

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

## An Expository Study of the Gospel According to Luke Chapter 22- Luke 22:31-34 330- Jesus Prays for Peter

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October 2, 2016

### Luke 22:31-34

**31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;**

**32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."**

**33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"**

**34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."**

To the Glory of God

Now, as we have found out by going over this Passage over the last several weeks, this scene of the Last Supper of Jesus as described by Dr. Luke, as he was moved along by God the Spirit to write this account, is one of the most amazing scenes in the entire Bible. This is a very busy scene, in fact, it is quite chaotic. There is a lot is going on in this single Service, that is both real Good and real Bad.

One of the *best* things that God is doing in this Service, on this particular Thursday evening in the last week of Jesus' earthly Ministry, is using Himself to institute one of the glorious "Means of Grace", one of the gifts that God has given to the Church to help encourage and empower believers, the "Ordinance" or the "Sacrament" of the Lord's Supper, that the Christian Church has celebrated now for 2,000 consecutive years. And that is a real Good thing.

Jesus is also confirming that the institution of the glorious New Covenant will be through His Own Blood rather than through the blood

of an animal, as was the Original or the First Covenant. And that is a very Good thing.

But, one of the worst things that is happening, at the very same time in this very same Service, is *the* single greatest sin in the history of Mankind is being carried out, the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. And that is a very Bad thing.

And yet, as we have discovered, this betrayal is carried out in such a way that fully and precisely fulfills God's Own pre-ordained Plan of Salvation that God set in motion before the world was. And so, in the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, we have perhaps the single greatest example in all of the Bible of the profound Mystery between two seemingly divergent forces:

- ✓ God's Sovereignty
- ✓ Human Responsibility

God is absolutely Sovereign over everything, all the time, so that *nothing* that God has determined to do will fail. And yet, at the same time, Man is full accountable to God for what he does, and can and will be judged by God if he doesn't do the "right" thing.

And *both* of these concepts are absolutely true, and neither one hinders the other one. And so we must resist the temptation to lean too heavily on the Truth of God's Sovereignty at the expense of Human Responsibility, and we must resist the temptation to lean too heavily on the side of Human Responsibility at the expense of God's Sovereignty. There is a tension between these two Truths that tempt us to become warped or jaded, which will cause us to either try to work to be saved, or to lay back and become unconcerned. And neither one of those are right. And so we must be careful to maintain the tension between both of these Truths so that we hold both to be equally true at all times.

And we went over that amazing reality two weeks ago. And last week we looked at why Jesus did not reveal who was going to betray Him and allowed the disciples to initially get very frightened. And then we saw how they each moved very quickly away from fear to self-righteousness, arrogance, and pride. And we found out that Jesus allowed this display so He could teach them a very powerful lesson on how Leadership in His Church should be carried out when He said:

**Luke 22:25b-27**

**25 ... The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'**

**26 "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.**

**27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves.**

We saw that in here, in the Church, among the believers, in the Body of Christ, Leadership is always to be what is called "Servant Leadership", that we are not supposed to "lord it over" other believers and bark out orders and expect people to obey us without question, and then get mad when they don't, but that we are to *love* the people we lead and we are not to boss them around, but we are to *serve* them in humility and great brokenness and with trembling.

And so now, in the passage that Bother Andy just read to you, Dr. Luke puts the focus back on Peter. And I want you to remember what we found out two weeks ago, by looking again at the exchange between Peter and John, so please go to **John 13:21-30** with me:

**21 When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me."**

**22 The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a loss *to know* of which one He was speaking.**

**23 There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.**

**24 So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell *us* who it is of whom He is speaking."**

**25 He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?"**

**26 Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, *the son* of Simon Iscariot.**

**27 After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."**

**28 Now no one of those reclining *at the table* knew for what purpose He had said this to him.**

**29** For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor.

**30** So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

Now this is an amazing event. Here, in verse 24, Peter goes to John and asks John to ask Jesus who was going to betray the Lord. Now there is only one reason why Peter was so interested in who would betray the Lord and that is because, in the darkness of his own heart, Peter had contemplated the very same thing. In fact, all of them had, at one time or the other, been disillusioned with Jesus and had contemplated either leaving Him or betraying Him, and that is why they were so fearful when Jesus said this to them.

