

# Christ Forsaken by His Disciples

Charles Herle (1598-1659)

John 16:32

## I. The Text Opened

### A. John 16:32

1. “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me,” (John 16:32).

a) True friends multiply joy as well as lessen misery.

b) Some of Christ’s truest friends on earth were his faithful apostles.

c) But in his time of greatest need, the prophet Isaiah describes the Lord’s experience, “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me,” (Isa. 63:3).

d) And in Psalm 69:21, “I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.”

## II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: In his time of extreme human need, Christ’s closest companions actually desert him rather than support him.

1. How truthfully he could say, “I came to my own, and my own would not receive me.”
  - a) He came to the Jews, his chosen people, and they accused him of being a glutton, a winebibber, a blasphemer, and even Beelzebub himself, (Matt. 11:19).
  - b) In his own province in Galilee he is disregarded and disesteemed, (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:4).
  - c) He comes to Jerusalem, whose inhabitants are enlightened by his sermons and amazed by his miracles, and still they break his heart.
    - (1) “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you... but you would not,” (Matt. 23:37).
    - (2) And that’s not all, for when he is arrested, Jesus is accused of treason against Caesar, sedition against the Law, enmity against the temple, and blasphemy against God.
    - (3) But this is not all.
2. When you look more closely, you find that many of his own disciples (2 Tim. 4:10) return to the love of this present world.
  - a) “Many,” the text says in John 6:66, “drew back and walked no more with him.”
  - b) But will his closest friends leave him too?
  - c) Before they have said, “Master, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life.”
    - (1) And yet, when the sun beats hottest on them, how soon are they all withered.
    - (2) One betrays him, another swears against him, but all forsake him.
  - d) What does it mean that his own apostles forsake him?
    - (1) Scripture asks that if the light itself becomes dark, how great is that darkness?
    - (2) If the salt of the world loses its saltiness, how can it be effective? (Matt. 5:13).
    - (3) So, if these cedars of Lebanon can become reeds that are shaken with the wind, let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

(4) These, “to whom it is given to know the secrets of the kingdom,” (Luke 8:10), these stewards of his mercies who dispense the alms of his bounties, those who promise “never to forsake him,” in this most difficult of times do, indeed, forsake him.

e) Had he not warned them before of this event, that he would be delivered into the hands of men? (Luke 24:7, John 16:4).

(1) Was their faith so strong before as to cast out spirits, and yet they are unable to cast out their own ghosts of fear?

(2) “True love,” the apostle John says, “casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

(3) And yet when he is praying with such agony that he sweats as it were great drops of blood, they could only sleep.

(4) And when he was bound and taken away, they fled the scene in fear.

3. “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me,” (John 16:32).

a) It takes so little to remind us that we are nothing without Christ, our Rock, our Surety, our Salvation.

b) How fear-filled, how weather beaten, how unsure of the truth are these apostles once they have deserted their Master?

c) And yet how resolute they are, how stormproof, how filled with power from on high once they receive the Holy Spirit, the Comforter that Christ promised them.

(1) They even rejoice in suffering, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name,” (Acts 5:41), a condition only possible in the power of the Spirit.

(2) This divine strength and support from God is so important that when such is withdrawn from our Savior during his final hour on the cross, even he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

### III. The Text Applied

A. If God withdrew his hand which keeps this bruised reed from breaking, what would become of me? (Matt. 12:20).

1. Such are these apostles when left to themselves.

a) Peter and John follow him from afar after his arrest.

b) After his death, they are found hiding, (John 20:19), for fear of the Jews.

c) After he is risen, they are fearful to meet him.

(1) Am I really any stronger than they were?

d) David is not afraid though ten thousand should hem him in, (Psa. 3:6), because the Lord sustains him. But let God even ever so little withdraw his support, (Psa. 55), and fearfulness overtakes him and dread overwhelms him.

(1) It is clear that this man after God’s own heart has so little heart of his own when left to himself.

(2) God sometimes lets us fall so we can clearly see in whose strength we stand.

(a) He allows us to see the hand that holds us, to let us know that without him we are but men (Psa. 9:20).

e) “Come unto me, all that are heavily laden and I will give you rest,” (Matt. 11:28).

(1) And yet must the Lord tread the winepress alone, bearing alone the whole burden of your miseries, (Isa. 63:3), such that not even one of your apostles shares with him in one wound, stripe, or taunt?

(2) They ran from life itself, in order to save themselves from a temporal death.

*(3) You must never leave God's side, but rather be helped ever do as they say, "Master, to whom else shall I go, for you have the words of eternal life."*

f) You see, sometimes our faith burns brightly, and sometimes it may do no more than smolder like a hot coal.

*(1) And still at other times it may be able to only produce a few sparkling cinders.*

*(2) And yet it is all still a true fire.*

*(3) Even if my faith is nothing more than smoking flax, God will not quench it.*

*(a) Rather, by the breath of his Spirit he nurtures it yet again until it becomes a burning and a shining light, (Matt. 11).*

g) And yet God may choose to withdraw his presence from us temporarily to humble us so we can clearly see our own weakness.

*(1) But even then, as Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 12:9, God's strength is perfected in our weakness, for when we are weak, then he is strong.*

*(2) Therefore, "most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

h) God loves to show his power in our weakness.

*(1) One New Testament example, (and there are many), is when Jesus called to Peter to come to him on top of the water in the midst of the raging storm. Christ did not reach out his hand to help him until Peter had almost sunk into the stormy lake (Matt. 14:29-32).*

*(2) Man's extremity is God's opportunity; he is our sure and stable refuge in times of trouble (Nahum 1:7).*

*(3) So, though my faith be no more than a mustard seed (Matt. 17:20), it may yet have life enough to spring forth, and strength enough through Christ to throw the mountain of my sins into the sea of my Savior's blood.*