



THE EASTER EXPERIENCE

“Deserted By His Followers”

Matthew 26-27

March 20, 2011 P.M. Service

Our Response:

1. Tonight, do you realize who Jesus is and what He did for you on the cross? Have you given Him your heart and your life? It's as simple as ABC. **Admit** to God you are a sinner, **Ask** for His forgiveness, **Believe** Jesus is God's Son, **Confess** Him as Savior & **Commit** Your Life to Him as Lord. (the Boss of your life)
2. Have you asked Christ into you heart, but never made it public? Have you been baptized? If not, you can make that decision today and be obedient and follow through and become a part of the Bethsalem Family.
3. Do you need a church home – without one a Christian is an orphan. Don't just attend – step over the line today and join this family! We need you and you need us.
- 4.

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As Jesus hangs from the tree and looks out, He sees the soldiers have dismissed Him as they role the dice for His clothes. He sees the Romans that have tortured and beaten Him. He sees His own people who rejected Him as they shouted, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” But perhaps the response that was most troubling to Jesus was that of His closest followers. With the exception of John, the rest of the disciples had abandoned Him. For several years they hadn’t left the side of Jesus. They had left everything to follow Him. But now, in His greatest hour of need, they were nowhere to be seen. When things got really hard the disciples deserted Jesus. Have you ever been deserted in your greatest hour of need?

ILLUS: Did you hear about the Desert Storm soldier a number of years ago who received a “Dear John” letter from his girlfriend back home in the states. In the letter she said she had met someone else and they were getting married. To add insult to injury, she wrote, “Will you please return my favorite photograph of myself? I need it for my engagement picture in the local newspaper.” Ouch! Talk about feeling deserted and rejected. The poor guy was devastated, but all the soldiers came to his rescue. They went throughout the entire camp and collected pictures of all the guys’ girlfriends. They filled up an entire shoebox and sent it to the girl along with a note from the guy saying, “Please find your picture, and return the rest, because for the life of me, I can’t remember which one you were!”

Nobody likes to see someone betrayed or hurt, especially when the rejection comes from someone to whom we’ve felt very close. It was one thing for the crowds and the soldiers to turn against Jesus, but where were the disciples? Nowhere to be found. Their response to Jesus changed when life got hard. The challenges of life often reveal our true response to Jesus. This week we’re going to consider life’s ultimate question in the context of life’s hardships. *When life gets hard what do you do with Jesus?*

When we talk about the deserting disciples we typically focus on Judas who betrayed, or Peter who denied; but the response of the other disciples was just as indicting.

Their desertion seems surprising. After all, they had seen incredible miracles. They watched as Jesus made the lame to walk, the blind to see, and turned funeral processions into family reunions. Why would friends leave such a man after all of this? It seems incredible until we examine our own hearts and histories and realize they weren't much different then than we are now. Lets' look at a few of the disciples' stories and why they deserted Jesus at this time.

1. The Disciples' Story

[Read Matthew 26:36-46](#) He had asked His closest companions to be in prayer. But after a big meal and a stressful, long day they began to zone out. He asked them to pray, and they tried to, but they just couldn't do it. The phrase that I want you to write down or remember when you think of the disciples' story is **FATIGUE AND FEAR**. That's why they deserted Christ. It was because of *fatigue and fear*. When Jesus requested their prayers, they wanted to comply, but they were too tired.

Have you ever felt so tired that you had a hard time staying awake? Maybe you have felt like this during an interview you were conducting with someone, or perhaps with a date during a movie. Maybe you had a mandatory training class and you just couldn't keep your eyes open. Maybe it was a more recent time . . . like right now.

The disciples awakened to a crowd of people who had come to arrest Jesus. What an overwhelming scene. Torches, soldiers, and weapons surround them. It appears when they had the opportunity they ran out of fear to save their hide. [Matthew 26:55](#) *At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

These guys had been close to Jesus. Inwardly they enjoyed the position of popularity and some had even longed for positions of power and prestige when Jesus would come into His Kingdom. When it appeared that the

future meant bleeding with Jesus instead of leading with Jesus, their commitment faltered.

