

Sifted and Strengthened

Luke 22:31-34

February 9, 2025

Well, turn in your Bibles to Luke 22, as we're looking at the final instructions of our Lord to prepare his Apostles before his death. Last week, the Lord set before his men a vision of future glory and honor, which we see is our own future glory and honor as well, as we saw in the text that we went through last time, Luke 22:28-30, and then other Scriptures as well, that show our involvement in that future glory and honor.

That section started with the Lord's commendation of his men because they had stood with him in his trials. Well, this week, as we're going to see, they're going to be facing some trials of their own. If we go to Luke 22, take a look at verses 31-34, our text for this morning, and I'll read those verses as we begin. Just after speaking of future glory, future honor, he says this in verse 31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I've prayed earnestly for you, that your faith may not fail. And you, once you have returned, strengthen your brothers.' But he said to him, 'Lord, with you I'm ready to go both to prison and to death.' And he said, 'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me.'"

We remember in this section, like all the other sections, we remember that these are instructions to prepare the Apostles for the world that they will enter right after Jesus' execution at the cross. The world's going to completely change at the cross. His crucifixion and his resurrection from the dead is the dividing line of all of history. And here they have no idea what's coming. They have no idea what's ahead.

And so the Lord gives a series of instructions coming out of the upper room in this Passover meal, starting with the Lord's Supper, gives them a number of instructions that are going to carry them through the church age. They, being the foundation stones of the church, are going to, these instructions are going to be instilled in the way they think, in the way they do ministry, the way they think about life, and the way they instruct the church and all the churches that come out of them.

And we, by God's grace, are trying to follow that exact same pattern and learn this same pattern of living and thinking. These instructions, this preparation is a preparation for the way we think, and the way we do leadership, and the way we do discipleship. And the theme of these verses in particular is the theme of testing. Specifically, Jesus speaks about the testing and the proving, and you could say the improving of faith. So we see in verses 31-32 the goal of testing, and in verses 33-34 they show us the need for testing, a deep need for testing.

The testing is, as was indicated in the reading, there, the testing is for all the Apostles; but our Lord makes clear that Peter is to have a special role among the Apostles. He is the first to pass through this testing, and he will be the first to emerge from it and Peter will become known for strengthening his brothers. In fact, he'll be known for strengthening all of us Christians by passing on lessons like this from 1 Peter 5:8, "Be of sober spirit. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished among your brethren who are in the world."

So folks, if we are privileged by God to be numbered among Peter's brethren who are in the world, if we are privileged to be the ones prayed for in John 17 by our great high priest Jesus Christ, again, he does not pray for the world. There's, there's a distinction he makes. He does not pray for them. His high-priestly ministry are not for those who are not his, not for those who will remain steadfast to the very end in their unbelief. Jesus doesn't pray for them. He prays for his people. He prays for the people who are God's, whom God gave to him, whom he redeemed, whom he died for, whom he now lives for, whom he intercedes for. He prays for us.

So if we're privileged to be counted by God among that number, if we're Peter's brethren who are in the world, then we are familiar with the same experiences of suffering. We have the same victories as we accomplish the goal of our suffering, to resist the devil, to stand firm, to improve our faith. And at times we experience also the same defeats as we fail to be watchful in faith.

So, beloved, as I've been praying for you in anticipation of this sermon, may the Lord use all that follows to sober you, to give you a sobriety in your life and your thinking and the way you live and the way you prioritize, the way you use or don't use resources, the way you use your energy, the way you make your plans, the words that come out of your mouth, the thoughts that you will allow or disallow from coming into your minds. May the Lord use all of this to sober you, make you constantly watchful and prayerful in faith so that you stand firm in faith, resist the devil so that he flees from you, as James says.

So let me give you just two points for this morning, divided along the text, lines of the text. But let me give you the first point: the goal of testing. Jesus speaks to the goal of testing, first and foremost. He says, really, we can see the goal of testing is not to avoid it. It's not to run from it. It's not to fear it. It's not to turn from it. It's not to try to just live in a way that doesn't upset anything.

No, we're to be on the march, on the move, taking ground, and that's going to get us into some trouble, going to get a shot at by an enemy who does not like us taking ground. We're going to be tested along

the way. We're going to be proven along the way. There are going to be hard things that we have to endure: trials and suffering, temptations that are going to come at us as we put ourselves out there.

Those who are the cowardly, who just sit back, who do not try to take ground, but just try to sit and keep their heads down and stay in the foxhole and duck everything, well, I would wager that most of them are probably not Christians. That's not what Christians do. That's not how Christians live.

Christians are those who take up the Lord's command to go make disciples of the nations, baptizing them, teaching them to the point of baptism, and also teaching them to observe everything that Jesus taught. There's an instruction ministry, an exhortation ministry that we're all to be a part of, we're all to be supporting, we're all to be of one mind and participating in here in the church, out there in the world. We do this together.

And as we go about our ministry, our lives, using them as a stewardship that we're going to give an account for one day, we are going to be tested, guaranteed. No child of God is without testing. And if we're, you're without testing, you're not a child of God. What is the goal of testing, then? Prove your faith and to improve your faith. It's to pass the test.

And that is what our Lord wants for Peter and these other men. He says in verse 31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed earnestly for you that your faith may not fail. And you, once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Now, what's our Lord doing here? Trying to scare Peter straight? Is he trying to sober him up so that he doesn't fail? No, he foresees the failure. He acknowledges it. In fact, he predicts it in verse 34. It's an indicative; it's going to happen. But what is he doing? If he's not scaring him straight, if he's not just trying to put the fear into him so that he just watches his every step, what is what is he doing?

