

The Devil Doubling Down

Harmony M.B.C., January 21, 2017

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, **Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:**

Luke 22:32 **But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.**

Have you ever given serious thought to why our Lord might have revealed some inside information like this to us in Holy Scripture? We read in the bible about Jacob wrestling all night with an angel; that was a private kind of thing that was ordered custom-fit for Jacob to put him where he needed to be in order to become humble prince of God. And, what do we do with the account of Moses arguing with God on the backside of the desert about going to Pharaoh with an unpleasant message? On the other hand, we don't hear a word about John the Baptist's communication with God before he shows up along the Jordan preaching the coming of the Kingdom, but you have to know that there had to be some very awe-inspiring things that went on between John and the Lord before he came preaching. We are given an inside view of Elijah's time of discouragement and his conversation with the Lord about it (1Kings 19), but there's not a word about the exchange that Enoch must have had with God (Gen. 5), nor do we get to know what things John the beloved heard there (Rev. 10:4) in his heavenly vision, when he started to write about it and was forbidden by the Lord.

What I'm pointing out is that the Lord has exposed some private things and left others hidden. And the very fact of it demands that we look into why. So, I want us to look at Jesus's statement to Peter here in our text and attempt to see what must obviously be a message for believers that is to be applicable all through time for all of them.

Read text again:

This is the only place in the bible where this Greek word is used (*siniazo*; pronounce sin-ee-ad'-zo). It is a word that gives imagery of a sieve and what is done with a sieve. The Lord uses it in connection with wheat, so we are prompted to see a grain separator. Today, a sieve is seen as a kind of bowl made out of a piece of screen wire, or a bowl with holes in the bottom. But, the kind of sieve referred to in our text is a kind of flat pan used to separate wheat from chaff. The photos I passed around are examples. What those sieves accomplish is part of the lesson Jesus leaves us with.

With our Lord's use of this word in scripture only once, I believe he meant for this to be a unique entry in Holy Scripture. I also believe He intended that we realize a few things about this one-of-a-kind experience so that we could look at it as something to draw our attention; something to be alert to.

When I call this a one-of-a-kind experience, I am not meaning that it only happened once...that is, to Peter. Rather, I mean that there's no other thing that happens to humans like this experience of having the devil seek to sift us. Not only is such a thing personal, but it is something unlike anything else we might experience in our lives. It is, in fact, what I perceive to be the devil doubling down with his oppression of saints of God.

- I. At some level, and at some point in our lives, the devil specifically targets each of us
- ❖ We want to be reminded that he is busy going about on the earth to and fro “seeking whom he may devour” (1Pet. 5:8). If he's been by your place lately, he will be back again.
 - ❖ It is very instructive that when Jesus was talking to Peter here, he used the plural word for “you.” We can know from this that the Lord was including all the disciples...and I would dare to say that since He made sure this was recorded in Holy Scripture that the plural “you” included all believers.
 - ❖ Let's all assume that we will, ourselves, be targeted for being sifted as wheat at some time in our lives.
 - ❖ What is this “sifting as wheat?” What might it represent?
 - The photos I passed out should help us think about this.
 - Notice that the sifter separates the wheat from the chaff...the real kernels from the husk and waste material. There are lessons here:
 - The devil desires to shake up the people of God – the illustration by Jesus shows plainly that it is all about disturbance
 - The devil desires to make the attack personal (“desires you”)
 - The devil desires us so that he can concentrate and expose our worst traits (the chaff) – think about what is left in the sieve after the big shakeup
 - You'll get to see the worst of yourself, spiritually speaking in such a sifting process
 - So will others, perhaps. We don't want to forget that everybody saw the disciples run off; everybody around Peter got to see him act like a heathen. Everybody got to notice that the majority of the Lord's disciples – including 9 of those apostles - didn't come near the site where Jesus was being tortured.

II. The **devil is the most influential when our Savior seems the weakest**

- ❖ Have you ever noticed that night is its most oppressive when your viewing distance is reduced...like when there's some fog or rain...and it is most oppressive when the sky is overcast and no stars are visible...it becomes “thick darkness.” So it is when there are times in our lives that we don't feel the strength of the presence of the Lord...the darkness of the devil can feel most oppressive at this time.
- ❖ This is what Peter and all the disciples went through in a spiritual sense when Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten, etc. He seemed weak and helpless to them (it was only a human imagination at work here...Jesus Christ was never more strong than when He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities...when the chastisement of

our peace was upon Him). And remember, that the devil's work began when He was arrested there in the Garden and all His disciples forsook Him and fled.

- ❖ Let us be warned that when we begin to develop the idea that the Lord is in a weakened position, or that He has been forced to limit Himself, we are at a spiritual place to become a victim to the devil doubling down on us with oppression...with trials...with the purpose of drawing out the worst in us.

III. Despite how things may look here on earth, the devil must obtain permission (“**hath desired you**”)

- ❖ The restraint of God is such that even though the devil wants to do all evil, he is allowed to do only some
- ❖ The outcome of the apostle's grueling experience with the sifting that followed this is proof that the Lord limits how far such things can go (use the illustration of the fact that even before Christ rose 3 days later, the apostles were already meeting together...still sharing the bond that had been forged between them by their Lord).
 - It should be very comforting to us to know that the Lord truly limits the works of the devil.

IV. It is the intercession of Christ that directs the outcome of the work of Satan upon our lives: “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not”

- ❖ A statement like this (“**I have prayed for thee**”) from our Savior should lay everything else to rest about what we might be concerned about – not that it always does, but **it should!**
- ❖ This is a summary, spoken by our Lord, of what is most important for us in our experience of being sifted (the Lord deals in essentials) – “**that thy faith fail not**”
- ❖ Looking at the behavior of the apostles on that night of sifting we can see that there was nothing spiritually heroic about it...but they survived spiritually, and in the years following, I remind you again, they proved that Christ's intercession for them was effective.

V. Our experience with the devil's sifting leaves us with a responsibility: “**when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.**”

- ❖ This word converted refers to the idea of “reverting” back, or coming back.
- ❖ It suggests that we are going to slip in this awful trial, in this being “sifted as wheat”
- ❖ Every one of us has a story to tell about our trials and that story will have something in it that will help a struggling fellow-believer to be strengthened in their trial.