

Scripture Reading:

Luke 22: "31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." 34 Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me." ..."54 Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance. 55 Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. 56 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." 57 But he denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." 58 And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" 59 Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly. "

"Satan Sifts the Rock"

The sisters in the Sound of Music asked, and sang, the probing question of what to do with Maria!

- As we come to our text this morning we certainly could be tempted to ask:
What do we do with Peter?

Simon, who Jesus named Peter, the Rock, has inspired and baffled Saints down through the ages.

- A fisherman, who was called to be a fisher of men...
- A disciple who very early professed that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God
- A disciple who was almost immediately rebuked by Jesus as a tool of Satan when Peter rejected the suffering Messiah.

That struggle now continues in the heart and mind of Peter here at the end of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

- I trust we will learn some very important lessons for us as we study the sifting of Peter, the rock!

Once again I have included the parallel accounts from the four Gospel writers and I want to say just a word about this before we look at the text from Luke in detail: We must remember that the Holy Spirit gave us four Gospels and not just one. We have four witnesses of the earthly ministry of Jesus which not only confirms with multiple witnesses the truth of what is presented, but adds to the richness of what we can see and understand.

- I trust you will use these tools in the orders of worship to facilitate further study & discussions in our homes on these important matters.

It is also important that we are Christians who understand that this is one of the critical areas where the skeptics attack the Scriptures arguing that the Bible is full of contradictions.

These accounts of the denials of Peter are one of their favorites...

How can one Gospel say Peter will deny the Lord three times before the rooster crows, and another say it will be before the rooster crows twice, as Mark does. Was the 2nd challenge the same servant girl, or a different servant girl or someone else?

- These are clear contradictions in their minds proving that the Bible CANNOT be the authoritative Word of God.

Many different answers have been offered to explain these passages... BUT we must NOT miss a major point that should be made:

These apparent conflicts actually confirm the authority of Scripture!

Some have argued that Peter actually had six denials, three before a rooster crows and three more before a second rooster crows. Might be possible, but does not seem to fit the text which is our final test. Those on the farm have less trouble, because they know that while we often speak of the rooster crowing in the morning, we know that they do not crow just once.

So it is not a stretch to say that Mark is specific in saying that Peter's third denial comes after the second crow from the rooster, while the others simply say after the rooster crows... Noting that they do not say after the FIRST crow of the rooster, which would be a true contradiction.

The same is true about who made the second accusation about Peter: Mark says it was the same servant girl, Matthew says it was another servant girl and Luke says it was another...

- Now the skeptics surely have us: The Bible IS full of contradictions!

BUT if we look over at the Gospel of John, he tells us that "THEY said to him," revealing that others had joined the first servant girl in a chorus of questions for Peter!

- So, we can explain the apparent contradictions, but you ask:
How do these passages confirm the authority of Scripture?

Those who hate God and do not want to believe that the Bible is the Word of God insist that it is a man-made book...

- They insist that the Bible has been in the hands of the church for centuries so it says just what those in the church want it to say.
- They argue that there is very little real history left, if there was any to begin with...

For example they tell us that the church added the miracles of Jesus later to make Him look good!

So, IF their story of how we got the Bible is to be believed and certain men in the church have changed the Bible as they saw fit down through the centuries, then why have they not cleared up these apparent contradictions?

- For example, why not make Mark match what the others say? *[In fact you can find some unreliable older copies of Mark where this has been done, dropping the word twice.]*
- No, I would argue that we have before us one of the strongest evidences that the Bible is God-breathed and has been preserved and protected down through the ages by the Holy Spirit
- Mere men would have changed these things long ago!
- Of course they would have had a host of other problems, which the Bible does not have but that is the subject for another sermon!

This Book IS the Word of God...

We can know that we have the Word of God right between these pages, even though it has been in the hands of men for thousands of years. The writer of the Proverbs declares that we should seek God's wisdom as we would great treasure, and this is where we find such wisdom IF we fear God rather than men! So let us turn with even greater confidence to our text this morning:

We are going to see Peter's darkest hour, but again it was no surprise to Jesus: He tells Peter while they are still in the upper room, "Simon, Simon! Indeed Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat." It will be Peter who later tells us in his first epistle: "5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."

