

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Table Talk on Trouble and Triumph, Part 2

Scripture: Luke 22:31-34

Code: 42-271

Let's open our Bibles now to Luke chapter 22 and we're going to be looking at verses 31 through 34...Luke 22:31 through 34. I want to read these verses for you and you can follow along to set them in your mind. Beginning at verse 31, our Lord Jesus is speaking. He says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. And he said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death.' And He said, 'I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.'"

As you know, last week we started a brief look at a series of passages entitled, "Table Talks on Trouble and Triumph." Our Lord is gathered in the upper room on Thursday night to eat the Passover and to institute the Lord's Supper with His disciples. In that very important occasion, the last official Passover authorized and authenticated by God was held. There's no legitimate Passover after that until it is re-instituted in the great Messianic Millennial Kingdom. The Lord also instituted His table, taking the bread and the cup associated with the Passover and giving them new symbolic meaning related to His body and His blood, and thus designed the ordinance which the church celebrates the cross. The Lord also spent many hours that evening instructing the disciples. The full body of that instruction is found in John 13 through 16, lengthy passage of Scripture in which Jesus makes amazing promises to His disciples and all who would follow them in the faith.

But one thing became very evident that night. Everything God accomplishes, He accomplishes by triumphing over trouble. This is the whole history of redemption. Since the Fall, all the purposes of God are achieved and accomplished by God's triumphing over trouble. This is a fallen world, filled with fallen beings both angelic and human. This is a world saturated with sin from top to bottom and side to side, this is a world in which, in one sense, sin stains absolutely everything. And for God to achieve His holy purposes, He must triumph over sin's trouble. A macrocosm of that we see throughout redemptive history, a microcosm of it we see on this Thursday night, the night before Jesus is crucified as trouble confronts Him in that very upper room...trouble from Judas, trouble from the Apostles, trouble from Satan, trouble from Peter and soon an imminent and brewing trouble from the rejecting hostile world.

One would like to think that that evening with His own, that evening with the eleven Apostles, would have been a time free from trouble. It was not as always in God's redemptive purposes, He has to overcome evil to achieve His ends which He always does. In fact, God actually planned evil, planned

to allow it without being responsible for it so that it could in itself give Him glory. It is clearly established then, in Scripture, that God will accomplish everything He purposes and triumphs over evil to those ends.

In 1 Chronicles chapter 29 and verses 11 and 12, we read this, “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty for all that is in heaven and in the earth is Thine. Thine is the Kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all, Thou reignest over all, and in Thine hand is power and might and in Thine hand is to make great and to give strength to all.”

Psalms 115:3 puts it this way, “Our God is in the heavens. He has done whatsoever He pleases.” In Daniel 4:35 we read, “He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and none can stay His hand or say to Him, ‘What are You doing?’”

In the words of Deuteronomy 32:39 “See now, says God, that I...I am He and there is no God besides Me. It is I who put to death and give life, there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”

The words of Lamentations 3:37 and 38, “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill come forth?” Or Proverbs 16:4, “The Lord has made all things for Himself, yes even the wicked for the day of evil.” First Samuel 2:6 to 8, “The Lord kills and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and lifts up.” And the words of Amos chapter 3 verse 6, “If there is a calamity in the city, will not the Lord have done it?”

Evil is no surprise to God. Evil is no intrusion to God. Evil is no hindrance to God. Evil is no interruption to God. God has allowed it to exist and He triumphs over it in the end and all the way long the line. God controls everything, including all evil, all sin, all trouble for His own purposes. God has willed it to exist without being responsible for it so that He can achieve glory through triumphing over evil.

Listen to the words of Isaiah 45 verse 5, “I am the Lord, there is no other besides Me, there is no God. I will gird you though you have not known Me that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord. There is no other. The one forming light and creating darkness, causing well being and creating calamity, I am the Lord who does all these.”

