

Jacob London. New Horizon United Reformed Church. Feb 2, 2020

Satan's Accusations and the Mighty Intercession of Christ - Luke 22:31-34

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ,

If you are in Christ this afternoon, if you can be called a Christian by both spirit and action, is there a more comforting truth in the scriptures than what is found in this text? If ye be in Christ this day you may take comfort in knowing that Christ is praying for you.

Just pause and consider the grandeur of that statement! He is our elder statesman. He is the champion of our faith. He is the prince of heaven. He is the Lord of all creation. If anyone was worthy of retirement, surely it is our Christ? It is he who sits on the throne as the angels cover their feet and face with their wings and cry out *holy, holy, holy* (Isa. 6). All of this only makes this truth all the more surreal, that he prays for you.

Today we are dealing with the topic of Christ's intercession. Intercession meaning "to intervene on behalf of another."

Allow me to give a figurative example of intercession. Imagine that you were wrongly imprisoned for a heinous and egregious crime that you did not commit. It was such a disgusting crime that the public outrage against you was so universally negative that it was as if you were already guilty. You can imagine that before you even stood trial the verdict was decided. The death sentence. But a righteous lawyer discovered that in fact you are not guilty. He represents you, or intercedes for you, acquits you and sets you free.

We are told in the scriptures that Christ intercedes for the elect in a similar manner (Rom. 8:34). He is the one who represents us before the Father, who has vindicated us by his blood, and now represents us as our spiritual lawyer (Heb 7:25).

Often we only think of Jesus as praying for our salvation. While that's true he does pray for the salvation of his people... yet this is not all he prays for. In fact, in our text is an example of Jesus praying not for the salvation of Peter, for his salvation was already secure. Rather, our Lord prays for those graces that Peter received in salvation would be maintained and strengthened. When Jesus prays for the church he prays for the keeping of every grace.

Lesson: If you are a Christian, know that Christ is praying for you.

Our headings:

1. Satan's Accusations (v.31).
2. The Mighty Intercession of Christ (vv.32-34).

Point 1: Satan's Accusations (v.31).

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat'" (v.31).

There was a 16th century English preacher named Hugh Latimer who died tragically when he was burned on a stake by Queen Mary for his preaching. Recently, I read in one of his sermons, about the most active preacher there ever was. He laboured to establish one point:

- 1) That Satan labours tirelessly in his preaching. Throughout the week, for six days, Satan has the attention of the church. Satan is never not in his pulpit. Every time you are out in this world, and behold something contrary to God's Word, there lies Satan in his pulpit. He is constantly preaching to you his morals rather than the morals of Almighty God.

Rev. Latimer's point is that Satan is toiling endlessly against the elect in this life. The Lord Jesus makes this point very clear to Peter.

"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you". The first thing we notice is how the Lord Jesus refers to the Apostle Peter. He refers to him by his birth name and not by his Christian name. We would do well not to read too far into this. Jesus almost always refers to Peter as Simon with the only exception in verse 34. Rather, we should notice the repetition. Consider when you repeat your spouse's name, or your child's name, or the name of someone you love, what does this convey? This conveys a solemnity, an emphasis, tinged with emotion. In the case of our Lord Jesus, it is tinged with sadness.

"Indeed" meaning behold! I did a word study on the word behold, do you know what behold means in the original language? It means behold! Listen up! Peter, you need to hear what is about to be spoken to you.

1.1 - Satan's Timing

"Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat". Here Jesus reveals to Peter that Satan tirelessly works against the church and the timing of his attacks.

Consider what the disciples have just experienced with Christ. Earlier in this chapter was the institution of the Lord's Supper (vv.14-23). Which is the pinnacle and height of all of the Old Testament Covenants. Consider that Jesus has just told them that they would one day reign on thrones in the heavenly Jerusalem (v. 30). And yet it is here that Jesus reveals to Peter the demands of Satan.

The reason for this is because it is at these moments that Satan strikes. It is after the mountaintop experience. Spiritually eating the body of the soon to be crucified Lord, and drinking his blood. Being told of their heavenly inheritance to come in Christ, it is after these experiences that Satan strikes.