I'll give you several sub-points, here, if you're taking notes, starting with sub-point A: The Lord is calling Peter to attention. He's calling Peter to attention. We can see that he refers to God's arch-enemy here, Satan. He names him. It's Satan, which is a word that really does come from a word that means adversary. It's the adversary, the enemy of our souls.

But he's been given this moniker, Satan, God's arch-enemy. He is the chief, most powerful and intelligent, the most cunning of all the demonic realm. This Satan has created a target package on these eleven men. Satan has taken this target package and run this plan through the chain of command.

Who is in his chain of command? We find out it's God is in his chain of command. This attack is green-lit and it's coming. So Jesus calls Peter to attention. Snap out of it, Peter! Open your eyes. He addresses him with his given name, Simon, but he repeats that name, “Simon, Simon,” repeating it.

You can hear a, really a tone of affection, there, his care, his love for Simon. He follows the repetition of his name with the word, “Behold, Simon, Simon.” He, it's almost like he grabs his head and says, Turn, look at me. Behold, I want you to listen. He's shaking Peter, calling him to an attitude of sobriety, of watchfulness. If Peter will submit to this, allow himself to be shaken by the Lord, he will be able to stand against the shaking that Satan intends to give to him.

There's some Christians I, I've talked to, in fact, many who profess themselves to be Christians, and I, I find even in men in Christian leadership, who when I try to rouse them to a mindset of sobriety and watchfulness as the Bible describes for us, they seem intent on resisting. They think, Man, Travis, you're, you're just too intense for us, man. You're too serious. I mean, if you do that serious, intense thing all the time, you're going to give yourself a heart attack. Noted.

And I am not the example of all watchfulness and seriousness, intensity. But I do think that what I'm trying to live out in my life, and what I'm trying to convey to people for whom I set an example is, hopefully increasingly, a proper sobriety, and a proper watchfulness, and a proper prayerfulness, and a proper intensity.

There are some gentle souls, maybe they're unaccustomed to facing threats. Maybe they're gentle souls who all their life is just spent in play, living in safe places, never, never engaging an enemy, never facing a threat. Everything's been relatively safe and mild and gentle. And the most difficult conflict that they have may be on a basketball court or a pickle ball court, as the case may be. And so the call to attention and sobriety can trouble gentle souls, thinking that they're resistant to living in a state of alarm, with a sense of urgency.

Well, listen, don't let that be you, beloved. If having a mindset that you live each day on a battlefield, if every time you get up from your bed and put your foot on the floor that you've entered into a war zone, if that troubles you, then let yourself become better acquainted with Jesus' calls to attention such as this one.

And if you've been paying attention through the Gospel of Luke, you've heard him call people to attention a lot. It seems that his, his regular work is to have to grab people's attention and say, Wake up! This life is not all there is. The physical stuff around you that you seek, that you love, that you, you pine for is not all that there is. Let yourself become better acquainted with Jesus' calls to attention.

Read Peter's epistles. See if he encourages you to kind of lighten up, take an easy approach to your life. Consider Paul's call to the warrior mindset. If you would you'd go to Ephesians 6 and think about "stand firm against the schemes of the devil." There is a very real Devil, very real demonic forces out there. "Take up the full armor of God," he tells us, "so that you can resist in the evil day, and having done everything to stand firm."

Listen, Paul, Peter, the other Apostles as well, they learned to adopt our Lord's view of the world, to think as he does, to know that this is for keeps. They need to follow his pattern of living, and they try to teach us to do the same thing. He sees what we cannot see. His special insight, his revelatory knowledge, allowed him to see unseen things, to look beyond the visible, to see the invisible, and to know that there is an enemy prowling about to pick off the weak, the straying, the people on the fringe.

Informed by that knowledge, Jesus speaks to Peter with this solemn tone, but a loving tone. This isn't rebuking. This is affection. That's in the call of sobriety is an affectionate heart of love for these people, for these men. He loves them dearly, but he speaks in a tone of sobriety that benefits the degree of danger that they face. He grabs Peter's attention so that "'Simon, Simon'" will be wide awake, mentally alert to receive this disturbing report. Hey, Simon, Simon, listen up. You all are on Satan's hit list. And this is a "you all," or in the South we might say "y'all."

This is a plural. Jesus puts the second-person pronoun in the plural, here. Some translations have the word, you, but they don't indicate it's a plural. This translation, the LSB, "sift all of you," and that is accurate. His demand isn't just about sifting Peter alone by himself. Satan actually started this sifting with Judas Iscariot. He sifted that apostate out of the bunch right away, and now we come to find out he's after all of the men.

The infinitive there, to sift, is from *siniazō*; and the metaphor sift as wheat, it pictures, really, a, sifting wheat is picturing a violent attack against these men. He is intending to sift them, shake them, separate them out. He, he hates unity, he hates harmony.

Everything that Jesus prayed, that "we may be one as the Father and Christ are one," Satan hates that. He would destroy the Trinity if he could. He cannot. He's a creature like us, but he will go after those

created in God's image. And so he loves to disrupt and shake people from side to side, separate them out.

William Hendrickson provides a very simple, straightforward description of this word-picture of sifting. Let me read it to you. He writes, "A woman typically is the one who's doing the sifting of wheat and separating wheat from chaff. So a woman takes a sieve in both hands, and she begins to shake it vigorously from side to side so the chaff will rise to the surface. And this then is thrown away.