And you remember that Jesus said, “In this world you shall have tribulation, but I have overcome the world.” Why has God allowed evil? In order that He might display His glory. By allowing evil, God is able to display His righteousness and it can be understood in contrast to sin. By allowing evil, God has demonstrated His saving love, the amazing love of God toward sinners who are evil and utterly unworthy. God loving His enemies, this is the highest kind of love that reaches its absolute apex when He lays down His life for His enemies. We would never know God’s righteousness unless there’s a backdrop of sin. We would never know His saving love unless there’s the backdrop of

unworthiness and unloveliness. We would never understand His wrath if there were not an opportunity for judgment. We would never know His mercy if there were not an opportunity to know forgiveness. We would never understand grace if He could not bless those who are unworthy.

And so, God allows evil, ordains it into the plan without being responsible for it, in order that through triumphing over evil, God can display the fullness of His attributes and thus receive glory for all that He is. Now even the greatest evil in the history of the world, the murder of Jesus Christ, the murder of the Son of God. The greatest evil in the history of the world was ordained by God. Isaiah 53 says it was God who was pleased to bruise Him. Peter says on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:23 when he preaches that great sermon that Jesus was crucified by your hands but by the predetermined counsel and will of God. That is to say, God is the primary cause, the hands of men are the secondary cause. Acts 4 says the same thing, verses 27 and 28. People want to argue about whether the Jews killed Jesus or whether the Romans killed Jesus. Both as secondary causes but the one who really put Jesus on the cross is God. Jesus Christ was God's Lamb, chosen for sacrifice as a substitute for sinners so God could display His righteousness, His justice, His wrath, His love and His mercy and His grace. And they all come together in their most magnificent harmony at the cross.

So the whole history of redemption is the story of God triumphing over trouble, triumphing over sin and evil to achieve His purposes. Sin cannot thwart those purposes. Isaiah 46:9 through 11, "I am God, there is no other. I am God, there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done saying, 'My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure. Truly I have spoken, truly I will bring it to pass, I have planned it, I will do it.'"

Sin and evil is not an obstruction to God. It is part of the plan and still the sinner is fully culpable and guilty for his own, or her own sin. God must do all His work through triumphing over trouble. And so we might have expected on this one night that it would be a trouble-free time with Jesus and the disciples, but that's not the way it is in a fallen world. There was trouble. Luke chooses in his narrative to pull together the little vignettes of that night that point out the trouble and yet in all the trouble that Jesus faced that night, there is a note of triumph. Trouble from Judas, the betrayal, most heinous crime ever committed paralleled only to the disaffection and betrayal of Adam in the Garden. Horrendous trouble being produced by Judas who is prompted by Satan. And yet all the trouble that Judas can generate only does what is predetermined by God to happen. It's all in the plan, even prophesied in the Old Testament.

Trouble from the Apostles who are not enemies but friends. Remember verses 24 to 30, they're arguing about which of them is the greatest. They look like the most unlikely group imaginable to take the message of the cross of Christ to the ends of the world. They are so weak, so vacillating, so ignoble, they cannot rise to the occasion even when Jesus says the betrayer is here at the table, their discussion about the betrayer moves immediately to a discussion about which of them is the greatest.

They lose complete sight of the fact that Jesus is being betrayed, that His death is imminent. He's already told them, all they can do is argue about their own relative greatness. That's serious trouble. That's serious trouble.

That poses from the human viewpoint a disaster because if they fail to be faithful, to be strong, who will preach the message? It all rests on them. So trouble from Judas, an enemy. Trouble from the Apostles, friends.

That brings us now, since we've already considered those, that was just review, to the third. Trouble and triumph with the devil....trouble and triumph with the devil. Let's look at verse 31. Although it begins, "Simon, Simon," the first player in the scene is actually Satan. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat." Although He speaks to Simon, Satan has already showed up before. So we'll consider him first.

Now we move from a human enemy, Judas indwelt by Satan, to friends, the Apostles, who also pose a severe source of trouble to Jesus, to a supernatural adversary, actually Satan himself. We're still, by the way, in the Upper Room. Still in the Upper Room. You notice down in verse 39 of chapter 22, "He came out, proceeded as was his custom to the Mount of Olives." So they have not left the Upper Room when this occurs. John 13:31 to 38 has the account of this same incident between Jesus and Peter. So clearly this occurred during the evening, still in the Upper Room.

