

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #52
"The Battle of the Cross" (Part Six)
(Scriptures from NKJV)

Luke 22:21-23; 31-34:

"But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.

. . .

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

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."

INTRODUCTION: In our last lesson, we finished the three stages of the Jewish ecclesiastical trial. This trial was illegal in numerous ways and was rigged to find Jesus guilty from the very outset. He was found guilty of blasphemy, which brings with it the death sentence. But since the Jewish people are under Roman rule, they must now appeal to Roman civil law to carry out the death sentence. Before we follow Jesus as He is handed over to Pontius Pilate, we want to look at the events in the lives of two men which occurred prior to Jesus' appearance before Pilate. They are two of the twelve apostles, namely, Peter and Judas. We will subtitle this lesson as "Two Men Sifted by Satan." Let us not forget that we are covering the doctrine of God's election of grace in general and the election and rule of angels in particular. We will begin first with Peter.

A. PETER IS SIFTED BY SATAN - Luke 22:31-34.

1. Textual references - Matthew 26:30-35; Mark 14:16-31; John 13:36-38.
2. In Luke's account of the Gospel record, Jesus makes a remarkable threefold prediction:
 - a. That one (namely Judas) would betray Him.
 - b. That all of the twelve would be offended at Him.
 - c. That Peter would deny Him outright three times.
3. These were the twelve that Jesus personally hand-picked, and hand-trained. They had been with Him for three years and had heard His teachings and seen His miracles. It was hard for them, especially Peter, to believe it would occur. I wish to address Satan's ability to sift men by looking at the efforts of such sifting in the lives of Peter and Judas.

4. Satan's request - There are three words in verse 31 which need to be clarified.
- a. First - the word, **"you"** is in the plural, meaning that Satan is asking to sift all of the twelve, not just Peter.
 - b. Second, the word, **"asked"** is forceful, in that it is a demanding request or right to have access to the twelve for the purpose of destroying them by leading them into apostasy.
 - c. Third - the word **"sift"** means to shake in a sieve. In this case it is grains of wheat being separated from the chaff. Satan's desire is to prove who is a genuine believer and who is not. This should be compared to Job in chapters one and two. NOTE: In verse 32, the pronoun **"you"** is singular, meaning that Jesus is addressing Peter in particular. God claims that His elect or sheep are safe within His care. Satan claims that he has the ability to separate them from God's power and cause them to be lost. If he can but pluck one of them out of God's hand (power) he can then prove that he is greater than God Himself! Then he can claim the right to be the Most High God! This is a major part of the "Battle of the Cross."

5. There are five distinct limitations of Satan's power toward true believers. They are:

a. First limitation: Before Satan can sift a believer, he must first report to God of his intentions - **"Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you** (plural - all apostles) **that he may sift you as wheat."**

(1) cf. Job. 1:6-12.

(2) In Job one, Satan must make stated reports of all that he does, and wherever he goes. **"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, 'from where do you come?' So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.'"**

(3) In verses 8-12 God asked what Satan thinks about His servant Job, and Satan thinks that Job is a phoney, only serving God for His blessings, and not because he loves Him.

(4) Point: After inspecting a believer, Satan must tell God what he thinks about the believer and what he wants to do with him.

b. Second limitation: Before Satan can sift a believer, he must first obtain permission from God - "***Satan as asked for you.***"

(1) cf. Job 2:1-7.

(2) Point: Satan may ask or desire, but God must permit.

c. Third limitation: Before Satan can sift a believer, God must first determine if it is for the believer's good - "***That he may sift you as wheat.***"

(1) Romans 8:28-31 - "***And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?***"

(2) All things work together for the good of God's elect, who are known as believers. They have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. If God be for these, (the elect according to His purpose) who can be against them? The following verses 35 through 39 in Romans 8 establish that nothing can separate these people from the love of Christ.

(3) Point: If something could do so, then God's purpose is frustrated and He is defeated by some created being or thing.

d. Fourth limitation: Before Satan can sift a believer, the intercessory work of Jesus is already operating. "***I have prayed for you.***"

(1) John 17:6, 9, 15, 24 - "***I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.***" . . . "***I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.***" . . . "***I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.***" . . . "***Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.***"

(2) The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints rests upon the

doctrine of God's preservation of the saints, not vice-versa as the free-will system teaches.

(3) Point: It was not Peter's hold on Christ, but Christ's hold on Peter!

e. Fifth limitation: Before Satan can sift a believer, God has already sealed the believer from the sin of apostasy - ***"thy faith fail not."***

(1) John 10:27-30 - ***"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."*** Cf. John 10:15 - ***"As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."***

(2) Point: God has never lost one of His chosen, redeemed, regenerated and called children.

6. Peter's Denial.

a. Its location - Simon Peter's denial of his Lord took place in the courtyard outside of the High Priest's palace. It occurred while the Ecclesiastical trial was being conducted. He and John had followed their Lord from the Garden of Gethsemane where the arrest had taken place.

b. NOTE: While the perseverance of Peter was certain from the Divine standpoint, it nevertheless was necessary from the human standpoint.

c. The event is recorded in Luke 22:54-62 - ***"Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance. Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, 'This man was also with Him.' But he denied Him, saying, 'Woman, I do not know Him.' And after a little while another saw him and said, 'You also are of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not!' Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, 'Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are saying!' Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny***

Me three times.' So Peter went out and wept bitterly."

