

## QUALIFIED TO SERVE CHRIST

John 21:15-17

**Intro:** In my message tonight I want to take up four passages dealing with four events in the life of the Apostle Peter during the time of our Lord's ministry here on earth:

1) Luke 22:31-34 where the Lord told Peter that Satan had asked permission to sift him as wheat. This record is found only in the Gospel of Luke although Matthew and Mark tell of our Lord's prediction that Peter would deny Him

2) The second passage has to do with our Lord's time in the Garden of Gethsemane with Peter, James, and John just before His arrest. All three of the Synoptic writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record this, but I have chosen to use Mark's account because of the special way he recorded the fact that the Lord spoke specifically to Peter. The reference for this is Mark 14:26-42.

3) The third passage has to do with Peter's denial of the Lord. This is found in all four of the Gospel records. John has given us the shortest account (John 18:25-27). But I would like for us to look at Matthew's account, picking up one statement from Luke's Gospel. The passage in Matthew is Matthew 26:69-75. Luke 22:61 is the verse in Luke's Gospel – just the first part of the verse: "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter."

4) Finally, I want us to go to the text I announced with my subject, John 21:15-17 where we have the words which our Lord spoke to Peter when the two were together after our Lord was raised from the dead.

These four events are brought together by the Holy Spirit giving us some very important teaching for our own lives from these four episodes in the life of the Apostle Peter.

Now let us look at the first passage.

### I. LUKE 22:31-34.

It is the Apostle Peter who told us in his first epistle,

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Peter 5:8-9).

In the case of Peter, as in the case of Job in the OT, the Devil was power-

less to touch them until the Lord gave His permission. But there are always conditions to which the Devil is limited. In Job's case, first he could touch what Job had, and in the second attack he could afflict Job, but not take his life.

In Peter's case, the Devil could not destroy Peter's faith. But Peter's word in his first epistle indicates that the Devil keep looking for those whom he can destroy. We know from the outcome with Job and with Peter, that the Lord uses such testings to strengthen us, not to do us in. And since the NT places a strong emphasis on the present ministry in prayer that our Lord is carrying on in heaven for each one of us, we, too, have the encouragement of knowing that the Lord is praying for us.

Sifting wheat is for the purpose of knocking of the hulls, which can have one of two, or sometimes both, results. It can reveal the strength of the wheat, or it can expose its imperfections.

We notice the strong confidence that Peter had in himself from what he said in verse 33. (Read.) Obviously Peter was not as ready as he thought he was when the testing came. The fact that the Lord was praying for him should have made Peter realize that he needed to pray for himself. But that did not happen. Peter thought his devotion to the Lord was a strong as it needed to be, but the Lord declared very emphatically that Peter would deny Him, not just once or twice, but three times.

We never know when the Devil is going to turn his attention to us, and that is the reason we need to learn from Peter's experience, instead of feeling that what happened to Peter could not happen to us. There is too much self-confidence in all of us which we can easily mistake for devotion to the Lord.

But now let us go on to the next passage. And for this I ask you to turn to

## **II. MARK 14:26-42.**

All of the Synoptic writers relate this incident in the life of our Lord, but I have chosen Mark because of the way he recorded how the Lord addressed Peter (although Matthew did the same). (Read.)

All of the apostles were sure that they would be faithful to the Lord, but it seems that the focus was on Peter because of the special place that he was to have in the work of the Lord after the Lord went back to heaven. And

this episode in the life of our Lord followed so closely upon the Lord's words to Peter about the Devil and the sifting that was ahead for him, that you would think that Peter would have been on his guard more than he was. What the Lord wanted from Peter and James and John was that they were to "watch." This word meant (1) that they were to stay awake, and (2) that they were to be on guard. But in verse 38 the Lord makes it clear that we can't really be watching if we are not praying.

In the Gospels we often read about the Lord praying, sometimes spending whole nights in prayer. Regarding the disciples, they did ask the Lord to teach them to pray, but it does not seem that prayer occupied a very important place in any of their lives. And this is a clue to the need which the Lord saw in their hearts. Peter, James, and John were to have a major part in the future of the Lord's work, and they had to learn to pray.

Why do we pray (apart from the knowledge that we know that the Lord wants us to pray)? We pray because we know that we need the Lord's help and his blessing. A failure to pray regularly indicates that we have too much confidence in ourselves. We were born with an abundant supply of self-confidence, and only the Lord can deliver us from it.

When the Lord came back the third time, He did not tell them to keep on watching. It was too late for them to do what He wanted them to do, and so He told them to go on sleeping, and to get their rest.

There seems to be no question but that the three apostles felt that their weariness was a legitimate excuse for their failure to pray. They evidently had forgotten that on at least one occasion, the Lord spent a whole night in prayer after He had been busy all day ministering to people. What the Lord asks us to do, He gives us the strength to do, and we ought to rethink those times when we know that we need to pray, but we don't pray because "we are just too tired!"