"Then she puts that sieve through another teeter-totter motion, raising now this and then that side, blowing over it, so that what still remains of the chaff gathers in an easily removable pile. The purpose is, of course, to save the wheat, now separated from chaff and other unwanted materials."

And that is what, end quote, that is what Satan wants to do to these eleven men, put them in a sieve and shake them violently about. And make no mistake, beloved, he is up to the same mischief today. He hasn't stopped. He loves to sift churches. He loves to send his agents in, infiltrate the fellowship, divide believers, isolate the weak with temptation and doubts, and, and flatter the strong with a false affirmation, so that they let their guard down and they give in to temptation.

And he nullifies their effectiveness with their sinning, with their distraction, with their attention to other priorities over and against the priorities that the Lord would give us. Beloved, beware. Be on your guard. He is about his sifting work even today.

So Satan intends to sift, shake these men. The, the word can also be translated: to pick them to pieces, to tear them apart, kind of like the picture of ripping chaff off of grain. That's the idea. This, this is a picture, really, of his, of his ruthlessness, the violence of the attacks. "Satan has demanded," "has demanded." That's an aorist-tense verb, which means, here, Satan got what he was after. He, he has obtained the permission that he sought. And maybe that may seem surprising. I mean, who's he seeking permission from? I mean, if he is the arch-demon, chief of the demons, who's, who's above him in the ranking category? God.

Seems surprising, doesn't it, that God would grant permission to Satan, Satan the demon, to sift the Apostles? Ah, but then we remember the biblical precedent set for this in Job. Job gives us insight. We read in Job 1:6-12, again in Job 2:1-6, that Satan was called to appear along with all the other sons of God, which includes the angel, all the angels; sons of God being a comprehensive term for the angels. That would be holy angels who did not fall, but then the unholy angels who did fall back in the creation week.

This Satan is the one who in Job 1 and Job 2 was called to appear and come and present before God, and he had sought and obtained permission from God to go after Job, to sift him. Well, he's up to the same thing, here. Apparently, the old dog knows no new tricks. What's he trying to prove? What's he trying to prove with his sifting of these men? Well, same thing he was wanting to do with Job. It's Frederick Godet who writes this, "Satan asks the right of putting the Twelve to the proof, and he takes upon himself over and against God, as formerly in relation to Job, to prove, at the bottom line, the best among the disciples is but a Judas." End quote.

That's what his sifting intends to do. It has no positive benefit. What he wants to prove, that is every bit of grain that he puts into the sifter, into the sieve as he shakes it, as he's violent about it, he wants to prove that there is no grain in that sieve. All of it is chaff. Judas was chaff. He blew away.

So God grants Satan permission. Now why would he do that? Why would our loving, kind God, who is goodness himself, why would he allow his people to be attacked, and to be attacked so mercilessly, to be shaken by so fierce an enemy with such force? Why would God allow this enemy to powerfully, easily overwhelm these men and allow him to tear them to pieces? What possible good could there be in this?

Well, we'll set those questions aside for now, but you need to be mindful of them as we go through this text. But let's consider the provision that God makes for his people when they do come under attack. We can bet that the Lord has Peter's full, undivided attention at this point. But wait, what'd you say? Run that by me again? Satan himself talked to, talked to God, got permission to sift us. That's plural. Me. I'm in, too, also, as wheat.

Now with his full attention, Jesus intends to instill confidence. So sub-point B, the Lord assures protection. The Lord assures protection. He says, "But I have prayed earnestly for you that your faith may not fail." We're not told, here, how Jesus knew of Satan's visit to God to obtain permission from God. But immediately upon knowing, what does Jesus do? He goes straight to prayer. It's instructive for us, isn't it? What do we do when we hear disturbing news about someone that we love dearly? We make a phone call, don't we? We send a text. We maybe even pay a visit.

Can I suggest to you that your first visit be with God? Jesus goes before the Father. Jesus seeks help from the Father, The word pray, here, deomai, ask urgently, beg, plead for someone to, it's a desperate appeal for someone's immediate need, for immediate help for their immediate need. This warning of imminent satanic attack concerned all these eleven men. But notice that in this point, here, Jesus isolates Peter. He speaks directly to him, not only informing him of the attack, but also to provide him with the assurance of spiritual protection. He's isolating Peter.



He wants Peter to know about the spiritual protection. "Satan's coming after all of you, Peter." He calls him "Simon." "He's obtained permission to sift you all, to tear you apart." "But," Jesus says in the emphatic here, "I myself," there's emphasis in the Greek, "I myself have prayed earnestly for you." As in not, not every, at this point, not everybody, though we can assume he prays for everybody, John 17 that we read for our Scripture reading this morning. He's praying for all those men. We have no doubt that he's praying for them.

But here he wants Peter to know, "I myself have prayed earnestly for you" as in, for you, Simon, you in particular. Father, who granted Satan's request. Any question as to whether the father would grant this prayer, this request from his beloved Son for the men that he chose to give his son? There's no doubt.

The father hears the prayers of the son. It's offered up to him from the one with the purest of intent, offered from the sinless heart. He prays perfectly, always in accord with the will of the father, always serving these people, his men, us as our merciful, faithful high priest. And what does Jesus pray? What is this petition? Is it, Hey, Father, don't grant Satan's request. Remember how you granted him permission to sift him like wheat? Would you retract that? Would you, would you, would you, would you back off of that? Let's find a way to do that.