The reason I say that is because if you read Matthew 26 verses 30 to 35 and Mark 14 verses 26 to 31, you're going to find them in the Garden of Gethsemane. And in the Garden of Gethsemane there's a repeat of this. Just for your own clarification, Jesus addressed this issue with Peter in the Upper Room, telling him about his denial, as recorded by both Luke and John, and later again repeated it to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane as recorded by Matthew and Mark, wanting to warn Peter as strongly and repeatedly as He could of what was coming.

This is a fascinating passage, by the way. Only Luke tells us about Satan's desire to have you that he may sift you like wheat. So let's look at that. "Behold!" exclamation point, surprise, shock, warning, exclamation...Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat. Demand is a very strong word and that is the right kind of translation here because it's a Greek word that only appears here in the whole New Testament. The word "to ask" is aiteo, this is exaiteo, a compound form meaning a demand, to make a demand. And it's in the reflexive which refers back to the one making the demand. Demanding for himself. Satan has a very personal interest in Peter, and not just in Peter, as we will see. He is, Peter is, the leader of the eleven. He is the spokesman, as you well understand, from the gospel accounts. He's the one who asks all the questions, the questions on his own mind and on the minds of those following his direction, the other Apostles. He is the obvious leader. He's the crucial evangel in the first eleven chapters of Acts. He's the dominant preacher, of course, during that period of the early formation of the church and so it is not surprising that Satan would want to go

after Peter.

What does he want? He demands permission to sift him. The verb there in the Greek, *siniazo*, means basically to...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, the wind blowing away the lighter chaff and leaving only the wheat. It's a way to discern what is true and real. So that's what Satan wants to do. He wants to violently, turbulently, rapidly shake you to find out if you're real.

By the way, the word "you" there, very important. "Satan has demanded permission to sift you," you is plural...it's plural. It's not just Peter. It is Peter but it's just not Peter. It refers to all of the eleven, all of them. This becomes very clear in the parallel account in Matthew 26 and verse 30 when Jesus repeats this same warning in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "You will all," verse 31, "you will all fall away because of Me this night." 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 Satan, and you're all going to fall away. This is no surprise. This is a fulfillment of prophecy, for it is written, "I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered," Zechariah 13:7. This is no shock to Jesus, no shock to God. The prophet said, "When the shepherd is smitten, the sheep will be scattered."

Jesus went on to say in verse 32 of Matthew 26, "After I've been raised from the dead, I'll go before you to Galilee." In other words, you'll be recovered and we'll meet in Galilee, you'll be restored. This is not a fatal sifting. Mark 14:26 to 28 records the very same conversation for a second time in the Garden of Gethsemane with the very same statement from Zechariah 13:7 that when the shepherd is smitten, the sheep will be scattered. Satan wants to bring a turbulent, violent, severe shaking temptation on you to see if you are real, if anything genuine can survive.

This is some big trouble...big trouble. Remember now, Satan's goal is to keep Jesus from the cross, to keep Him from the cross. He makes every effort to do that. Here's the next one. If all the disciples defect, if they all deny Christ, if they all flee, if they disband and disappear, there will be no one left to preach the cross so why bother with the cross? This will end the whole enterprise if he can get the eleven to abandon their faith in Christ. They're weak, He knows that. They've been arguing about trivial, personal glory. They're full of self-doubt so that when Jesus says one of you will betray, they say, "Is it I? Is it I? Is it I?" Filled with self-doubt, lack of spiritual confidence, manifestly weak, self-centered, this is a perfect time to go after them with a vengeance, the one who is a roaring lion seeking who he may devour wants a shot at the eleven, including the leader, Peter. Remember now, Revelation 12:10 says of Satan, "He accuses the brethren before God night and day."

