

PETER'S SIFTING AND CONVERSION  
Luke 22:31-34

Intro: In continuing the present series on The Passion of Christ, we come tonight to the way in which Peter figured into these events.

All four of the Gospel writers record this event (Matt. 26:30-35; Mark 14:26-31; John 13:36-38). This shows its critical importance.

Matthew and Mark tell how the Lord had told all of the disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night," and then He quoted from Zech. 13:7. Then Matthew tells us how Peter spoke up, being the leader of the 12, but Mark tells, "Likewise also said they all" (Mark 14:31).

John centers the report around Peter's desire to stay with the Lord.

All four Gospels give us Peter's statement that he was willing to lay down his life for the Lord, and that he would do so if it were necessary!

All four Gospels also give us the story of Peter's failure. Let us read it from the Gospel of Luke (22:54-62).

Only twice after this does Luke mention Peter: (1) In 24:12, when Peter ran to the sepulchre after the women had brought the report that the tomb was empty and that Jesus had been raised from the dead; (2) in 24:34 when the disciples who had met the Lord on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to find that the Lord had "appeared to Simon."

It is John who tells us about the time after the resurrection when the Lord had fed His disciples bread and fish, and after they had eaten He turned to Peter and said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15 ff.).

It is important to keep the whole story in mind as we consider the two verses which are found only in the Gospel of Luke: 22:31, 32.

Disaster had already struck the twelve. Now it seems, as Godet indicates, that Satan, having won the first battle after he "entered into" Judas (John 13:27), is now out to "prove that at bottom the best among the disciples is but a Judas" (II, 300). What better prey could he get than Peter! But we learn from what Luke tells us that Satan,

the adversary, has to deal with Peter in an entirely different way from the way he handled Judas! Note

I. The request which Satan had made concerning Peter.

There is no record that Satan had to ask our Lord for permission to deal with Judas as he did. Judas was already in the camp of Satan and so Satan did with him as he pleased!

But with Peter it was different! Satan could not touch Peter without the approval of the Son of God.

And I am convinced that the Lord permitted Satan to go only so far with Peter, as was the case with Job even though Satan makes a request concerned Peter that is never found any place else in the NT--indicating possibly that this is a rare instance! "Hath desired" means "to ask that one be given up to one from the power of another" (Thayer, 221--the only time this verb is used in the NT). ~~TO PRESERVE THE CHAFF AND DESTROY THE WHEAT, OR TO PROVE THAT THERE WAS MORE CHAFF THAN WHEAT.~~ How do we know that this request was not granted in full? How do we know that the Lord would not let Satan have Peter for himself?

First, because our Lord prayed for Peter, and secondly, because of John 10:27-30. Never before nor since has this truth been tested as it was that night. The powers of Satan were arrayed against the power of God to prove which power was the greater.

Later John would be able to write, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). But here the truth of that verse is to be given its proof.

One evidence of the outcome is that Satan had to ask before he could do anything. Let us take a great deal of comfort in this!

But note secondly,

II. The prayer of the Lord Jesus. He says, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

The way the Lord addresses Peter has a message for Peter (and for us) in itself. He says, "Simon, Simon."

This was Peter's name before the Lord changed it. It

was Peter's name before Peter knew the Lord. It was to remind Peter of all that he was before he came to the Lord, and to remind him that in some respects he was still the same at this moment that he had been then.

What a solemn indication that Peter needed to trust the Lord!

What was the Lord's request for Peter? It was: "That thy faith fail not."

Let me ask you this question. What would have happened to Peter if his faith had failed?

He would have been LOST--LOST FOREVER!!!

"Fail" means cease, die (cf. Thayer, 197). This was a test not only of Peter, but it was an even greater test of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to keep Peter.

Now please turn to John 17, verses 9-12 (esp. v. 12). Here the Lord is praying again, praying before Peter's denial, and claiming to have KEPT all whom the Father had given Him, except Judas who had never been His!

Peter failed miserably. He did what any of us might do if we are left to discover how really weak we are. But I am here to say tonight that his faith did not cease. How thankful we can be that when Luke concludes the story of Peter's failure he says, "And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62)!

Think of how he rushed out to the tomb. Remember how he declared his love for the Saviour in John 21. And then turn to Acts 2 and imagine that you were in Jerusalem listening to him preach the Gospel, or to Acts 4:12 where Peter is reported to have said, "Neither is there salvation in any other . . ."

His faith did not fail. Satan was out to destroy Peter's salvation, but he could not do it!

Now, let us look at

- III. The instructions the Lord gave to Peter. He said, "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

When I was in Seminary one of the things that Dr.

Chafer used to plead with us to use Biblical terms the way they are used in the Bible.

There is one word in this passage which we have been guilty of misusing. It is the word, "Converted." We use it as a synonym for salvation. Sometimes this word is used in the NT to picture salvation, but that is not its meaning here. This is not where Peter was saved. Neither is our Lord indicating that Peter is going to lose his salvation, but he will get it again. There is no such thing in Scripture.

No, Peter was only saved once, but he might have to be converted many times, that is, to return, to turn back, to turn around.

He was going to be headed in the wrong direction, but the Lord would bring him back.

Then, as a result of what the Lord had done for him, he was to "strengthen" his brethren. This means he was to establish them in the truths of salvation, to confirm them in their faith, to make them know that Jesus Christ was a Saviour who could keep them through any trial.

Did he ever do it?

Now please turn to 1 Peter 1:3-5. "Kept" is a present participle which means, who are being kept, who are preserved under heavy guard--so that nothing can take away our salvation EVER.

Concl: How many times have you read 1 Pet. 1:3-5? If this has helped you to understand that your salvation is really eternal, then you are one whom Peter has strengthened.

What a tremendous thing it is that as our Lord faced the Cross in what appeared to be His time of greatest weakness we have the greatest illustration of all time that Satan was utterly unable to get a weak child of God away from Him.

He has never lost any one, and He never will. We need to know this truth and to rejoice in it as we walk steadfastly on to heaven. Cf. Heb. 7:25.