No, he lets God be God. The permission was already granted. So it's instead not, father, I bind Satan in Jesus' name. He doesn't bind him. He discerns instead that God has a purpose for all things. He knows that God has a purpose for all things, even evil, even wicked, malicious demons. He has a purpose for them, too.

What is the purpose, the father's purpose for the satanic attack and for any kind of sifting and sorting work of the enemy, and for all form of spiritual warfare? Well, Peter tells us what that purpose is. He says in 1 Peter 1:7, "Even though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials."

What is a trial? It's a testing. It's putting you through the paces to see what you're made of, to see where you lack, to see where you're weak, what needs to be shored up by training, what needs to be shored up by resource. He's putting you through testing. "If necessary, you've been grieved through various trials so that," what? "the proof of your faith." When we are whittled away, when we are sifted, you know what lays in the bottom of the sieve? Our faith. That is the key. It's "more precious than gold, which is perishable even though tested by fire, but it will be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."



The word proof, there, in that text is dokimion, which if we elaborate that a bit fills out the meaning. Dokimion refers to testing. It refers to a test that will prove the true quality of something, okay? Proverbs 17:3 puts it this way, just to illustrate it, just to give kind of word pictures for you. "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace is for gold, but the Lord Yahweh tests the hearts." So just as silver ore, silver in ore goes into the crucible, and gold ore goes into the smelter, the heat is turned up and it separates all that is silver out of that silver ore, and separates all that is not gold out of that gold ore. So that all that is left is pure unalloyed silver and pure unalloyed gold.

That is precisely how the Lord tests the hearts of his people, with the intention of proving and purifying, or we could say proving and improving the faith of his people. God's intent in granting the request of our enemies is to use enemy attacks as trials, his trials, his tests that he gives to us, and he uses enemy forces to do it. Test us, to prove us, to purify our faith, so that our faith emerges as pure, unalloyed, and useful.

And listen, it's useful for, as he's saying here, our protection. It's how we're protected from failing, ultimately failing, failing in the ultimate sense. Will Peter stumble and fall? Yes, he will. We see that in this text. We're going to see it come up in the text to follow. Peter will stumble and fail. Will he fail ultimately? Will he lose his salvation, if I could put it that way? No, he will not.

So when our Lord prays for Peter, and beloved, when he prays for you and for me, he does not pray, Father, give them an easy life. Father, give them smooth sailing, career success with big promotions, lots of money. Give them everything that the American Dream promises them, all that their hearts will desire. Take away all pain and suffering and sickness and cancer and injury. Take away all relational problems. Take away all difficulty, all conflict.

No, he doesn't pray that at all. He prays, father, through it all, you being sovereign, you being the one who tests all people, tests all flesh, tests all people, tests your people, you know best. So father, let their faith not fail, because if their faith, it does not fail, it's genuine saving faith. And genuine saving faith put to the fire will always result in pure and unalloyed faith. Stronger, bolder, more fruitful, more productive, faith that doesn't fail is genuine faith. And genuine faith will only grow, will only strengthen through difficulty in testing.

Take away the test, well, there's no strengthening of your faith. You remain weak, waddling around in your diapers, messing yourself. Now you need to grow to maturity, and that maturity requires testing, God-granted, Spirit-generated faith, saving faith. Biblical faith is a productive faith, a fruit-bearing faith which will be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So we've seen the Lord's call to attention. We've seen his protection, not to rescue them out of the problem and out of the difficulty, but actually to strengthen them through it by strengthening the faith that provides them with a comprehensive protection.

Then sub-point C, here's where those questions about intentionality or what is God's purpose, here's where those come into play. Sub-point C, the Lord reveals his intention. The Lord reveals his intention. As we said, Satan's not only coming after Peter; he's gunning for all of them. Jesus, though, singles out Simon Peter to set him apart for a special work. Verse 32, he says, "And you, once you have returned, strengthen your brothers." Strengthen them. You got a purpose; you got a future role.

We know how the story goes. Peter's precipitous fall from confidence, from steadfast loyalty, our Lord predicts that in verse 34. But here Jesus, he's merely alluding to that fall in saying "once you have returned," returned, meaning he, he had to turn away, and now he's got to return and come back. So he just alludes to it here, epistrepho.

Epistrepho is a verb that can refer to conversion. In fact, it's often used that way. But, and, and some actually take those meanings of the word epistrepho. Every, every word in, in Greek or Hebrew, every word in the Bible, every word in the English language has to be interpreted through context. There's a semantic meaning, a dictionary definition, you could say, but we all understand that you got to take that dictionary definition and kind of put it into the context.

He laughed his head off. It doesn't mean his head fell off. If we look up all the different definitions of those terms, we realize that's a gruesome sight. No, it's a metaphor. It's an idiom. It says he's laughing vibrantly, effusively. Here we see that the term epistrepho, which can, in many places does, refer to conversion, some do take that from the other contexts and place it into here, supporting the error that believers can sin to such an extent that they need to be saved all over again, that Peter after his fall, he needs to be reconverted, re-saved, so to speak.

The verb does not need to mean conversion, referring to salvation. Epistrepho can simply mean to return after a temporary departure, and that's what's clear here. Jesus uses actually, here, the aorist tense of epistrepho, a tense showing completeness that when you have returned, he's speaking of that as a completed act. He predicts even before Simon Peter falls, even before he does deny knowing the Lord, that he will indeed come back.