And, in verse 25, John indeed does ask the Lord who it will be, and then, in verse 26, Jesus tells him:

**... That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.**

.. and then the Apostle John wrote this:

**26 ... So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, *the son of Simon Iscariot.***

**27** After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, **"What you do, do quickly."**

... so at this point, John knew it was Judas. But for some reason John didn't tell Peter. And so Peter was left to wonder with the rest of the disciples and deal with the darkness of his own heart.

It was at this point, after Judas left, that Jesus turns His full attention to Peter and says this to him:

**Luke 22:31-32**

**31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission to sift you like wheat;***

**32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."**

Now this is frightening. How would you like Jesus to tell you that satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat? So satan himself wants to sift Peter the very same way that wheat is sifted during harvest. But look at the way that Jesus phrased this:

**Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat**

Now the word "Demand" is a very strong word, but that is the correct translation. And the way this Greek word is put here, it shows us that satan was demanding for himself. So satan has a very personal interest in Peter, *individually*, but also in the rest.

But notice that satan is not simply "demanding". He is demanding *permission*. Now he is forcefully wanting this permission, he is demanding it. Yet, even though he is demanding, he is also asking. And this teaches us a very powerful Truth about God and satan.

You see, the Bible teaches that God is absolutely Sovereign over everything, all the time. And so, in ten thousand different ways the Bible teaches from cover to cover that God alone is the One Who is in charge of all things. So, whereas satan has been given limited authority, he doesn't have complete authority. While he is free to walk to and fro throughout the earth and up and down in it, and while satan is free to roam through the earth as a roaring lion, seeking who he can devour, and while it is true that satan is free to kill, steal, and destroy, he does not have all power or all authority.

Satan cannot do anything that is contrary to God's pre-ordained Plan. And so satan operates in complete submission to God and God's Will. And he has to go to God and ask permission before he can carry out any of his wickedness. And so satan and his desires are *limited* by God, they are *governed* by God, they are *restricted* by God, and God only allows satan to do what will further God's Plan in the earth.

So, it is not true, that many teach today that satan has unfettered authority in the earth. That is simply not true. The Bible does not teach that. The Bible teaches God, and God, alone has totally Power and Authority over all of His Creation, and that satan is really nothing more than a tool that God uses to further His Will in the earth by periodically allowing *some* of the evil that satan desires to do to come to pass.

So satan has to go to God and ask permission to tempt and kill, and steal and rob and destroy. And in His Good and perfect Love and Wisdom, there are times that God allows satan to do some or all that he desires to do. And there are other times that God forbids satan to do anything he wants to do. And the criteria as to why God allows satan to do some or all that he wants, while at other times blocking him from doing anything that he wants, is that by maintaining total and complete control and authority over satan, it furthers God's Plan in the earth.

But, this also shows us something else. By having to ask permission from God before he can do anything, this shows us that satan does *not* know all of what God's Plan is. Satan is *not* Omniscient; he *doesn't* know everything about everything. And you're not Omniscient either. No human, no angel, and no demon is Omniscient. Only God has perfect knowledge about all things. So being Omniscient is part of what makes God to be Holy and *deserving* of our worship and adoration.

And so satan must find out what God's Plan is, the same way as we do, by watching it happen. So, while we humans are no match for satan, satan is no match for God.

Now back when we were going over Chapter 6 where Jesus was praying all night to pick these 12 men and set them in as Apostles, we saw that Dr. Luke is very forthcoming about the fact that all of the Apostles were not created equal. Some were closer to Jesus than the rest and Peter especially was the leader of all of the Apostles. Jesus Himself used the word "protos", meaning first among equals when dealing with Peter.

So, Peter is the leader of all of the Apostles. He is the spokesman. He is the one who asks all the questions, both the questions on his own mind and questions that were on the minds of the other Apostles. He is the natural and obvious leader. And Peter is the crucial "evangelist" in the first eleven chapters of **The Book of the Acts**. He's the dominant preacher, of course, during that period of the early formation of the church. So, it is not surprising that satan would want to go after Peter.

So what does satan want? Luke tells us that satan demands permission to sift him. And the verb there in the Greek means basically to sift wheat. And what happened was simply you put all the wheat and all the chaff and everything that came out of the initial process, and you put it in a large flat kind of instrument or a basket, and violently,

turbulently, shake it and throw it in the air, and the wind blows away the lighter chaff leaving only the heavier wheat. That's what Satan wants to do to Peter. He wants to violently, turbulently, rapidly shake him and sift him.

