

## **The Gospel According to Luke**

Luke 22:31-34

**Reading:** John 13:36-38

**Parallel Passages:** Matthew 26:30-35, Mark 14:26-31 and John 13:36-38

Sermon #95  
October 4, 2020

### **God's Purpose In Testing Faith**

#### **Knowledge Or Faith?**

We have a wonderful passage in Luke today that we so desperately need to hear. All Christians need to hear this short passage found in Luke 22, verses 31 to 34 and understand its implications. Jesus prays for His followers that their faith endures to the end. The reason we can be secure in our salvation is that true saving faith cannot fail because Jesus prays that it will not and Jesus has all authority and power to make this true; for He is God.

If you are truly saved there is no plan of the devil, no trial in the entire universe that can cause your faith to fail. This guarantee is not because of anything within us. True faith will endure because Jesus desires it to endure and His desires have the power of the Creator of the universe.

In our text today, Jesus prays for Peter and all the disciples and He predicts Peter's denial in just a few hours. Peter's trial of his faith causes in him a momentary lapse of fear and doubt, but ultimately even though the devil creates fear in Peter, his faith endures by the power of God.

We too may encounter difficult struggles in this life, we too may have momentary lapses of fear and doubt but ultimately our faith will endure by the power given by Christ to true believers; the Holy Spirit that dwells within. We will not overcome fear and trials because of our ability, but because of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. He not only secures salvation for His people but He keeps them by His

power. This does not mean one can live a life contrary to Jesus' teachings and Jesus will guarantee their salvation anyway. A truly saved person may sin out of weakness and will be grieved by their sin and will be repentant, but a true believer will not sin out of defiance or choose a life contrary to God's Word.

Briefly, let me give some background before I move on. This background is over simplified even though the concepts are of great importance and we will spend time on them in the future. So, I am asking for your patience.

The Apostle Peter, the person this morning's passage is primarily focused on, wrote in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the churches, "For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. <sup>20</sup> For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup> For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. <sup>22</sup> What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.'" (2 Peter 2:19-22) What is important in this passage is the word "knowledge" in verse 20, which means intellectual understanding or knowing from observation – it does not mean belief. Once one has heard the gospel or "the way of righteousness" and rejects it - their heart is hardened and they are now in a worse state than before as they return to the ways of the world or returns to wallow in the mire. Without the Holy Spirit, which is given only when one believes in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, there is not supernatural power to overcome sin.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, <sup>8</sup>"For by grace you have been saved through **faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of

God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10) What is important in verse 8 is the word “[faith](#)” which means belief in something as true and it means trusting that God is who God says He is. It takes both belief and trust to have faith.

There are two opposing approaches; the once saved always saved or eternal salvation and there is the opposite; one can lose their salvation by unrepented sin. One can then regain their salvation once they repent. There are many variations in between these two camps of thought. I struggle with these concepts and at this point in time of my spiritual maturity I believe that if one is saved, meaning they believe and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, as with Peter, their faith will endure the trials of life. However, there are people who have believed in Jesus as a number of good things; prophet, teacher, man of social change, etc., but have not submitted their lives to Him as their Lord and Savior; they have knowledge of Him but not belief in Him. They may appear Christian from outward appearances but have not believed on Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When I see someone, who appeared to be saved by their behavior and works, and then they change their behavior and works to that which is against the Bible and the Gospel of Christ it would be my assertion, at this point in time, they never were saved, they lacked belief and trust in Jesus and therefore they never had the gift of the Holy Spirit. I have known several people in my life that fit this and are living lives not in submission to the Lord. Now, having said this, I have recently began studying this issue of eternal salvation vs. the ability for one to lose their salvation and I will let you know where I settle on this issue when I am finished. Defining these concepts with my words is not easy for me. However, with these simple definitions given, I

will now press forward with the study of this passage. Please have patience and do not let these opposing viewpoints distract us from what God wants us to see today.

How important it is at this time - that I need prayer and we need prayer. God our Father, I come before you this morning and ask for You to keep my teaching true to Your Words, Your Scripture. Please Father give those listening ears that hear and minds that understand what You would have us take away with them at the end of our time of corporate worship. Amen.

**Key Concept:** *Saving faith empowered by Christ will overcome the darkest of trials, enabling one's faith to be strengthened and to persevere to the end.*

Please stand for the reading of God's Word by Brother Ivan.

### **Satan's Bold Demand** (v.31)

In the Book of Job, we are allowed to observe a conversation between God and Satan. Reading from Job chapter 1, beginning at verse 8, "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?'<sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Does Job fear God for no reason?<sup>10</sup> Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.<sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.'<sup>12</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.'" (Job 1:8-12) The devil claimed that the only reason Job loved God so much was because He gave Job everything; children, livestock, servants, wealth, etc. Satan's claim was that if all the stuff of the world was removed from Job, then Job rather than loving God

would hate God. In spite of Satan's efforts, we see Job suffer but continue to praise God. Job possessed faith and it sustained him and he remained faithful. In verses 20 to 22 Job reacts to his suffering, "Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.<sup>21</sup> And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.'<sup>22</sup> In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong." The unsaved friends of Job; Eliphaz (el·ee·faz), Bildad (bil·dad) and Zophar (tso·far) (2:11) did not have faith in God and they saw the world through fallen eyes. God calls His people to be Holy, meaning to be pure, godly, to be separated from the world and live for His glory. God's people are to live by faith and this separates them from the world which has no faith.