He's putting even that failure into its broader context that, you are those who stood by me in my trials. Indeed, Peter, you're going to return. You're going to continue standing by me, but you got this lapse.

Simon Peter is the leader of these men that Jesus chose, men who were characterized by loyalty, verse 28, standing by him in his trials.

That characterization remains. The Lord hasn't changed his view of them even though they all will fail him in the near future. "Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." They're all going to flee. And Peter's failure, as we know, is going to be epic, stunning, bitterly painful. But even though his loyalty will fail in this moment, it's a temporary failure. It's a temporary lapse. Aren't you thankful for that, beloved, in your Christian life, that we have an example of a man who did fail and failed dramatically, as kind of all Peter's actions are pretty dramatic, aren't they? But he's an example for us, to show us that the Lord loves us even in our failure. In fact, he provided a cross, that all of our sins would be atoned for.

So it's a comfort to us, really. But though Peter's steadfastness is going to crumble, he's going to be rebuilt again so that he'll be rebuilt upon the rock whom he confesses. Though he'll deny his Lord, he will return never again to deny his Lord, but to do as he says he will do in verse 33. He will go to prison, and he will eventually even go to death. Peter being crucified, but even being crucified, he said, "I don't want to be crucified like my Lord. Will you turn the cross upside down so that I'm not crucified in the same manner as my Lord? I'm not even fit to be crucified like him."

Peter's failure would not characterize him. It's an aberration. It's bitter and tragic, yes, but it's an anomaly in his life. So Jesus says, "once you have returned." He knows how he's going to restore Peter in John 21:15 and following. He assures Peter there in John 21 of his love, his forgiveness, his acceptance, and he redeploys Peter into service. "Tend my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep."

And here in verse 32 he sets the foundation for that restoration. Still yet future, but he sets the foundation for it. Here he assures Simon of his intention to give him a position among the Twelve, influence in their midst, that he'd be a leader among leaders. Jesus isolates Peter, separates him out, speaks to him personally as a chief among the Twelve, or as we like to say, a leader among equals. There's precedent for thinking like that right here.

So that means if he's going to be leader among equals, chief among the Apostles, well, what is he going to be doing? Verses 24-27 means Peter's going to be the chief servant of them all, isn't he? But with a specific role to play in verse 32, He's going to be strengthening his brothers. He'll serve them by strengthening them, serve them by lifting them up, serving them by imbuing them with strength and encouragement.

The verb for strengthen is *sterizo*, *sterizo*. Luke used it, you may remember, way back. Well, some of you weren't even here back when we were going through Luke chapter 9. But he used this verb, Luke did, to refer to Jesus and describe Jesus' resolve to go up to Jerusalem. In spite of all the opposition and, and the, the death threats and the murderous intent and plans and plots of the leadership of the Jews, Jesus still resolved to go to Jerusalem, to the very heart of the hornet's nest. He's going to go there, where all his murderers are.

It says in Luke 9:51, "Now it happened." when the, "when the days for him to be taken up were," soon, "soon to be fulfilled," here's the, here's how the verb's translated, "he set his face to go to Jerusalem." That expression "set his face" is likely taken from Isaiah 50 verse 7, where the Messiah says that "the Lord helps me and therefore I'm not disgraced. Therefore," here's this, here's the translation, "I have set my face like flint." Stony. You could smash against it all you want to; all you're going to get is sparks. He says, "I know I shall not be ashamed." That's how Jesus is thinking. He's utterly resolved. He's fixed, he's firm as he heads to Jerusalem, heads to the cross.

So Simon Peter, after his repentance, after his return, he is able, then, to serve his brothers and minister to their deepest need. Peter the Rock is going to stabilize his brothers. He's going to help them to set their faces like flint, to be resolved men, ensure they're firmly fixed, well-established, firm, immovable men. And they're going to need it post-crucifixion. They're going to need it because of the sifting that Satan's going to use to scatter them all, as Jesus will soon warn them.

Note the progression. "Simon, I myself have prayed for you, so you, yourself, you strengthen them." See that progression? The grace that our Lord gives to Peter, he wants that grace then to go to the rest of the man. He's not a cul-de-sac; he's a conduit of this grace and strength. It's the same thing he does with us. The grace that you have been helped by, you're not to just absorb it like a black hole that sucks in all life and energy. No, you're to be a conduit, a channel of grace and blessing and strength to other people, to your brothers and sisters sitting around you. What our Lord gives to us we receive, we're strengthened by it, we feed off of it, but we in turn use that to strengthen and feed other people. That's the pattern.

Now we know Peter. By now we're familiar enough to kind of get inside his head a little bit and imagine how he's taking all this. As Jesus is speaking, just think about this, which part of Jesus' words do you think that Peter heard? What stood out? Was it, "I've prayed for you, Peter." Does that stand out? What about this one? "Your faith will not fail." That stand out? What about this? "You're going to turn again, and once you do, you will strengthen your brothers."

Nah, none of that. None of that registered with the Peter. What did he hear? "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat." And what does Peter think of that? "No, Lord, not me."

This brings us to the second point, verses 33-34, the need for testing. Peter's response demonstrates the need he has for testing, the need he has to be put through the paces, to be run through the crucible, run through the Refiner's fire. He needs it because he doesn't get his need for it. He needs it. Verse 33, "But he said to him, 'Lord, with you I'm ready to go to both prison and to death.'"