Now it is important to know that here, again, two completely different things are going on:

- ✓ Satan wants to destroy Peter
- ✓ God wants to prove Peter

Satan wants Peter to be removed from his position as a leader among the Apostles, so he demands permission from God. So Satan is not trying to be used by God to bring Peter forth as pure gold. No, Satan simply wants Peter to be destroyed.

And God grants that permission, but only to the extent that Peter is brought forth as the *"protos"* of the Apostles by being sifted, *not* so that Peter is destroyed.

Now, by the way, the word "you" in verse 31 is plural. And from that we know that Satan is not trying to sift only Peter. He wants to start with Peter, but Satan wants to sift all of the Apostles. So the "you" in verse 31 refers to all of the eleven, not just Peter.

This becomes very clear in the parallel account over in **Matthew 26:31** when Jesus repeats this same warning in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He said:

### **Matthew 26:31**

***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 SHALL BE SCATTERED.'***

*"You're all going to be shaken by Satan, you're all going to be taken into a severe temptation and trial. You're all going to encounter the adversary, and you're all going to fall away this very night."*

Now isn't it God's Will for us to be faithful and not fall away? Yes. So why is Jesus saying this? Because of what He said at the end of verse 31. This is a fulfillment of OT Prophecy as given by the Prophet Zechariah:

***I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'***

So the Shepherd is Jesus. But *Who* is going to strike Jesus down? God. Why? So that His Word will be fulfilled. God will do what He has commanded us not to do, strike down the Shepherd. But God only does this to fulfill His Word.

But then, in **Matthew 26:32**, Jesus went on to say:

***But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.***

In other words, all of you Apostles will recover from your fall and we'll meet again in Galilee. So this is not a fatal sifting.

Jesus is telling them in advance, *"While satan wants to bring a turbulent, violent, severe shaking on all of you, I will prevent this shaking from being fatal."*

And it is at this point where Jesus says to Peter:

**Luke 22:32**

***but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."***

Now it seems that the best thing Jesus could have told Peter was that He had destroyed satan, or that He was going to sovereignly keep satan away from him, or that Jesus was going to deliver Peter from being tempted at all. Yet, Jesus didn't say that. Because that isn't how this works.

We need to take a moment to examine all that Jesus is saying here. First of all, Jesus has already prayed for Peter. The tense of this verb is past tense. And so before satan begins to sift Peter and the others like wheat, Jesus prayed for them.

And this brings up another Principle about temptations and trials that we need to understand. God prepares us for our trial *before* we actually go into it. Jesus prays for us *before* we go into the trial and *before* we are tempted. Nobody goes into a trial blind-sided. Nobody goes into a time of temptation without Jesus preparing us in advance. And this is exactly what the Apostle Paul taught in **1 Corinthians 10:11-14**:

**11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**

**12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.**

**13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.**

**14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.**

Now this amazing and precious Promise has been watered down through the years to become:

God won't put more on you than you can handle

... which is *not* what Paul said here at all. First of all, this Promise is only for those who are saved. Because God will absolutely put more on lost people than they can handle. Unless they repent and believe the Gospel, God has promised to throw all unrepentant rebels into hell, and hell is a lot more than you can handle.

But this Promise has to do with temptations and staying faithful to God through the temptations and of not falling into sin through the temptation. And the Promise of God here is that since God is in charge of your temptations, He will not allow you to be tempted by satan to the point of not being able to overcome that temptation through Jesus Christ.

And the only reason why we are able to go through a time of temptation and not fall into sin is because Jesus is praying for us, even as He prayed for Peter.

Now I also want you to notice what Jesus prayed in **Luke 22:32**. He prayed:

**... that your faith may not fail**

Jesus is praying that your trust in Him, your belief in Who He is and what He has done on your behalf, will not fail. This is not generic faith in the sense of some commodity that you possess that belongs to you and that has nothing in focus, as many in the modern Church teach

today. No, this is faith in Jesus; trust in Jesus. This is the confidence that we get about Who Jesus is and what Jesus has already done, not in how strong you are or in how much power you have.