Have you ever experienced this? Have you ever noticed that its after a great day that you are more susceptible to temptation? Or when something wonderful happens we are prone to sin? This is by no coincidence. Satan knows that in our times of victory we tend to let our guard down.

Yet, we can also find great comfort in this text. Notice the words of Christ, “*Satan has asked for you*”. Satan is not a sovereign creature! Jesus shows us the true nature of his power, his power is limited. He cannot assail and tempt anyone that he chooses. Though the scriptures tell us that he continually assaults believers, we know that he can only operate in the parameters and limitations set for him by God himself.

Which is why Job, Jesus, and Paul all speak of the trials of temptations as tests given to us by God.

1.2 - *Satan's Accusation*

The Bible speaks often of the work of Satan as the work of someone who accuses the elect of their sins (Zec. 3:1-2; Job 2; Rev. 12:10). He desires nothing more than the failure of the disciples. He is driven by furious madness to destroy us, he is like a lion constantly roaring for his prey. Satan's demand for Peter is consistent with the rest of the scriptures teaching about his work.

“*Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat*”. If you read your Bible you know the term *sift as wheat*. This sifting, before the days of farming combines, was a way to separate the chaff from the kernels of wheat. You see, when they harvested the wheat they would remain a dead membrane of skin on the outside called chaff. In order to remove this chaff they would take the kernel and throw it into the air. As it was in the air the wind would blow the chaff off the kernel and the kernel would fall to the ground.

This becomes a frequent spiritual analogy in the scriptures. Psalm 1:4 says, “*The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*” The righteous are the kernel and the wicked are the dead membrane that remains on the outside.

We must ask the question, who is God in this analogy? He of course is the one who throws the kernel and chaff into the air! Yet we must also recognize that he is the wind who blows the wicked away Psalm 35:5 says, “*Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the Lord driving them away!*” You see, it is God who separates the chaff from the kernel, the sheep from the goats.

The chaff is those who profess faith falsely. They say they are Christians but they really are not, and it is God who shall judge each man and woman on that last day. Yet, here Satan is asking that he would be made judge over the disciples' souls. He wants to be the wind and to be the one to test whether their faith is true! It is as if Satan has asked, “Allow me to shake their faith, allow me to blow them with force. Let me be the judge over their souls, and then we shall see if they have faith.”

Our Lord Jesus always has our best interest at heart, yet most shockingly we realize, like God with Job, Jesus allows his disciples to be shaken by Satan. Only 20 verses later Peter has denied the Lord three times and wept bitterly. The 12 disciples will sleep through Jesus request to stay up and pray. Jesus will be crucified by himself with only one disciple present. They will abandon his teaching after his death and return to their fishing.

Application:

1. Know the hour temptation. We noticed that Satan choose a certain time to accuse the disciples. Each of us will be more susceptible to temptation at different times in the day and in our lives. If you know that you are susceptible to sin in the dead of night, don't go scrolling online. If you, after a long day with the children, find in those moments hatred towards your husband choose that moment to take a walk. Know the hour of temptation and in those moments give not the enemy a foothold.

Point 2: The Mighty Intercession of Christ (vv.32-34).

Though the disciples have been informed of Satan's attacks upon them and we know of their eventual defection. We rejoice this morning knowing that their defection will not be permanent. Why? Because Jesus prayed for them.

In some churches this may be a controversial statement, I trust not so with you. I do not believe that a Christian can lose their salvation. Once someone is regenerated by the Holy Ghost, saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, I believe they are God's alone forever. We in the Reformed Churches have always believed this. We have held that as an essential truth of our Reformed faith. Amen? Now, the question becomes, what keeps us from giving up the faith? We still sin. We may even backslide, the disciples sure did, but what is it that keeps us from backsliding all the way into hell and destruction?

Listen to the Word of our confession, “but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, (*For the elect to perish*) since his counsel cannot be changed, nor his promise fail, neither can the call according to his purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual” (CoD. Head 5; Art 1).