- **Peter had learned the lesson well and by the Spirit warns all of us to be careful.**

The Bible gives us the most detailed picture of how Satan is allowed to operate in the Book of Job which has many parallels to the account here in Luke.

- **Job is a righteous man who Satan also desired to sift.**
- **Job falters and must repent when God challenges him about what he had said and done**
- **And finally Job is restored with a double blessing, receiving twice for all that he had in the beginning**

So, I want us to quickly review what happened to Job so we understand the limits of Satan's work in Peter's life and of course ours as well: We are introduced to Job, to his family & riches and then the scene shifts to heaven:

"7 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." 8 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" 9 So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" 12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person."

- **Our lesson: Satan is REAL and he does not have our best interests at heart!**
- **He is at war with God and is more than willing to use us as his pawns in that battle.**

Now God does allow Satan to do certainly things to Job, which we might not fully understand...

- **BUT we must also see that God placed absolute limits on what Satan could do to Job.**
- **At first, Satan could destroy things around Job, including his own children, but he could not harm Job.**

It is only when Satan returns a second time arguing that Job is still faithful ONLY because God has kept Satan from harming him that God even allows that...

- **But again, note in verse 6 God says to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life."**
- **Satan goes on to cause great physical pain for Job, but he cannot take his life.**

Job learns the limits of his own strength and wisdom and in the end God greatly blesses Job!

Such will now be the case with Peter: Jesus knows that Satan is about to sift Peter, but adds, “I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail.

- Just as Satan could not kill Job, so Satan cannot extinguish the saving faith that Peter has been given...
- Though Peter will certainly now learn the limits of his own strength and wisdom!

Jesus knows that Peter will be fully restored and empowered by the Holy Spirit so he reminds him to strengthen his brethren!

Of course Peter, who had just participated in a discussion about who would be #1 denies that this could ever happen and swears he will fight for Jesus to the death!

- Jesus then tells Peter that he will deny his Lord three times before the rooster crows this very day!

It appears from Matthew and Mark that this warning was actually given to Peter not once but twice and yet we will see that he did not heed it... Last week we looked at the agony that Jesus faced in the Garden and His arrest. Now He is being led off to an illegal trial and Peter and John follow behind. John knows those at the High Priest’s house and is able to enter and get Peter permission as well. Around a fire Peter is first confronted by a servant girl:

- The man who insisted that he would fight to the death for Jesus, is frightened by this girl and says, “Woman, I do not know Him!”

Peter goes on to deny his Lord twice more as Jesus had predicted. Luke does not present the details given by the other writers, but we know when we study them together that Peter goes from a simple denial to one that is accompanied by an oath, swearing that he does not know the man! And finally, Peter gives a strong denial that included cursing and swearing to make his point:

- It is at this point that Luke gives the most detail,

Peter hears the rooster crow and Luke tells us that “the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And 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”

We have often contrasted the lives of Kings Saul and David to show a heart of stone v. a heart of flesh. Now we have in the New Testament an example of two men who have sinned grievously, having totally different reactions in their hearts, though both had outward weeping.

- A few hours before Jesus had looked at Judas saying, ‘do you betray the Son of God with a kiss?’

Now Jesus looks at Peter to remind him that he has denied Him three times just as He had said he would. Peter weeps over his sin much like King David did when confronted by the Prophet Nathan. Nathan told David ‘you are the man’...

- Here in our text, in the midst of His own suffering and trials, Jesus looks at Peter to remind him,
‘you are the man’...
YOU have denied me!

David cries in Psalm 51, “against you and you only have I sinned” and through his repentance is restored.

Peter goes out to weep bitterly, but they are tears of true sorrow and repentance, because on Sunday morning he would run to the empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus would visit him to restore him!

- Such was not the case with Judas, who also lamented and wept over his actions.
- Judas did not repent but rather returned the money wanting to blame others and went out and hung himself.

Just as King Saul refused the admonitions of Samuel making excuses for his sin and in the end dined with the witch of En Dor before his death in battle.