He shows up in heaven on a regular basis. He's not omnipresent but he's fast. And he spends a lot of his time before the throne of God. And what is he doing? He's telling God that God looks foolish by

being faithful to these sinners who belong to Him. He tries to turn God against us, that's why the Bible tells us we have an advocate, Jesus Christ, who stands at the right hand of the Father in defense of us, having paid in full the penalty for all our sins. And the Father is in perfect harmony and agreement with what Christ has done. It is He Himself who purposed it to begin with. But Satan relentlessly appeals to God to turn against His own, to abandon His own, to leave them to themselves because they're so weak. Let their faith fail. And he asks God for permission to assault their faith.

Now you might assume that God would say, "Absolutely not...absolutely not." But that's not what God says. That's not what our Lord says. Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat, and I let him. He's going to do it.

I think it's very important to remind you that the devil is God's devil. That Satan is God's Satan. That Satan only operates within parameters established by God and never outside of them. Nothing Satan does is a surprise to God. Nothing Satan does is outside the will of God. Satan only operates within the parameters and the limitations which God Himself has established for him. Satan is the servant of God. He can only do that which God permits him to do. Here he is, having to ask permission from the Lord to go after the Apostles.

If you go back to the book of Job, you remember that's the same scene we see there. In the patriarchal period, the period of Moses and the Pentateuch, the earliest of Bible writings, there is this man who is blameless, upright, loves God, worships God, serves God, is a righteous man, a truly Godly man by the name of Job. Satan comes before the throne of God, as he always does, night and day, and he's accusing God of holding on to these wicked sinful people and he wants the permission to go after these people. And God says to him, "Why don't you go after Job? Why don't you give Job your best shot?" Satan says the only reason Job is faithful to You is because he's rich. He's got all those camels, all that cattle, all that sheep, that big family, happy children. Life is perfect for Job. He's rich and that's why he continues to serve You and worship You. Let me take all that away and he'll turn on You. God says, "Have at it."

"Only you can't take his life." And He puts that limit on him. Satan comes down and all his family, all his animals, gone...death. Satan comes back in the second chapter of Job because Job has not defected and says, "Well let me attack him personally." God says, "Okay, you can make him sick, you can attack his physical health, but you can't take his life." Satan comes back and does the same thing. Everything is now gone...absolutely everything.

Finally Job sits and scrapes the boils with a broken piece of pottery all alone in agony. Did his faith fail? Job says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." And out of the vortex of that amazing storm of temptation, Job comes to the crescendo of faith, chapter 42, "I heard of God with the hearing of mine ear, it was all superficial and now I see Him, I've seen God in my pain, I've seen God in my trial like I never saw Him before and repent in dust and ashes." He reached a new level of repentance, a

new level of worship in the midst of his pain and his faith never failed.

In Zechariah, Zechariah has a vision of the throne of God. Coming before the throne of God are angels and Satan is there and the angel of the Lord is there, and so is Joshua, the high priest. Joshua standing before the Lord, representative of the nation Israel. He himself a sinner, the nation full of sinners. Joshua embodies the nation, stands before the throne of God. On one hand is the angel of the Lord who is a preincarnate Christ. On the other hand is Satan. Satan is telling God to damn Joshua. Telling God to damn Israel, symbolized in the high priest, Joshua. And instead, God takes the dirty filthy garments, symbolic of his sin, off Joshua and clothes him in beautiful garments, puts a beautiful turban on his head, covers him with His righteousness.

There is Satan at the throne of God trying to assault a sinner who belongs to God. God will have none of it. God washes him and makes him righteous. But Satan does not give up. Second Corinthians chapter 12, a messenger of Satan comes after the Apostle Paul, Paul is beleaguered by this demonic assault. He prays three times to be removed. It's not removed and Paul finally comes to this great conclusion that when I am weak, then I am strong. He had his confidence in himself broken. His confidence in his own plans, his own strategies broken and found his confidence only in God.