Now there are many who see this at this point as another example of self-confidence, Peter thinking he's really stronger than he really is. Many see him here as self-assured, confident in the flesh, as if he has the power in himself to remain loyal and steadfast and reliable. I think it's, certainly here we could say an expression of courage. I think also an expression of friendship, of loyalty. Jesus just said it. "You're those who stood by me in my trials." And Peter's, like, I'm going to do that, I want to do that, I'm going to do that. He intends to be the kind of friend who will go with the Lord to prison, even to death, if that's what it comes to.

We know Simon Peter loves the Lord. He really does want to remain steadfast, loyal to the end, no matter where that takes him, whether into a prison cell, whether to the executioner's block. Those who detect this note in Peter of the error of self-confidence, of relying on his own strength, they put the emphasis in this verse on the words, "I am ready."

And they rightly point out, Are you, Peter, really? You're not ready, not on your own. You have no idea how weak you are, how vacillating you'll prove to be. Peter did have a wrong view of his own steadfastness, in fact, and it'll be just in a few short hours as they're on their way to Gethsemane, having left the upper room and going to Gethsemane. In fact, I'm just going to turn over to that portion in Matthew chapter 26 because it's going to sound very familiar, another prediction of failing.

Matthew 26, verses 30 and following, it says, "After singing a hymn," there in the upper room, "after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And then Jesus said to them, "'You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.'

"But Peter answered and said to him, 'Even though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away.' And Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I say to you that this very night before a rooster crows, you'll deny me three times.' And Peter said to him, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you.' And all the disciples, they said the same thing," too. They all said the same thing.

Once again, Peter, he's the spokesman. He's out in front as usual, parading the folly, there, of putting confidence in the flesh. All it's going to take are the few questions of a young servant girl to expose the weakness of the flesh. He'll be duly chastened. We're all duly warned by his example, aren't we?

But putting confidence in the flesh, which is a common trait for all these men, it's not exactly or precisely, we should say, what we're seeing at this point in Luke 22:33. If we look closer, Peter does express confidence, but he's not expressing confidence in himself per se. This expression of confidence, here, is, is actually in Jesus, and it receives an emphasis in the Greek. He says, "With you," he says. "With you, I am ready to go both to prison and to death." You see that? "With you."

He rightly sees Jesus as the ground of his confidence, here. He sees Jesus as the strong one, not himself. Jesus is the capable one, not himself. I think he's expressing, here, with Jesus in his presence, with the Lord at his side, he knows with him he will stay loyal. He'll be steadfast. He'll never fail. How could he? Jesus is there. Think he's got the right idea, wrong application, here, but the right idea.

Remember when, Matthew 14, if you'd like to turn there and look, it's really worth turning to. Matthew, chapter 14, starting at verse 24, Jesus is there walking on the water during a storm, and you remember that Peter joined him. He actually got out of the boat, started walking on the water toward Jesus at Jesus' behest, only to start sinking after a few steps.

We read in Matthew 14:24 and following, "But the boat was already many stadia from the land, being battered by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea." The one who created the waters is now walking on the waters. The one who created the wind is now walking through the wind.

"He came to them, walking on the sea, and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and they said, 'It's a ghost,' and given to silly superstition, there. "They cried out in fear. Immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take courage, it's I; don't be afraid.' Peter answered and said to him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come and join you on the water.'" That's bold. "He said, 'Come.' Getting out of the boat, Peter walked on the water, came toward Jesus, but seeing the wind, he became frightened and began to sink and cried out saying, 'Lord, save me!'"

Look, if standing up is about proximity to Jesus, was Peter not coming closer to Jesus with every step? So what happened? When Jesus reaches out to grab Peter and rescue him does he say, Almost, Peter! You were so close! If you had just come just a little bit closer, just one more step, you'd be near enough to me. You wouldn't have ever started to sink? Look at verse 31, because this is what we read. "Jesus

stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, not Oh, you of far proximity, but ““You of little faith.”” Not You who weren't near enough to me and not right by my side, but “you who doubted. Why did you doubt?”

Isn't that something: that the spiritual exercise of our faith, that is what overcomes the physical peril of drowning. Faith is the issue. Faith is the issue, not mere physical proximity to Jesus. And that's why I'm back to Luke 22:33. Peter's fundamental error is about failing to recognize the value of exercising faith. He didn't attend to his faith. He didn't attend to the strengthening, the exercise of his faith.

After all, Judas Iscariot was close to Jesus. He was physically, spatially more proximate to Jesus than you or I ever will be on this earth in this life. And Judas sat right next to Jesus at the Passover meal, and he sat in the seat of honor. And yet, from that advantaged position, Satan easily entered into Judas and Judas walked away.

Proximity to Jesus, going to church regularly, mixing with Christians, hearing the truth preached in the church every week, these are all good things. Make no mistake, beloved, none of them, none of them, not one of those things guarantees loyalty to Jesus Christ. Not one of them guarantees spiritual steadfastness. Not one of them means you won't fail and fall.

Well, what does then? You're like, What am I coming here for? Because everything preached out of this pulpit and all the good, godly conversations you have with Christians, and all the examples that are put before you inform your faith, encourage your faith, strengthen your faith, but they cannot exercise your faith for you. “In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything.” Well, that's a painful process, circumcision. I mean talk about doing something that's radical, “but only,” Paul says in Galatians 5-6, what counts, “what matters is faith working through love.” I believe and therefore I act in love. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3, “I believe and therefore I spoke.”

