.

When Jesus told the disciples that they would all deny that they even knew Him, Peter strongly protested.

Matthew 26:33-35

Peter declared, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you." (34) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me." (35) "No!" Peter insisted. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples vowed the same.

Peter and all the disciples insisted that they would remain loyal and true to Jesus no matter what!

When they came to the garden Jesus told them to stay on guard by the garden gate while He prayed.

Matthew 26:36-38

Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." (37) He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. (38) He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Jesus took Peter, James and John to pray with Him and began to plead with God the Father that He might not have to die this awful death. "*Stay awake with Me,*" Jesus asked. "*My heart is breaking with sorrow and sadness.*"

Matthew 26:39

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Jesus knew what was going to happen; He knew He was going to face a cruel and painful death the next day. He, who had never sinned, was to be judged a sinner and treated as one. He was to be blamed for the sins of everyone in the whole world. But He also knew that there was no other way to deliver mankind from sin's penalty and power. He prayed, "*Father, if it is possible, don't let Me go through the terrible suffering that lies ahead. But let Your will be done, not Mine.*" He knew it must happen. If He were to give up now there would be no hope, no salvation for anybody. That's why He said, "*Your will be done, not Mine.*"

Jesus was sorrowful. He was feeling the weight of the sin of the world. Have you ever thought about how terrible sin really is? [Teacher, allow children to discuss.]

It was Jesus' love for you and me that made Him willing to go through this agony. We can't even imagine what pain Jesus suffered. Although Jesus was dreading the awful ordeal ahead, He would carry out His Father's will because of His great love for us.

Matthew 29:40-41

Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? (41) Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”

Here Jesus was praying in agony and He found His three best friends asleep! Not only did Jesus need their support, but Jesus knew what was ahead for them, too. He knew they needed to pray for God’s strength, as well.

Matthew 29:42-44

Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, “My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.” (43) When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open. (44) So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again.

Three times Jesus had prayed for strength to do God’s will; three times He had found the disciples sleeping. Jesus knew they wanted to be true to Him. That’s why He warned them to watch and pray! He had wanted them to also ask God for help.

As Christians, we, too, want to be loyal to Jesus. But sometimes we fail Him. Can you think of a promise you have made to Him, but didn’t keep? [Teacher, allow children to respond — to obey parents, to read your Bible and pray, to give money to missionaries, to witness.]

How can we remain loyal to the Lord? Not by trusting in our own strength; if we do that, we will fail (Rom 7:18, 24, 25). We need God’s grace — the strength we gain through prayer. The Lord commands us to watch and pray. James 5:16 says, “*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man [a person who is right before God] avails much [it is powerful]!*” God will give you courage to stand for Him when you are tempted. So be on guard, and pray for strength to be loyal to Jesus. The disciples lost their chance to gain strength through prayer because they slept. Little did they know what would happen.

Matthew 26:45-46

Then he came to the disciples and said, “Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look—the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. (46) Up, let’s be going. Look, my betrayer is here!”

While Jesus was telling the disciples that the one who would betray Him was coming, suddenly the darkness was shattered by torchlight. A mob, including Roman soldiers, surged through the garden gate, their swords glistening in the moonlight.

Matthew 26:47-50

And even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests and elders of the people. (48) The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: “You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss.” (49) So Judas came straight to Jesus. “Greetings, Rabbi!” he exclaimed and gave him the kiss. (50) Jesus said, “My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for.” Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him.

Judas walked up to Jesus and kissed Him. This was the sign that Judas had said he would give. (Just as we greet each other with a hand shake, greeting someone with a hug and a kiss on either cheek is still a custom in most European and Eastern cultures.) The soldiers moved forward to arrest Jesus.

Matthew 26:51-54

But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest’s slave, slashing off his ear. (52) “Put away your sword,” Jesus told him. “Those who use the sword will die by the sword. (53) Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? (54) But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?”

Peter was furious. He pulled out a sword and lashed out wildly, cutting off the ear of one of the high priest’s servants. Peter did not understand God’s will in this situation. Jesus reminded him that He could call armies of angels to fight for Him. But Jesus’ arrest was all

part of God's plan. This was a fulfillment of prophecy. (Isaiah 50:6; 53:2-11.) [Note: a legion is 6,000; 12 legions is 72,000.]

Matthew 26:55-56

Then Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. (56) But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures." At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.

The frightened disciples watched as Jesus allowed the soldiers to take Him away. In panic and despair, the disciples deserted Jesus and fled. Just as Jesus said they would, the disciples turned away from Him and ran away when they could have been loyal to Him.

If you had been in the garden that night, what do you think you would have done?

What will you do or say when someone asks you if you are a Christian? Will you speak up for Jesus? Remember, as you pray, God will give you His grace — His special strength to face every situation. God promises you will "*find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16).

You will be strengthened by God as you read His Word and pray. This week will you be on guard and pray for strength to be loyal to Jesus?

Closing Prayer

Father, we pray that we will always be able to keep watch and pray. Don't let us get side tracked in our thoughts as we pray for Your direction in our lives. Then, Lord, help us to be able to say, as Jesus did, "*Not My will, but Your will be done.*" Jesus is our example of trusting in Your plan for our lives, no matter what! We pray for that kind of strength and loyalty to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Peek Box Scene (see page 168)

Game Center

Use the following review questions in a game of your choice. For example, print each question on a separate piece of paper. Wad the papers up and let the children have a "snow ball" fight with them. When you say, "Stop!" they have to take turns answering the question in their "snow ball."

1. What shocking thing did Jesus tell His disciples as they walked over to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives? (All of you will be made to stumble, that is they would deny that they ever knew Him.)
2. What does it mean to deny the Lord Jesus? (To live as though He's not important to you.)
3. Which of the disciples strongly protested when Jesus told the disciples they would all deny that they ever knew Him? (Peter)
4. What does it mean to be loyal? (To be true to those who deserve your faithful love and support.)
5. Why is it sometimes easier to say that you are a loyal, faithful follower of Jesus than to be one? (You have to risk being different than the crowd; dare to go against what your friends think is cool.)
6. What is the best way to guard against turning away from Jesus at a difficult time? (To pray. Ask for the strength it takes to be loyal.)

7. What did Jesus ask Peter, James, and John to do while He prayed? (Stay here and watch with Me.)
8. What did His disciples do while Jesus prayed? (They fell asleep.)
9. Fill in these blanks: When Jesus came to the disciples and found them sleeping, He said, "The spirit indeed is _____, but the flesh is _____." (willing; weak.)
10. How did Judas show the Roman soldiers who Jesus was? (He greeted Him with a kiss.)
11. When the soldiers came and arrested Jesus, what did Peter do? (Peter drew his sword and cut off the soldier's ear.)
12. If you had been in the garden that night when they came to arrest Jesus, what do you think you would have done?
13. What will you do or say next time someone asks you if you are a Christian?

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