Don't mistake it. There are plenty of times when Satan who always is accusing the brethren, is given permission to come after believers for God's own purposes. And what his purpose is, is indicated to us in verse 32, this is one of the greatest statements in the Bible. Verse 32, "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." And when Jesus prays, His prayer is answered. He always prays according to the will of God, just like the Holy Spirit, Romans 8:26. He always prays in the will of God. "I have prayed for you." This is the high priest interceding for us at the right hand of God. I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. Satan wants to prove that he can destroy saving faith. That's the old effort. That's the age-old effort. Satan says, "Let me at him and I'll destroy their trust in You, I'll destroy their faith in You."

And you want to know something? If it was left up to us, he would. I've told you this before. If I could lose my salvation, I would lose it. If it were possible, it would happen. If I had to save myself, I couldn't save myself. If I had to keep myself saved, I couldn't keep myself saved. My faith cannot fail not because of me but because of the one who secures my faith by His own intercession. And when Satan goes, according to Romans 8, before God and lays an accusation before God against us, it does not stand. Who can lay any charge to God's elect? It is Christ that justified. Christ has already paid in full the penalty for our sin, declared us just, granted us righteousness and therefore no condemnation can stand against us. And Paul goes on to say, "Then what's going to separate us from the love of Christ?" And the answer is, "Absolutely nothing...nothing." No accusation stands against us. Our great High Priest is for us and if God is for us, who can successfully be against us? I love that. "I have prayed for you." That's personal.

Satan's very personal. He wants Peter, in particular, and the other ten as well for himself, for his kingdom. But he's not going to get them because of the intercessory work of Jesus. "I have prayed for you."

You say, "Wow, I wonder what that's like? Wonder what that prayer is like? What's it like when Jesus prays for us?"

I'll do better than that. You don't even have to imagine what it's like. I'll take you to the prayer. John 17, the prayer was prayed by Jesus and all the Apostles were there. Chapter 16 ends with in the world you'll have tribulation. Trouble to come, lots of it, that very night they would all flee and Peter would deny. But it's not going to be a failure of their faith. They will fail in their humanness, their faith will not fail. They will all be recovered and here's the essence of the prayer in John 17, go down to verse 6. This section of John 17 is the prayer directly for the disciples...that night. And He prays to the Father.

"I manifested Thy name to the men Thou gavest Me out of the world. Thine they were. Thou gavest them to Me. They've kept Thy Word. Now they have come to know that everything Thou hast given Me is from Thee, for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them. They received them. Truly understood that I came forth from Thee. They believed that Thou didst send Me."

Now what's all that about? That's about an affirmation that their faith is the real thing. They believed Me, they believe You, they believe that I am who I am and You are who You are and that You sent Me and they believe everything. This is legitimate faith. This is the affirmation that the faith that they had been given is the real thing.

So, verse 9, "I ask on their behalf. I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those that Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine." Listen, they belong to You and then they belong to Me and it is for them that I pray. And what do I pray? Verse 11, "I'm no more in the world." Jesus is about to go to the cross. There's going to be a period of time when He's going to be alienated from God and yet, "They themselves are in the world and I come to Thee, Holy Father. Keep them in Thy name. Guard them. The name which Thou hast given Me that they may be one even as we are one. While I was with them, I was guarding them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition that the Scripture might be fulfilled." That was prophesied that he would. "Now I come to Thee and these things I speak in the world that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I've given them Thy Word, the world has hated them because they're not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I don't ask You to take them out of the world." Here's the prayer, "But keep them from whom? The evil one." That's His prayer for them. Guard them. I've guarded them. I've guarded them. Now there's going to be a cross and an alienation and a separation in that period, keep them, Father....keep them.

That's His prayer. Keep them from the evil one. And so back to Luke 22. How wonderful must it had been for them to hear Him pray that prayer. So He says to Peter, "I have prayed for you," singular...singular. "Simon, Simon, I have prayed for you, and the rest, of course, as well." But He's speaking to Simon. "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail."

Fail is ekleipo, from which we get the word eclipse, that your faith may not be eclipsed. No satanic assault, as evil and troubling as it is, can destroy saving faith. Let the devil come, let the devil assault, let the devil give his best shot as a roaring lion against Simon and against the other ten Apostles, bring it on, bring it on, you cannot break saving faith because I intercede. Christ is our security. This is the great testimony of the words of Jude, "Of Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever, Amen." He will keep you from a final fall. Satan is defeated in all attempts.