Jesus tells Peter, in Luke 22, verse 31, that Satan approached God, just as he had done concerning Job. Satan asks God's permission to sift Peter like wheat. Here is the imagery; Peter is the kernel of wheat or one of faith protected by God or His protective hull. Satan wants to thresh Peter with trials and suffering in an attempt to separate him and his faith from God. Once Peter's faith is separated from God's protective hull Satan will winnow Peter to separate him from God like separating the kernel from the chaff and he will no longer have faith and he will no longer worship God. Satan's hope is if he can separate Peter and the other disciples from God, their faith will wane and they will not preach the Gospel of Christ and plant Christ's Church. If the Gospel is not preached, then no one hears the Gospel and the cross will not be important. Also, let me not overlook the fact that Jesus calls Peter by his original name, Simon. Jesus had given Simon a new name of Peter meaning rock. In Matthew's Gospel account we read Jesus saying, "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) Here in Luke 22:31, Jesus uses the

name Simon; meaning one who listens or hears because Jesus is saying Simon it is important you hear this. Simon you will be spiritually weak and Satan will try to remove your faith; you will stumble and deny me and you, and the other disciples will be scattered as found in Psalm 88 and as it was predicted by the prophet Zechariah (*Zâkaryah*) “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” (13:7) This was what Jesus was speaking about when He said, ““All this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.’ Then all the disciples left him and fled.” (Matthew 26:56) My beloved, do you realize what was at stake here? If Satan could winnow the faith of the disciples and remove it, there would be no apostles, no New Testament, no witnesses to Christ’s incarnation or to His resurrection – Christianity is at stake!

We must also be mindful that anytime Satan attacked a child of God, he did so with God’s permission. The devil is subject to God as is all creation and he cannot act on his own. You might say, what about Judas? It does not say Satan got God’s permission to enter him. That is correct and that is because Judas was not a child of God, he was not a believer, he had no faith – he only had knowledge of Jesus.

Job’s faith was shaken but it did not fail. Peter will be as Job; faith shaken but faith remained. Somewhat different than Job, Peter, through the sifting or trails by Satan will become spiritually even stronger to become the bold preacher of the Gospel of Christ. Satan’s sifting will better equip Peter for the Gospel and the trails the early church would face and this is what Satan did not want. The Son of God will never fail and God the Father will never fail and Peter did not fail because there is a divine assurance coming into play that Satan does not understand - for the devil has knowledge but not faith that brings spiritual wisdom.

## Jesus' Effectual Prayer (v.32)

Satan's desire to violently shake and sift Peter to separate him from his faith and God's protection may have had some permeant affect, however, there is Someone at work to prevent this. There is a divine plan of assurance. Reading at verse 32, Jesus said to Simon Peter, **"I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."** We should take note here that while Jesus is speaking with one person, namely, Peter, He is really speaking about the entire group of His disciples. The first **"you"** in verse 31 is *humas* (**hoo·mas**), which is a second person plural. Very much like when my grandparents would say, "ya'all" meaning all of you. So, Jesus prays for Peter and the rest of the disciples. How is it that we pray? I was thinking about some of my prayers and that they are not prayers that Jesus would pray, even though I tack on "in Jesus' name" at the end. Many of our prayers revolve around a sickness we want God to heal or some discomfort that we want God to make better. What can we learn from Jesus' prayer for Peter?

Jesus does not pray that Satan does not sift Peter. His prayer is not that Peter be spared from Satan's attacks. Rather, that while Peter is under the rod of Satan that his faith would not utterly fail. We know this because Jesus says it clearly, **"I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail."** The problem we have is that we are so used to praying prayers of comfort for people that we automatically assume that Jesus is praying that Peter would be spared the trial, when in fact it is this particular trial that God will use it to equip him to do what God has called him to do, namely, **"when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers"**. There are times we need to pray for God's will to be revealed and that we will be obedient.

Here is the image - God gives the ok for Satan to sift Peter, knowing all along that His plan will be accomplished through the sifting. Peter will come out on the other side refined, as gold is refined by fire. So, the most loving thing God can do for Peter is to allow Satan to sift him. Through the sifting his faith will grow to the place where he can preach the message at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 and 3000 souls are added to the church. Through refined faith Peter can speak to the authorities and give an account of the faith that is within him. Through this refining Peter can accomplish the call of God to strengthen his brothers. There is however, a condition set by God. Satan will not be able to sift Peter to the point of shaking him loose from his faith.

Please understand that if it were not for Jesus praying for Peter, his faith would have been ripped from him. Saving faith remains because God gives it and prays that we keep it. Jesus' prayers are always answered affirmatively because He always prays exactly in the Father's will.