We believe and we do. We believe and we obey. We believe and we love. We believe and we give. We believe and we serve. It's faith that matters. It's the presence or the absence of that faith, firstly, but followed by the strength of that faith, the maturity of that faith. Peter failed to see the significance of his faith, his responsibility to act in faith, to exercise faith. If only, if only he'd listened a little more carefully to what Jesus had told him. If only he'd reflected a little bit longer on Jesus' call to attention and the means of protection. If he'd paused before answering, he may have picked up on the clue where to find strength during testing.



The proper posture for standing firm in a trial as an attitude of faith is watchfulness, and the action of faith, powerfulness. Perhaps he would have heard that the key element that needs attending to in an enemy attack is faith, and that this spiritual battle is a wrestling against doubt, a wrestling to believe. Perhaps he would have had a, a proper boldness, here, an appropriate courage to be watchful, standing in faith, being prayed for by his Savior, and then joining his Savior's prayers for his own stability.

Perhaps he would have looked beyond the trial to what the Lord intended in the trial, through the trial, hear the Lord's promise that he would return, that he would have a future ministry, that he would lead his brothers by serving them, that he would strengthen their faith, and that he would be bolstered up, buoyed up by hope.

So when Peter said, "Lord, with you, I'm ready to go both to prison and to death," the problem, here, as I see it, was not self-confidence, not in this instance anyway. It led to self-confidence; but here Peter is looking to the Lord. His error is in failing to see his own responsibility, to exercise his own faith. And that, beloved, is what inevitably leads to putting confidence in the flesh.

Steadfastness is not the result of magic. It's not to be mystically upheld by miraculous, supernatural forces, and you just sit passively and let the Lord float you through trials. Standing firm, remaining steadfast, acting toward the Lord according to the loyalty that we have in our hearts, don't we, comes about by the normal, regular means of you growing in the faith, becoming strong in believing.

Peter's words here betray not self-confidence, but rather a lack of understanding about how faith works. It's not our spatial proximity to Christ that keeps us standing firm. It's not being in within earshot of preaching. It's not just, just reading Bibles. It's not conversations with godly people that keeps us standing firm.

Those things contribute, those things inform, those things feed; but they all change and fluctuate. We see that in verse 34. The Lord predicts Peter's fall from steadfastness, the failure to remain loyal. "I say to you, Peter," the rooster, "the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me." That had to sting. Man, that's a deep, deep fall because he says not just deny your, your being an Apostle, not just deny you're in the inner circle, not deny, you know, where we're going and what we're doing, not, not, you know, not withstanding interrogation. It's not even that. It's deny that you know me.

And this is not the, the word *ginosko*, the verb most often associated with the knowledge of a close relationship. The more remote verb for knowing, here, is *eido*, which is more like knowing facts. He

denied even knowing the facts about his Lord. Spanish speakers distinguish between two different types of knowing. In the Spanish language the verbs *conocer*, *Yo lo conozco*, meaning, I know him, and the verb *saber*, *saber*, which is *Yo lo sé*, which is, I know it, or *Yo sé eso*, I know that. *Saber* is to know facts; *conocer* is to know people.

Jesus isn't only predicting the fact that Peter's fall is going to be disassociation, but the depth of it is that Peter's going to thoroughly repudiate knowledge of him, not just having a close relationship. He's going to deny any acquaintance at all, no factual knowledge. The lesson Peter's going to have to learn, and he's going to have to go through this in order to learn, is that proximity to Jesus is not what is going to keep him loyal and standing for him.

One day, as Jesus told him on this very night in this same upper room, Jesus was about to leave them and return to his Father in heaven. He prayed that in his high-priestly prayer in John 17. They're not going to have the benefit of his physical proximity, his spatial proximity, his physical presence anymore. But what they needed to learn, and learn quickly, is that Jesus' ministry of prayer is enough to uphold them, and their faith enough to sustain them. Their faith needs attending to. It needs practice. It needs exercise.

The way to standing, to stand firm is the exercise of our faith, and that's an internal discipline in response to external pressures, testing, spiritual struggles, even satanic attack. It's an internal discipline. It's by faith that we're watchful and prayerful. That's how Jesus responded to the news of this satanic attack, by immediate prayerfulness, because he was watchful. We learn by his example to be constantly watchful, constant and instant in prayer.

And we're assured of victory because of the faith God has given to us by his Spirit, right? He regenerated us, after all. He gave us a new nature, caused us to be born again. We're new. "If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creature. The old's gone; the new's come." Say goodbye, sayonara to the old life, the old you. He's anchored us deeply and permanently into the bedrock promises of his perfect, precious, unfailing Word, and he's sealed us there by the Spirit.

This is what Peter actually learned through his testing. If you want to put your finger there in Luke 22 and look at 1 Peter 1, he emerged from his trials to pass this on to us. In 1 Peter 1:3 and following, he said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, having been kept in heaven for you, you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

“And in this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials. It's also that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, it may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. And though you haven't seen him, you love him. And though you do not see him now, but you believe in him, you rejoice with joy, inexpressible and full of glory, receiving as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

Peter's very good friend, partner, the Apostle John, he said it this way in 1 John 5:4, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that overcomes the world.” Proximity to Jesus Christ? No, our faith, our faith. I find it remarkable; I hope you do, too.

Most encouraging in this sorrowful prediction of Peter's failure, Jesus, you have to realize, is the one who is most hurt by this, the most offended by Peter's denial of even knowing him, Jesus drops even in the prediction of his failure in verse 34, he drops a hint that Peter's failure is not when it's, what's going to define his life and his ministry.