2.1 - *The Prayers of Christ*

What the Bible teaches us is that the prayers of Christ do a mighty work in keeping our souls. Jesus knows of the sin that so easily entangles us. He knows how weak your faith is. He knows that Satan preaches on every street corner. So he prays for you. Our Lord is in heaven right now praying for his church. He prays mighty, effectual, prayers. He prays prayers that produce results. His prayers are not flimsy, his prayers are not weak, but strong prayers into the ear of the Father on our behalf.

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail;” (v.32a). Notice that Jesus does not pray for Peter’s wealth. He does not pray that things would work out well for him. No, our Lord prays for the only thing that matters in life, he prays for his faith.

Ephesians 2:8 gives us insight into this text. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”* The gift of God is the faith to be able to receive Christ.

John Bunyan said, “Faith is the mother grace, the root of grace, that grace that hath all others in the bowels of it, and that from which all other flow; yea, it is that which gives being to all our other graces, and that by which all graces do live.”

As Jesus prays for the faith of Peter he prays for all things that come out of faith. He prays for his sanctification, he prays for his adoption, he prays for his trust, he prays for his hope, everything that comes to the man by faith Jesus prays us up in. So, then, Christ prayed for the preservation of every grace when he prayed for the preservation of faith.

The prayers of Jesus preserve his disciples. In other words, the only reason you or I have not backslidden, the only reason I am still saved is not because of my merits or strength, but because of the merit of Christ, and his intercession and preservation of my soul. So we give glory to Jesus Christ! When he says to us, *“I have prayed that your faith faileth not.”* He is praying that he would keep us from evil. And this is the true cause of our standing, and this is the true cause of our continuing in the faith, the true cause of our holy profession of the gospel to this very day. Jesus Christ prays for my soul.

That is why it is absolutely antithetical to the gospel to believe that you or I, in any way, contribute any merit to our salvation. The whole of scripture point us to Jesus as the sole cause of our salvation.

2.2 - The Effectual Nature of Jesus’ Prayers

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” (v.32).

How effective is the prayer life of our Lord? Jesus is so sure of his own intercession that he tells him that even though according to his own flesh he will fall away (vv.33-34), he will return again. For the benefit of the church!

Very quickly, let us observe the last two verses. *“But he said to Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.” Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me”* (vv.33-34). One cannot help but admire the courage of Peter, though misguided. Peter had seen the limitless power of Jesus on display. Notice those words, *“with you”*. He was sure he could withstand anything so long as Christ was with him.

Shortly after this conversation, away from the presence of Christ, Peter would cringe in cowardly fear and deny the Lord. Fulfilling Jesus’ warning. Later in life he would be imprisoned, and according to church history, also crucified.

Yet despite his denial of his Lord, despite his unwillingness to stay up and pray with Jesus, despite the fact he returned to fishing, Peter’s faith would ultimately not fail. He was turned around by divine grace, according to the mighty prayers of Jesus our Lord.

Peter would later, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit authorize two books of the Bible, and notice the reason Peter gives for the writing of his first book.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”

The Lord’s prayers was realized in Peter and when he returned to his Lord he strengthen his brothers.

Application:

1. The prayer life of our Lord is one of the greatest tools in the resistance of sin. Jesus is our great high priest who always lives to make intercession (Heb. 7:25). Even now he prays for you. The next time you feel tempted, pause, and considers the prayers he prays for you.
2. Lastly, this doctrine should give us the boldness to come to God. Is Christ interceding for us in heaven? Then let us be a praying people here on earth. Let us often bring our petitions to God knowing that Jesus Christ the righteous ever lives to make intercession for me.

Conclusion:

Satan is the foe of all of God’s people. His mission is to bring as many with him to the fires of hell. In our own strength we would happily join him. Praise be to God through our great Prophet, Priest, and King Jesus we have an intermediary who provides for us life and salvation in himself. In closing, I pray that you would examine your heart and ask this question, do I know this Jesus? If not, today is the day of response. Come to Christ.