Jesus said to His sleeping disciples, “[The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.](#)” I wonder if that sounds familiar. Our intentions are good, but often we’re just too tired to do what we know we should. Instead of spend thirty minutes in prayer; we end up spending thirty minutes watching reality TV. We intend to wake up early to spend some time reading the Bible, but we hit the snooze button a few times. We know what kind of parent God wants us to be, but at the end of a long workday instead of spending time with our kids and praying with them, we put them to sleep and we plop down in front of the TV or surf the net. Maybe, for you, it’s not so much *fatigue* but *fear*. Like the disciples, perhaps you desert Jesus when you fear that He’s going to demand more from you than you really want to give. You have this fear of commitment. You want a relationship with Jesus, but you don’t want it to cost you anything. As long as it’s convenient, comfortable, and working to your advantage, you’re in. But when following Him starts to take you down an unpredictable path of sacrifice, you bail. The disciples’ story is one of *fatigue and fear*. Is yours?

2. Simon Peter’s Story

Simon Son of Bar-Jonah It was a common name, over 7 Simons mentions in the Gospels alone. Petras or Peter meaning rock became sort of a nickname. The Aramaic equivalent was Cephas. So why did Jesus change his name then? He wanted his nickname to be a constant reminder of who he should be. From this point forward whenever He called him Simon it was a reminder that he was acting like his old self, but when Peter he was acting like the rock. He was a fisherman by trade. He and his brother Andrew were heirs to the family fishing business centered in Capernaum. They caught fish on the Sea of Galilee. They were originally from a small village called Bethsaida on the north shore of the lake. We know also that Peter was married because Jesus healed his mother-in-law. We do not know if he had children or not. Peter is the leading spokesman for the disciples. He is essentially the unofficial lead disciple and along with James and John was especially close to Jesus. Peter was the leader of the

group, his name is mentioned more than any other name except Jesus. He spoke the most and Jesus spoke to him the most. No one was rebuked as much as he was, yet no one was praised and blessed as much as he was. Earlier in [Matthew 26](#), just before His prayer time in the Mount of Olives, Jesus says to His disciples, “[You all are going to fall away and desert Me tonight.](#)” They can’t believe it! Peter says in Matt. 26:33–35. “[Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.](#)” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “[this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.](#)” But Peter declared, “[Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.](#)” And all the other disciples said the same. Do you hear the number of times Peter uses the word “I”? It’s as if he looks at the rest of the crew and says, “*You know what? These guys might disown you but not me. I am above that.*”

And he truly means it in that moment. But there were no soldiers there at the moment. There was no mob at that moment. There were no swords or whips in that moment. There was just a group of people who loved Jesus. Part of his story can be found in the word **PRIDE**. He essentially says, *They might but I won’t.* Never say never! The Bible says that pride comes before a fall. Pride causes us to overestimate ourselves and underestimate our need to depend on God. Dealing with pride is difficult because very few people acknowledge or recognize it in their own lives. We have no trouble spotting this in others—but rarely see it in ourselves. Pride is blinding. [Obadiah 3](#) says, “[The pride of your heart has deceived you.](#)” In other words, what’s keeping you from seeing the pride in your life is the pride in your life. If you say, “*I don’t have a problem with pride,*” understand that it’s pride that’s making you say that. Pride keeps Peter from recognizing his vulnerability. When challenges come, the source of our confidence is exposed. And now we skip ahead in the chapter and see Simon Peter’s story unfolding after the arrest of Christ. Peter follows at a safe distance to find out what is happening with Jesus. Read [Matthew 26:69–75](#) [Luke 22:61](#) adds an additional specific detail that you can picture in your mind. He tells us that when Peter cursed and denied Christ for the third time, The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Evidently, Jesus was being led from Caiaphas’s house and it was God’s timing that at that moment their eyes met. The look from Jesus wasn’t a haughty “I told you so.” I don’t think it was like that at all. I think

it was disappointment that a friend had let Him down. Before we are too hard on him, remember the rest of the story and who he became and the mighty ways that God used him...wouldn't have happened without this moment in his life for it prepared him to be the courageous leader he wanted to be for the Lord!

3. Judas's Story

Judas' name meant "praise Yahweh" or "Jehovah leads"

He seemingly was called just like the rest of the disciples, and he choose to follow. It seems however most likely that he followed much like Simon the zealot followed him for selfish reason until he allowed the Lord to change his heart. Judas never allowed Jesus to do that. Instead he became more deceitful and farther from being a disciple every day. The lies had to only increase to cover himself of his true motives. He was a selfish man, who wanted wealth, fame, and power and thought that Jesus would provide him just that. A fairly good case though can be made that, until the betrayal, Judas was one of Jesus' closest friends. He had been put in charge of the moneybag. If we understand the seating arrangements in the Jewish culture and if we look at the studies of the conversations they had at the Last Supper, it would appear that John was on Jesus' right hand and Judas was on His left hand. Judas had what was called the place for the honored guest, the place of the intimate friend. If you were on *Family Feud* and they said, "One hundred people surveyed, name someone who betrayed a friend" . . . Judas would be at the top of the list. You may have thought about naming your newborn son after Peter, Andrew, James, or John, but I bet Judas probably didn't make your top 5. Of the twelve disciples Judas was the only outsider. All of the others were from Galilee. He came from a region called Kerioth, which was in southern Judah. He is often mischaracterized. When Jesus said to the disciples, "One of you will betray Me," the other eleven didn't point and say, "I'll bet it's Judas. Look at those eyebrows."