And this also shows us that even though we say that we are in a trial of our finances, or a trial of our health, or a trial over our children, or a trial over some other aspect, really and truly, there is only one trial, *the trial or the proof of your faith*. So please go with me to **1 Peter 1:3**:

### **1 Peter 1:3-9**

**3 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,**

**4 to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,**

**5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

**6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,**

**7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

**8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,**

**9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.**

Now verse 4 says that the inheritance of the saints in Heaven is four things:

- 1. Imperishable**
- 2. Undefiled**
- 3. Will not fade away**
- 4. Reserved in heaven for you**

In other words, Heaven for the elect is guaranteed. But why is it guaranteed? How could that be true? Look what Peter said in the first part of verse 5:

**who are protected by the power of God through faith...**

So, how does this work? Does it work through an *absence* of trials? No. It works *because* of our trials. Our inheritance in Heaven is imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, and is reserved precisely because Jesus didn't keep us out of our trials; He just keeps us while we are in them. Look again at the next two verses:

**1Peter 1:6-7**

**6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,**

**7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

So why does Peter say we rejoice in verse 6? So that the "proof of our faith" or the *outcome* of the "trial of our faith", which is **more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

So it isn't true that we are strong in the Lord *in spite of* our trials, or that we are faithful *in spite of* our trials, or that we are determined to remain true to Jesus *in spite of* our trials. That isn't the way this works. No, we are strong and we are faithful and we are determined to remain true to Jesus *because* of our trials.

So our trials are specifically designed for us by a Good and Loving and Merciful Savior, Who proves our faith and our trust in Him, by allowing us to go through these various tests and trials. In other words, trials are God's tools to prove whether our faith and hope and trust in Jesus is real, that we really do believe what God has said, and that we trust that God is Who He said He was, and that He will do what he said He will do.

So satan cannot touch us, unless he first goes to God and asks permission. And the only reason why our Father Who loves us allows satan to touch our flesh is that by allowing that "evil" to come to us, it works together with all the many Good things that God has given us, and both that Good that God sovereignly *caused* and the evil that God

sovereignly *allows* works together for the greater Good of the Glory of God, and ultimately the fullness of our joy as well.

So the *first* thing that happens is not the trial. No, the first thing that happens is that Jesus prays for us that our faith will not fail. He prays for us that what we have come to believe and trust in and hope in will not be diminished through the trial that is about to take place in our lives. Jesus doesn't pray that we can just hang on, either.

No, I'm telling you that it is God's Will that your faith in Jesus is proven, that it is made real, that it is developed into something that will guarantee your eternity in Heaven. And the only way that happens is through trials. And so our trials are not accidents. Our trials are not something that sneaked up on us. Satan didn't get to us while God wasn't looking. No, Satan came to God and asked permission to sift you like wheat, and God allowed Satan to cross the Blood line of protection around you and hurt you in some way. But this was not designed to destroy you, but rather that through this trial your faith will be proven to be real and strong, and something that will *guarantee* your eternity in Heaven.

*The* single most encouraging word of consolation and hope that I can possibly offer you today from God's Word is that, if you love God and if you have been called according to His Purpose, in other words, if you are despairing of your own resources and looking to Christ for hope, then this wonderful Promise from God belongs to you:

Jesus prays for you, and He will never let Satan destroy your faith  
and bring you to ruin.

... but it will only be done in His Power and through His Sovereignty and because of His Prayers. Our faith is guaranteed to not fail as we trust in Jesus. But the flip side of this is that our faith is guaranteed to be proven false; if we try to do this in our own human power. And that is the greatest lesson that Peter learned here. Look again at **Luke 22:32-34:**

**32 ... and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."**

**33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"**

**34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."**

Jesus knew that Peter was about to utterly fail in the biggest trial of his faith. In just a few hours from that very moment, Peter will deny repeatedly that he even knows Jesus. And yet here Jesus shows him, in advance, that his fall will not be permanent when He said:

**and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers**

Now the Greek word that was translated here into English as “**turned again**” is the root word from which we get the word “repent”. Jesus is telling Peter right here that after he falls and then repents, he will then be able to strengthen the others.

And from this we see that Peter’s failure to remain faithful was *not* cause for his disqualification, but rather, his failure and the repentance that came from that failure was the very tool that God used to prepare him for Ministry!

So satan aims to sift Simon and the others like wheat. But Jesus aims to keep Simon's faith from failing. So probably "sifting like wheat" means doing something to make the disciples' faith fail.

We can imagine a picture like this: Satan has a big sieve with jagged-edged wires forming a mesh with holes shaped like faithless men and women. And what he aims to do is throw people into this sieve and shake them around over these jagged edges until they are so torn and weak and desperate that they let go of their faith and fall through the sieve as faithless people, right into satan's company.

But faith cannot fall through the mesh. It's the wrong shape. And so as long as the disciples hold to their faith, trusting the Power and Goodness of God for their Hope, then they will not fall through the mesh into Satan's hands.