Peter lost something at this point in his life which he could not regain.

Now for the third passage.

### **III. MATTHEW 26:69-75.**

This record of Peter's temptation is found in all four of the Gospels. John's report is the shortest, containing only three verses. Cf. John 18:25-27.

(Read Matthew's account in Matt. 26:69-75.)

— A young lady was the first to link Peter with Jesus. But he claimed that he didn't know what she was talking about. Then another maid came, and she, too, said that Peter had been with Jesus. And again, Peter denied it with an oath, saying, "I do not know the man." And then there was another who said, "Surely thou art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee." Then Peter began to curse and to swear, saying again, "I know not the man."

There has been much discussion about just what Peter said when he cursed and swore. Some say that he called a curse upon himself, taking an oath and calling upon God to assure his hearers that he was telling the truth. Others say that he really used the Lord's Name in his intense desire to convince those around him that he was telling the truth.

But one thing we do know is that *he was lying*. Obviously he was gripped with fear, and he probably felt that such accusations might lead to his own crucifixion. So here Peter resorted to sin rather than confess that the Lord Jesus was his Savior and his Lord.

— At the very moment of Peter's third denial, the rooster crowed. Luke adds a word which needs to be brought in here to complete the story. It is found in Luke 22:61, and this is what it says:

61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

What happened then? Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us that Peter went out and *wept*! But Matthew and Luke add the word, "bitterly." This means that he wept with painful, stringing grief. Peter never had a lower moment in his life up to that time, and, as far as we know, never again afterwards. That was one of those situations when you would do anything if you could call those words back, and erase them from the minds of those who heard what you said. But it cannot be done. It is no wonder that Solomon warned his son over and over about how our tongues can get us into trouble. Read also James 3. How important it is for us to be a people whose word can be depended upon.

— Well, we leave Peter there for the moment, and go past our Lord's trials, past His condemnation, past His crucifixion, past His burial, and even past His resurrection. The Lord had been with His disciples on at least two

occasions, but as far as we know, the subject of Peter's denial had not been brought up by the Lord.

Now I ask you to turn to the fourth passage found in

#### **IV. JOHN 21:15-17.**

Before we get to those verses, let us look at the first fourteen verses of the chapter.

One night Peter and some of the other disciples had gone fishing. And that night they caught nothing. Let me read the account to you in John 21 – the only place where this event is recorded for us in Scripture. (Read John 21:1-14.)

Then we come to this passage that brings a marvelous conclusion to all of these events that we have been thinking about.

How do you think Peter felt about the future of his ministry as an apostle? Would you have been inclined to give Peter a leading role in the work of the church as the Lord had indicated that he would have when Peter made his great confession? We are not told in Scripture how he did feel, but he must have felt like Moses did when he had killed that Egyptian, and had to flee out of Egypt to stay alive. Nobody was more amazed than Moses was when God spoke to him out of the burning bush, as we learned in our SS lesson for today. He must have felt that he had fallen out of God's favor, and that he would never get back to the people of God again. After all, forty years had gone by without any revelation from God!

But what did the Lord say to Peter? Did he rebuke him for what he did? Did he shame Peter before the other apostles? What would you and I have done?

The Lord did not have to ask Peter to repent because the Lord saw repentance in the tears that Peter had shed. This gives new meaning to what David wrote in Psalm 56:8-9:

8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle:  
are they not in thy book?

9 When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I  
know; for God is for me.

But now we turn to verses 15 through 17 in this chapter. (Read.)

I won't go into detail with the meaning of the different words for love that our Lord used here, but I want you to see what, in the eyes of the Lord, qualifies us to serve Him. It is not the title that we carry, even though Peter was an apostle. It is not our degrees. It is not our gifts. It is not our experience. The major qualification for anyone who intends to serve the Lord, and serve Him effectively, is our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn't this what our Lord was trying to tell Peter? The Lord was not brushing Peter's sin aside. But he wanted Peter to know that the real reason for his fall was a lack of true devotion to Christ, and the way out was to love the Lord with all of his heart and soul and mind and strength. If we really love a person, we are delighted to be identified with them. And the last thing we want to do is to hurt them.

This explains why as you look over the servants of the Lord that you have known in past days, it might be someone whose theology is not all that we would like for it to be, but who down deep in their hearts loves the Lord Jesus Christ more than anyone else, and whose ministry has the blessing of God in a very special way. The Lord looks for this in all of us *first*. As one writer has said, there were some defects in Peter's love for the Lord originally, or he never would have done what he did. But with his love for the Lord to be what it should be, the Lord would send Peter forth to minister to His sheep and His lambs.

**Concl:** Close by reading Rev. 2:1-7.