Look with me at a Scripture passage that shows how Peter has grown spiritually after Satan sifts him. In Peter's 1<sup>st</sup> letter, <sup>3</sup>“**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,** <sup>4</sup>**to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,** <sup>5</sup>**who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>**so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**” (1 Peter 1:3-7) My beloved, can you see how the Holy Spirit used the trials of Peter to equip him to write this passage?



We also have a tremendous example of how spiritual trails changed Peter; the way he saw God and his need to humble himself before God and his purpose for living. These verses are for our instruction also. In chapter 5 of his 1<sup>st</sup> letter we read, <sup>6</sup>“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. <sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:6-11)

When I read these words, my heart is strengthened. I know that these words were not written by some ivory tower theologian whose thoughts and words are nothing more than theory. Peter can speak with us about enduring trials and suffering because he experienced it. He went through them and after the trial and after he repented, he did strengthen his brothers and today we too are strengthened by the Apostle Peter and by His Lord, which is our Lord. God will likewise strengthen us through trails and the sifting of our faith and then call us to encourage others.

### **Peter’s Untested Declarations** (v.33)

Peter’s pride is shown by his bravado in verse 33 where he responds to Jesus saying, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” One obvious result of Satan’s sifting Peter, is his pride gets taken down a notch or two. His response shows he was prideful and too confident in his own power and strength.

When Satan is through Peter understands his dependency upon the power and strength God provides.

Satan's goal was to sift Peter like wheat from the chaff, to separate him from his faith. However, the end result was he separated Peter from some of his pride and self-reliance – making Peter ready for God to use him to strengthen his fellow disciples and take the Gospel to the waiting world. This was similar to Paul's experience. Paul recorded this observation, <sup>7</sup>“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup>For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) Paul's trails humbled him and equipped him to serve God and His people. Remember last week we saw how hard it is to slay one's pride and seek after humility. As T. S. Eliot wrote, “Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of self.” Job, Peter and Paul became more humble men by the testing, sifting and trails God allowed in their lives.

Peter's pride and self-confidence caused him to act boldly when Jesus said He had prayed to God the Father, but when Jesus was arrested and taken away, Peter caved-in quickly and was ashamed by his actions. At this time Peter was not willing to go to jail or death. Peter was confident when sitting around the table with the others, but when push-came-to-shove he denied Jesus three times and denied he even knew Jesus. Even though Peter denied Jesus is it not amazing that

Jesus would restore and give Peter the gift of the Holy Spirit. God ordained by this testing Peter would be strengthened in faith and testimony. When Peter and John were later brought before the Chief Priests in Jerusalem we read, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13) Peter’s faith grew to the point, according to Christian tradition, when he was crucified in Rome under Emperor Nero, he demanded to be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to be crucified right side up as Christ had been. Peter possessed saving faith given by the grace of God, guaranteed by Jesus’ effectual prayer and sacrifice on the cross and he overcame the darkest trails and persevered until the end.

### **Assurance of Faith**

Peter was able to persevere to the end because of the Divine Assurance; Jesus prayed to the Father and by God’s power Peter’s faith remained intact. Jesus prays for His disciples that their faith endures to the end. The reason we can be secure in our salvation is that true saving faith cannot fail because Jesus prays that it will not. The trails God allows into your life will strengthen your faith. God gives to those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior the gift of God the Holy Spirit to strengthen their faith and by the power of God they will endure life’s trails.

If you are truly saved there is no plan of the devil, no trial in the entire universe that can cause your faith to completely fail. This guarantee is not because of anything within us. True faith will endure because Jesus desires it to endure. By Jesus’ power we can endure trials for the glory of God. We can attack life in this corrupt world and trust in the power of God to keep those who are His. As the

Apostle John recorded, we are given two key principals, <sup>22</sup> “At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. *Those who do not belong to Jesus have heard the truth of God and may have knowledge of Jesus but have not believed. By contrast Jesus continues,* <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.” (John 10:22-30) As those who believe in Jesus as God and as our Lord and Savior, we hear His voice and follow His teachings to the point we are forever changed. True faith is given by the grace of God, empowered by God the Holy Spirit and enforced by the effectual prayers of God the Son and this enables us to persevere to the end. So, the question before each of us is – are we, you and me, true believers? We must look into our hearts and see if Jesus is there. If Jesus is there we have been forever changed. This change will equip us to withstand the trails of the evil one that God allows into our lives to strengthen our faith. The outward evidence of this saving change is we are obedient to the teachings of God in the Bible, we have been humbled by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we are emboldened to share Jesus and His Gospel which is the cause of our assurance of salvation without regard of the cost, we consider others more worthy than ourselves and our hearts are broken for those who are lost.

This is summed up in Mark when the scribe asked Jesus, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The most important is ...<sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”<sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28-31)

This is what Peter is an example of; the sifting by Satan and by the power of Jesus, Peter not only endures but is strengthened in his faith to be bold for Christ. We too, like Peter, are able to endure by the power of Jesus and we will also be stronger when we overcome by God’s power. My beloved, today is the time we need to step up and trust in Christ to be men and women of God and stand firm to the end. Faith is believing in Jesus and trust Him with our lives. The battle is before us and our commander, Jesus will lead us to victory by His power. Amen and amen!