It wasn't like that at all. Anytime you see a painting or drawing of Judas they always have him looking very sinister as if he is up to something. That's not accurate. In fact, if you think about it, usually the most trusted individual of the group is the one put in charge of the money.

But Judas was a master actor, the ultimate hypocrite. The others, outside of Jesus, didn't have a clue that he was not what he portrayed himself to be. He very effectively blended into the group so well that he was never even suspected. *Like Judas, we can fool our friends and families. We can even fool ourselves. We can pretend to be something we really are not. Our hands can be clean, but our hearts can be dirty. And, like Judas, we can never fool God, for he sees our hearts and ignores our hands. He knows, because He is God!*

What was ultimately revealed about Judas is that he had a love for money and a love for power! He ended up deserting Jesus so he could pursue money and power. I am sure he was there when Jesus taught that you can't serve two masters. You can't serve both God and money.

A couple of words to jot down next to the story of Judas—**GREED AND DISILLUSIONMENT.**

What was it that finally led to Judas' decision to betray Jesus?

What was the final straw, the event that pushed him over the edge?

Scripture is silent on the point, but I wonder if it could have anything to do with Martha? Remember that Jesus and the Twelve went to Bethany, a village close to Jerusalem, prior to the Passover week for a time of rest and refreshment from the crowds and possibly away from the Jewish authorities who had already been plotting for some way to take Jesus out of the picture. They (the religious leaders) were most distressed with Jesus' actions and statements, mainly because He was challenging the status quo that allowed them to maintain their power and influence (and their wealth as well). He was especially hard on them, cutting them absolutely no slack.

So, when Martha washed Jesus' feet with an expensive perfume (one that would have cost an entire year's wages for the average worker), Judas piously complained that this extravagant act was not only unnecessary, but also wasteful. Why, it could have been sold and given to the poor! Yeah, or it could have been sold and the money put in the bag where Judas could have taken it for his own use. But Judas' deception was masterful, for the other disciples joined right in the chorus of disagreement.

Power and greed...a deadly combination. Perhaps coincidentally, perhaps intentionally, Judas went straight from Bethany to the religious leaders to offer up his Master in exchange for money. Instead of a year's wages, he

received the price that would have been paid for the lowest slave—30 pieces of silver.

Or, on the other hand, could Judas have been trying to force Jesus' hand? If he really believed that Jesus was the Messiah and the Messiah he had in mind was a military one that would be all powerful, maybe Judas was thinking that he could force Jesus' hand and make Him act. Maybe he was thinking that if he put Jesus in a position where the only solution was a show of force that Jesus would have to respond with force, rather than with the restraint that He had always seemed to exercise. By bringing 600 Roman soldiers with him, he certainly was putting Jesus in that position. Who knows? In either case, the culprit was the same. It was the sin of putting himself above God, the sin of selfishness. Not being willing to wait to see what Jesus, the Messiah, would do. Exercising his will over that of his Master.

Like Judas, we often tell God what we think He should do, rather than waiting on Him to do what He has planned. And like Judas, the result is the same...God does what God wants to do and we are left with the consequences of our denial of His Lordship in our lives.

Judas had some unspoken expectations of what kind of king he thought Jesus should become. He found himself disillusioned because Jesus would not use his power to overthrow the Romans—like an earthy king might have. Over the years I've seen a number of Christians desert God because they didn't think God was doing His job. They had these unwritten expectations. *"If I'm a Christian than I won't have money issues."*

"If I'm a Christian I won't have health problems." "If I'm a Christian I'll never have to bury my own child." "If I am faithful, things will go my way, I will always be happy" and on the list goes. We expect God to provide us with a comfortable lifestyle. Jesus never promised those things. In fact He promised that in this world we would have trouble.

Whether it was a guilty conscience, or the stark realization that Jesus would not do what Judas wanted him to and exercise the military strength Judas believed to be there, Judas knew that he had made a horrible mistake, one that he tried desperately to amend by giving back the money. But just as harsh and hurtful words can not be unspoken after being given utterance, so Judas deed was done and could not be undone. He had sinned and he knew it.