We said in verse 31, Jesus addressed Peter in this way: “Simon, Simon.” Simon is his given name, right? It's also a reminder, though, of his natural condition, his born-in-Adam condition. You were born Simon. Simon, reminds us every time it's used in Scripture of Peter's starting point in the flesh, of his, what he needed to emerge from, grow out of, grow away from, not be characterized by any more and in addressing him as Simon, Jesus identifies and looks to the end of the testing, when his character would be more aligned with the nickname that Jesus had given him from the very beginning, which is Cephas, Peter, The Rock.

Because of the expression of faith that he made in the good confession in Matthew 16:16, he looked ahead to that time when he would make that good, rock-like confession. Peter confessed, “You're the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That was a triumphant moment in Peter's life, a good confession that would shape his entire life and his ministry.

And as we see here, from the high point of his confession, Peter stumbles, falls, takes a significant step downward, backward, denying the Christ he had once confessed. And yet in verse 34, when predicting this downward step, this backward step, stumbling, a precipitous fall, what does Jesus call him? Simon? No, he calls him Peter. Peter. I was surprised to discover in my study that this is the only place, the only place anywhere in the Gospels where Jesus addresses this lead Apostle with the name Peter. He predicted that he would be called Peter, but never addressed him as Peter except here. This is the only place in the Gospels.

Upon meeting Simon in John 1:42 near Jerusalem, near the Jordan, Jesus looked him and said, “You’re Simon the son of John, and you shall be called Cephas,” which is translated from the Aramaic into Greek as Peter, meaning rock or little rock. You can say, cut out of the rock. That’s the idea of the name for Cephas or Peter, petra, petras. Petra is the larger rock outcropping, and petras, which is his name, is like a little rock broken off of that.

But again, after Peter made the good confession, the Lord responded in Matthew 16, blessing him, saying this, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.” What’s the rock, there, that he’s pointing to that the gates of Hell will not prevail against? “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It’s that truth that is the bedrock of our confession that he made.

So why, when predicting this incident of significant failing, this non-rock-like act of denial, this vacillation that is more like the sand or like that which would be sifted, than he is like a stable solid rock, why does Jesus address him as Peter, and it’s the only time he addresses in that way?

Seems to me our Lord is speaking strength and hope to a man who is about to display great weakness, turn his eyes away from his true hope, and speak about his hope. He addressed him throughout his ministry by his given name, Simon. This is the one time that he could use an injection of confidence, right? At this prediction. And what he prayed would most certainly come to pass. “I’ve prayed for you.” “I’ve prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”

Did Peter learn this? Well, we read at the beginning Peter became very rock-like. He became a steadfast source of encouragement, and he called us all to that attention. “Be of sober spirit, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.” The way Peter stands firm in the faith goes back to the good confession. He clings tightly to Christ, not physically, not spatially close, but he clings closely to Christ by the spiritual exercise of faith.

Beloved, that is the dividing line. That is the key in this text, that the testing is a testing of faith, and the proving is a proving of faith, and the improving is an improving of Peter’s faith. And it’s what you and I need most acutely, most desperately. Genuine faith is what separates Simon Peter from Judas Iscariot. The exercise of that faith is what makes the difference between victory and defeat whenever the testing comes. And when that testing comes, it’s for the strengthening, proving and improving of our faith. Bow with me in a word of prayer, please.

Our Father, we come to you as those who, well, we're like that father who doubted the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to heal his son. What he said to the Lord, on the prospect of him healing his Son, he said, "Lord, if you can." The Lord sharply rebuked that. If you can? If you can? Everything is possible to him who believes. And as that father responded, we also respond, "Lord, I do believe, but help my unbelief." It's by your grace that any of us believe anything of this Gospel. It's by your power and by your Spirit's illumination that we trust and hold fast to Christ. We cling to him by faith. We trust him because you've been gracious to give us this faith to believe.

But how often we find ourselves weak in believing, distracted, eventually doubting, and then resorting back to foolish self-confidence. We assure ourselves that we're doing fine, that everything's okay. We try to navigate our lives without any trouble, manage our way to safety and stability, provision, protection. How often we find ourselves acting like the unbelieving, like the unbelieving world we were plucked from by your grace from which we've emerged.

Father, we don't want to walk that way anymore. We do want to walk strong in faith. We pray that you would let your testing continue in our lives. And for those gentle souls that recoil at the prospect of tests, trials, difficulties, temptations, oh, Father, I pray that you would strengthen their souls and let them not fear, but let them look to you, not only in your great power, but your goodness, to see your loving kindness, your compassion, that you know our frame, that you're mindful that we're just dust.

But you have raised us up to an elevated position. You have great things in store for us. What we are now is not what we will be. And when our Lord Jesus Christ comes and we see him, we know we will be transformed immediately into his glory, and then we will see all things clearly. Oh, we pray that you would give us eyes of faith to see that now, to see your great vision for us, your people, and that we would walk in a way that benefits the child of God that we are.

Help us to walk strong in faith, not to try to navigate through our lives with no trouble, but instead to embrace anything that you put in our path, that you put, that you interrupt our schedules with, that you insert into our day, that you put into our relationships. We pray that you would strengthen us in faith, that we may present to you a life pleasing to you, a good stewardship that we render unto you for your glory in the name of Christ our Savior. It's in his name we pray. Amen.