Therefore, the sifting of Simon Peter and the others is satan's effort to destroy their faith. And this remains Satan's main goal today. It is relatively unimportant to satan whether we are healthy or sick, rich or poor; what he wants is to sift out our faith. And if he can do it by suffering, he will try that; if he can do it by wealth, he will try that. Peter learned a powerful lesson that night. And some 30 years later he wrote in **1 Peter 5:8-11**:

**8** Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

**9** But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

**10** After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

**11** To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus pictured satan as a farmer shaking Christians in his sieve, trying to tear them apart from their faith. Peter pictures satan as a lion who can devour anything but faith. So the only person that can fit through satan's sieve is an unbeliever. The only thing that will fit down the lion's throat is an unbeliever. The Apostle John said:

**1John 5:4b**

**... this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.**

If we hold it fast to the end, satan *cannot* destroy us. That's why John wrote to the Church of Smyrna in **The Revelation 2:10** and said:

**Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

So here is how all this went down that night in the first Communion Service. Back in **Luke 22:28**, Jesus had given these men an astonishing and reassuring Promise:

**Luke 22:28-30**

**28 "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials;**

**29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you**

**30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

And there must have been a great stir of excitement at these wonderful words. What a prospect! The great Messianic Kingdom established, and the Apostles ruling with Jesus! Talk about a spiritual high!

But then came the sobering words of realism in verses 31-32. The Kingdom is not yet fully come. So Jesus portrays life as threatened and fraught with spiritual difficulties. But in doing so He reveals another Promise that I could scarcely live without, especially over the last 15 years:

**Luke 22:31-32**

**31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;**

**32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."**

So just mere minutes after being told that he would be a ruler in Christ's Kingdom, Jesus tells Peter here that he is going to crash. So from the heights of joyful anticipation and confidence to the pit of failure and bitter weeping in one night.

But there is hope even in his failure:

**and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers**

Now the fact that Satan has such power in the world should give a kind of seriousness to our lives which unbelievers simply don't have. It ought not to make us paranoid or fearful, but sober and earnest in our prayers and persistently conscious of needing God's power. When the enemy is supernatural, so must our weapons be. We are aliens and exiles in the world not merely because our values differ from those who don't know God, but also because our struggles are different than those who don't know Satan.

That's one implication of Jesus' words: Satan is real, has great power, and must be reckoned with seriously and soberly in this age. But a *second* implication is that Satan's power is only by permission from God. So there are *not* two ultimate powers in the universe locked in a titanic struggle against each other. There is only one Power: God.

So when Satan wants to have the disciples, he must go to God first. And that's an important piece of information for our day, because the demonic forces of unreason and insubordination and hate and violence are becoming so strong and ever nearer to home that our faith in God's supremacy may be tested to the limit. We will need to remember words like these:

**Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;**

... and their meaning:

Satan cannot hurt us any more than God permits.

The *reason* God permits Satan to persist in his "sifting" work is that in the end it will be good for the Church and will bring more glory to God. It's clear from the whole NT that God intends to bring the Bride of Christ to perfection, but only through afflictions and temptations. The Apostle Peter said:

**1 Peter 1:6**

**In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,**

The Apostle Paul said:

**Romans 8:16-17**

**16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,  
17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.**

... and all of the Apostles preached:

**The Acts 14:22b**

**... Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**

So the mystery of all this is that through sufferings and trials, our faith is refined. Through these hardships, we are drawn to rely ever more heavily on God, and we are moved to cherish His Grace more

strongly. And satan has his role to play in fanning the flames of our refining furnace, and so God awaits the appointed day of Judgment.

But not only does the ongoing work of satan ultimately do Good for the Church, but it also will bring more Glory to God. I picture God as an omniscient General Whose Aim is to fight and win the war in the way that will bring Himself the most Glory for His magnificent, strategic Wisdom and Power. So instead of steam rolling over the enemy all at once, our great God combines strategic advances and retreats that allow the enemy some illusion of success, and brings out all their arrogance and hate for the General, so that it can be seen for what it really is. In His Wisdom, the General knows when the end should come. And so, He will give way for a time to allow the enemy to rage in defiance, and then when sin is seen for all that it is, He will close in and destroy the enemy in such a way that none can doubt the Wisdom and Glory and Power of the General.

So, yes, satan has power. But it is all by permission of God. And it is never out of control. Therefore, we must be sober in our prayers, fight the good fight, and anticipate the Victory of God at the perfect time.