- Jesus had prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail and it did not
- Jesus declared that David would establish His house and he did not fail even in the midst of grievous sins

This is the confidence that we should have as the Saints in the hands of Jesus!

There is also a caution we should have about judging the hearts of others...

IF we had observed what David had done over the year before Nathan confronted him, would we have thought he was a good Christian? IF we had overheard Peter cussing and swearing as he told those gathered that he did not even KNOW this Jesus, would we have thought him a Christian at all? We are not to look the other way when we see brothers & sisters in sin, but rather we must confront them and call them to repentance...

- BUT we must be so careful not to judge their hearts...
- Rather we must plead with the Savior to restore them if they are his own.

Even the ultimate church discipline of excommunication is done with the desire that Satan might buffet the flesh and that a repentant sinner be restored to the church! While we can rejoice that Peter's faith did not fail and that he was restored, there are still lessons we can learn from his fall into sin... How did a disciple of Jesus find himself in such a sorry state?

As is always the case with grievous sin, there are many steps along the way:

- We could begin at the Last Supper where Peter allows himself to fall into the sin of pride...
 - Arguing about who would be #1
- Later in the garden we see a lack of prayer: Even when Jesus admonished them three times to pray lest they fall into temptation, they chose to sleep.
- This is followed by Peter's rash actions during the arrest of Jesus: We see this both with his drawing and using his sword rather than looking to Jesus, AND with his flight in fear when he should have stood with his Savior.

[A good homework assignment to see the problem of 'rash' actions would be Numbers chapters 13 & 14 where first the people refuse to enter the land of Canaan and then try to go up and fight after God told them to leave.]

- Peter goes from fear & flight to choosing the wrong company: He quickly forgot that Jesus had warned him that He would deny his Lord three times that very night and so he proceeded to place himself among folks in a situation where that was almost sure to happen.
- And finally we see the denials

Where all the actions of Peter that night leave him in a state of mind and a place where he sees no choice but to lie!

- **How often have we found ourselves in such situations?**
- **Not because the Lord has led us there, but because we have refused His good counsel and warnings all along the pathway to great sin!**

Just as Paul tells us how the Old Testament Saints, with all their sins and problems, are there as our examples, so we have this account of Peter to remind us that there but for the Grace of God go we.

Jesus had prayed for Peter and we know from John 17, that Jesus has prayed for all of us that our faith would not fail

- **We will fail, but our faithful Savior will not fail!**

Whether we fall into great trials and sin because of our own neglect as Peter did...

Or whether it is part of God's great plans and not any fault of our own like Job...

- **We know that in the end God protects His people and brings restoration or resolution**

In the cases of Job and Peter we see great restoration in the here and now:

- **Job is given twice the blessings that he enjoyed before his trial, including the doubling of his children!**
- **Peter is visited by Jesus on Easter morning and will go on to proclaim the Good News to all Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost with great power and effectiveness! *[As a thought-provoking aside, IF the Bible was a man-made book, we would have the details of that visit!]***

Even when we as God's Saints do not see resolution or restoration in the here and now...

- **We know that suffering Saints will have rewards beyond our wildest imaginations:**

In Acts we will see Stephen stoned after a great sermon...

- **But he gets to see Jesus **STANDING** at the right hand of God.**

The Psalmist Asaph was depressed about the prosperity of the wicked in Psalm 73, but God showed Him their end, that they were on a slippery slope leading to their destruction, AND Asaph was comforted when he acknowledged to the Lord, "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory!"

- **We must remember that God is in control!**
- **However, we must also do all we can to avoid the pitfalls of sin!**
- **Jesus has come to save His people from their sins, and this included Peter!**

Jesus promises that His children are safe in His hands, even when He allows them to be attacked by Satan or they allow themselves to fall prey to the ravages of sin.

Those who are his sheep, like King David and Peter hear His voice, especially when the Lord is calling on them to repent of their sins!

In conclusion, I hope that this account of Peter's fall into sin and his repentance will help us to better understand what Paul is telling the Philippians when he says, "12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."