Have you ever found yourself in that situation, where you had done something that you knew was wrong, something that you would just give anything to be able to undo, to make it as though it never happened? Deeds are called deeds for a simple reason; it's because they are done and can't be undone. And all of the remorse and brokenness in the universe cannot reverse them or their consequences. Ever been there?

Excerpt from sermon of John Claypool, former pastor of Northminster Baptist Church...

One of the greatest sermons Carlyle Marney ever preached is entitled *God's Strong Hands*. It is about Judas and the ultimate tragedy of his life. His undoing, Marney said, lay not in his decision to betray our Lord, dastardly as that was, but in not staying around to see what God could do with human defection. In other words, Judas' greatest sin was the sin of despair. When the full impact of what he had done finally hit him, it was more than he could stand. He seemed to himself "a broken thing, too broke to mend," a creature so contemptible as to be utterly beyond mercy. So, he took his own life—the most obvious thing to do when it appears there is no future left. What a pity, says Marney, what a gross underestimate of what God's strong hands can do with human brokenness. If he had only waited around for the final act of that awful drama—to Easter Sunday, then undoubtedly he would have heard the women exclaim: "Jesus said to go and tell the disciples and Peter and **Judas** I want to meet them in Galilee and get on with it." After all, what Judas did was not that much worse than what Peter did when he denied our Lord, or the other disciples when they deserted Him. There would have been mercy enough even for Judas, I am sure of that. **But he did not stay around to see what God can do with what we have done.** He despaired. He forgot that our there in the future there is also God power enough to make dead things come to life again and mercy enough to be willing to do so.

Please, please this morning learn from Judas and do not make the same mistake. I know a lot of things may seem broken must now—hopes, careers, families, marriages. I know to some of you, the future looks pretty drear—nothing but a lot of grave stones out there too heavy for you to move. But listen—there is also God! He can redeem and restore our tomorrow. There is power enough and mercy enough in Him to deal with

whatever brokenness you brought to this place today. It was Jesus who died on the first Good Friday. But on Easter, it was the need to despair that died. That is when God's strong hands demonstrated what they can do. This is what goes before you into the future. I ask you then...What broken thing is there too broke to mend? Nothing, nothing at all. Listen, there is future for us all. There is hope. There is also God! Hallelujah!

If you see Jesus as a wise counselor who will solve all of your problems and bring family harmony immediately, you are going to be disillusioned. Look at Jesus dying on the cross. His mother was present, but we don't read anything about His father. Maybe Joseph had died. And His brothers didn't believe on Him at this point. If you see Jesus as the great physician who will heal all of your diseases, you will be disillusioned. Look at the cross. Jesus suffered almost as no man had ever suffered, and He died at age thirty-three. It's easy to get disillusioned, happens to everyone – just ask old Job.

Has one of these factors from the disciples' stories impacted the way you have responded to Jesus? Fatigue, fear, pride, greed, disillusionment—these are part of our story as well. Ultimately for the disciples and for us, it comes down to a choice. Will we choose Jesus over comfort and security? Will we choose Jesus over ourselves? Will we choose Jesus over money? When the heat is on. When the testing comes. How will you answer life's ultimate question? How will you respond to Jesus?

ILLUS: I heard the story of an elderly missionary who was returning from the foreign field to the United States to live out the days he had left with his married daughter in the Midwest. Upon arriving on the California coast he boarded a bus to begin his trip across the country. The first night the bus stopped in Las Vegas. He had been out of the United States for more than thirty years. He had never been to Las Vegas. He checked into a hotel and took a walk down the strip. Although it was close to midnight, it looked like midday, because of all the lights. As he walked down the strip he heard the loud music, saw the amazing hotels, and even went to a car show where he saw the world's finest automobiles. He saw the games being played in the casinos and heard the money coming out of the slot machines. He saw the marquees, announcing the amazing entertainers. He saw the drink specials announced and the amazing food advertised in the

restaurants. He saw the best the world could produce held up on a platter. Eventually he went back to his room in the high-rise hotel where he was staying. He entered the room but didn't turn on the light. He walked across the room, opened the curtains. In the quietness of his room he got on his knees in front of the window, looked down at the Vegas strip, then into the more impressive lights of the heavens & prayed this prayer: "God, I thank You that tonight I haven't seen anything I want more than I want You."

"I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, I'd rather be his than have riches untold, I'd rather be led by his nailed pierced hand, I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today. I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause, I'd rather be faithful to his dear cause; I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame. I'd rather be true to his holy name. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today."