But now look at Peter's response to all of this in **Luke 22:33-34**:

**33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"**

**34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."**

Now it is a dangerous thing to underestimate the power of spiritual evil and to overestimate our own ability to withstand it. When Jesus told Peter that Satan was coming after him and the others, Peter responded:

**"Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"**

Peter had a willing spirit, but he didn't know how weak his flesh really was. But Jesus did. And so He told it to Peter straight up:

**"I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."**

Now in human terms, Peter was no wimp. This man had left *everything* to follow Jesus. He had the guts to try walking on water. He had seen Jesus transfigured. So it would be wise for us not to assume that we are Peter's equals. If Peter could be pressed by Satan to deny Jesus, there's no doubt that we could be as well. And so without the Protection of Jesus, we have no hope of withstanding such an evil spiritual force.

In the face of Satan's attack, Peter had only one hope, as he discovered, when Jesus had said to him:

**but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."**

Now it's interesting that the Greek word for "you" in this verse is singular, as opposed to the plural "you" of verse 31. So Jesus was saying,

**"I have prayed for you, Peter."**

Jesus knew Peter was going to outright deny him repeatedly. Peter was going to have a major failure of faith. He was going to discover that he needed far more than self-confidence to withstand satanic sifting. But Jesus had prayed for Peter, and so Peter's faith was not going to utterly fail. His faith would be sustained, restored, and strengthened.

And like Peter, ultimately our only hope of enduring this present oppressive darkness is with Jesus's prayers. And we have very good ground for hope, because Jesus:

**Hebrews 7:25b**

**... is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

... and that Intercession ensures that by His Omnipotent Grace, we will ultimately stand.

But, there is one last thing I want you to see in the text. This is not to lay a burden on you, but only to increase your joy. The joy we

have in the Promises of God is always doubled when it bubbles up over the brim of our life and spill over onto others.

So, what about the other ten apostles (not counting Judas)? Satan was going to sift them, too. Did Jesus pray for them? Yes, He did. But Jesus did *not* ask the Father to guard their faith in the very same way he guarded Peter's. God broke the back of Peter's pride and self-reliance that night in the agony of satan's sieve. But Jesus did not let him go. He turned him around and forgave him and restored him and strengthened his faith. And now it was Peter's mission to strengthen the other ten. Jesus provided for the ten, by providing for Peter. And, in that way, the strengthened became the strengthener.

There is a great lesson here for us. Sometimes God will deal with you directly, strengthening your faith alone in the wee hours of the morning. But most of the time (we might say ten-elevenths of the time) God strengthens our faith through another person.

God sends us some "Simon Peter" who brings just the word of Grace we need to keep on in the faith: some testimony about how ...

### **Psalms 30:5b**

**... Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy *comes* in the morning.**

What we must understand is that the eternality of our Salvation is a community project. Whenever God encourages your heart with the Promise that in satan's sifting your faith will not fail, then we are to take that Divine Encouragement and double your joy by using it to strengthen our brothers and sisters.

So even though we think we know what's going on, often we barely have a clue. The Holy Scriptures teach us that what we see happening in the world is only part of the story. There's a whole dimension to reality that wields a direct and very powerful influence in our experience, and yet is largely outside of our perception. The Apostle Paul describes it this way:

### **Ephesians 6:12-13**

**12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.**

**13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.**

It is a great encouragement to know that God is always stronger than satan, and that by faith in Jesus, we can avoid satan's destruction and gain a crown of life. But the text is not yet done; God's Word of consolation and hope goes farther.

Jesus does not merely intend for us to be the passive recipients of His mighty Prayers. He intends for us to engage our powerful Adversary, the cosmic powers, in battle by the Strength that only He supplies.

In other words, we must take the reality of spiritual evil very seriously. The "enemy" and the "war" are not metaphors. They are very real. And being armed, we are called to remain alert by remaining prayerful, **"praying at all times in the Spirit . . . with all perseverance . . . for all the saints"** (Ephesians 6:18).

And if we are not praying this way, it's likely that we do not take the spiritual forces of evil seriously enough. And it also shows that like the disciples, we do not know how weak our flesh really is. So Jesus's word to us, like it was to them, is:

**Matthew 26:41**

**Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."**

So if we wear the armor, wield the Word, and pray at all times in the Spirit, we will "not be outwitted by satan" or "ignorant of his designs". And we will be ready to wrestle well when he demands to have us.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.