7. Steps leading up to His denial.

a. **First Step: He had boasted too much.** Satan had been assaulting Peter as far back as his attempt to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross. In Matthew 16:22,23 we are reminded, ***"Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.'"*** When a man begins to rebuke his Lord, it does not surprise us when he is informed that he would deny his Lord, that he boasts, ***"Lord, I am ready to go with you, both to prison and to death."*** (Luke 22:33). It is good to have confidence in what you do. It is not good to possess self-confidence. Our abilities lie in God, not within ourselves. Jesus said in John 15:5 ***"without Me you can do nothing."*** While Peter possessed a true love for his Lord, he must yet learn the lesson that ***"let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."*** (I Corinthians 10:12).

b. **Second Step: He prayed too little.** When Jesus was praying in agony in the Garden, He said to His disciples, ***"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch with me."*** (Matthew 26:38). We then read in verse 40 - ***"Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?'"*** He did this a second and third time prior to His arrest. Peter's self-confidence had led to a feeble prayer life. Three times he was told to watch and pray, and three times he fell asleep. Here is an example of the ever-present balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Jesus had already prayed that Peter's faith would not fail (Luke 22:32), but that did not relieve him of his responsibility to pray. The point is clear. If Christ did not face temptation without prayer, how much more did the apostles and do all Christians need to do the same. Those who would pray properly must empty themselves of self-confidence, spiritual pride and call upon God for divine help. Jesus' words are a warning against being caught prayerless when the full force of temptation hits. Jesus' words also promise that help awaits those who pray.

c. **Third Step: He acted too hastily.** When the officers started to arrest Jesus in the Garden, Peter immediately came to His defense. In John 18:10-11, we read, ***"Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has***

given Me?" Due to a careless understanding and a slothful prayer life, Peter is looking for Jesus to be a military and political Messiah to overthrow the Romans. He watched as Jesus said, ***"I am,"*** and the mob fell backward to the ground. He hastily concluded that it was now time to use the sword and start the warfare. Jesus quickly intervened and healed the servant's ear. Cf. Luke 22:49-51 - ***"When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, 'Permit even this.' And He touched his ear and healed him."*** Armed resistance is not the way Christ was to establish His kingdom. The apostles disregarded the necessity of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Christ's death being fulfilled (cf. Psalm 22; Isaiah 53). This action by Jesus totally confused the disciples resulting in Mark 14:50 saying, ***"Then they all forsook Him and fled."***

Many of our difficulties in life are brought upon ourselves by making hasty decisions. When we do not think through a matter, we pre-judge the outcome and are frequently wrong. In one of David's trials, he said in Psalm 31:22, ***"For I said in my haste, 'I am cut off from before Your eyes;' Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You."*** Proverbs 25:8-9 says, ***"Do not go hastily to court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor has put you to shame? Debate your case with your neighbor, and do not disclose the secret to another."*** The sequence of the steps leading to Peter's denial thus far are: his excessive boasting has led to his praying too little, which has caused his acting too hastily. If we avoid these steps, we could save ourselves from many of the trials which come our way, as well as bringing shame to our Savior by our conduct.

d. **Fourth Step: His fellowship was distant and strained.** Peter is now in the courtyard of the high priest where Jesus was being tried. He did not wish to be identified lest he be punished for being a follower of Jesus. In Matthew 26:57, 58 we are told, ***"And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end."*** Following Christ at a distance, not wanting others to know you are a Christian, always places you in the wrong company. A distant disciple becomes a defeated disciple. A distant disciple flirts with the world while his Lord is on trial, but Peter's faith is also on trial. How encouraged Satan must be at this point. He has Judas in his kingdom. Now it appears that the "rock" on whom Jesus said He would use to build His church is about to defect also! Peter would deny His Lord three times over a period of several hours. Each time he would become more intense in his denial. We read that in his third denial that ***"he began to curse and swear saying, 'I do not know the man!'"***

Immediately a rooster crowed." (Matthew 26:74). The words "curse and swear" have been misunderstood to mean that Peter cursed and used profanity. This is incorrect. They mean that he was swearing, or taking an oath that what he was saying was true, and may God's curse be upon me if I am lying. This was the ultimate denial. In Luke 22:61, 62, we are told that immediately when the rooster crowed, that ***"The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' Peter went out and wept bitterly."*** In all probability, Peter never again heard a rooster crow without his conscience being pricked. Do any of us have our conscience troubled when we have sins of the past brought to our attention?

8. What Peter lost in his denial. By denying his Lord, Peter lost something that money could not buy. What did he lose? Several things:

a. He lost his courage. Here was a man whose name means "rock" who has now become as weak as a man could be, and that before a young maiden. Do we now see where self-confidence, prayerlessness, and haste lead us?

b. He lost his control. He collapsed and denied his Lord with an oath. Peter has gone to pieces, but our Lord is present to pick up the pieces, and put them together again.

c. He lost his communion with Christ. He could have the glow of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration or the glow of the world's fires, but he cannot have both at the same time! We may be thrilled with the manna of God's word or enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, but we cannot partake of both at the same time!

9. The love which Jesus displayed through Peter's denial. Yes, Peter lost his courage, his control, and his communion, but the one thing Peter did not lose, was His Savior's love. He has prayed that Peter's faith fail not, meaning an utter collapse into apostasy. The rock fell on the Rock, but he did not fall off of the Rock! Why? God's sovereign electing purpose of grace had set Peter aside to be one of His children, and God will not lose one of His own! Jesus had predicted in Luke 22:32, ***"When you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."*** Peter would become a great leader and preach the sermon on the day of Pentecost when 3000 souls were saved. He would give his life as a martyr for Christ. Tradition has it that he was crucified upside down at his request because he considered himself so unworthy to die upright like His Lord.

10. We have looked at one of the two men whom Satan was granted to sift in a

most severe manner. One has stood the test, the other will fail. In our next lesson, we will look at Judas and seek to discover what it was that made these two apostles to differ from one another.