You say, "Well why does God even allow it?" Because, look at the end of verse 32, "When once you have turned again, or been converted, strengthen your brothers." God allowed Satan to do his worst against Peter because out of it Peter would be able to strengthen others.

And that takes us to the final thought, trouble and triumph with Peter. Satan has been working on Peter for a long time. Back in chapter 16 and verse 23 of Matthew, you remember Peter told Jesus not to go to the cross. And Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan." Satan's been going after Peter for a while.

But let's look at Peter. Let's consider briefly this cause it all unfolds later in the chapter, and we'll look at it in more detail. "Simon, Simon....Simon, Simon," Jesus had changed his name to Peter but only one time refers to him as Peter and that's in this same text. He always seemed to call him Simon because he was, most of the time, acting like his old self. But He calls him Simon, Simon, twice. I think there's some pathos, some compassion, some sadness...Simon, Simon. "Satan's after you, Simon." And he had such weakness but he was so overconfident.

Go down to verse 33, after Jesus had told Peter that Satan was going to come after him, here's his response, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death." Always overconfident. "With You" is the operative phrase, prepositional phrase, "With You, as long as You're here, I can go through anything, I can take anything." He knew Jesus could raise the dead, heal the sick and had limitless power. As long as You're here, I can endure anything. And it showed up a little later in the Garden when the force arrived to arrest Jesus, Peter grabbed his sword and began to whack his way through all of them. Started with the servant of the high priest named Malchus and took off his ear . He wasn't aiming for his ear, he was aiming for his throat. He was invincible in his own mind, as long as "with You," as long as Jesus is here, I'll go to prison and death.

By the way, that was a prophecy because he did. He ended up being imprisoned for his faith in Christ and ultimately crucified upside down because he wasn't worthy, he said, to be crucified the way his Lord was crucified. So he did go to prison and to death. But here it's just bravado. "As long as You're here, have at it, Lord, I will never deny You, I will never disappoint You." And he showed that as long as Jesus was around, he could pick up a sword and go at it knowing the Lord could bail him out at any moment with His power.

But, when Jesus was arrested, that was a different story. And Jesus knew that. In verse 34 He said, "I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you've denied three times that you know Me." You're going to deny three times that you even know Me. Now here He calls him Peter, the only time in the gospel record that He actually addressed him as Peter. Maybe hoping he would by this trial begin to live like a rock and not a small stone. Before the cock crows, you will deny Me three times.

If you jump over to verse 60, Peter said, "Man I do not know what You are talking about." He was denying Christ. "And immediately while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Peter remembered the Word of the Lord how He had told him before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly."

Cock crow was kind of announcing the morning. The Romans divided the night watch into four segments. The third segment was called cock crow because it was associated with the crowing of the cock announcing morning. It would be in the darkness before dawn of the early morning that Peter will have denied the Lord three different times, actually multiple denials on three different occasions.

Is that the end of Peter? Is that the end of the story? No, no. Trouble? Oh yeah. Trouble from Judas, trouble from the Apostles, trouble from Satan and trouble from Peter. This kind of serious denial, devastating, and the rest scattered, severe trouble. But that's not the end. Jesus sees the triumph in verse 32, "When once you have turned around," once you've literally been converted, epistropho, to turn back, to turn around, "strengthen your brothers." You will have been through a temptation and a trial, the likes of which those in the future will not have experienced. You be their strength. You tell them how Christ upheld you, how your faith did not fail in the direst of the dark hours of temptation.

He did defect. He did deny Christ. But his faith did not fail. He was there at the tomb, remember? At the resurrection? He was there in the gathering of the Apostles when Jesus appeared after His resurrection. And in John 21 he is fully restored to ministry. "Peter, do you love Me? Peter, do you love Me? Peter, do you love Me? Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs. Feed My sheep." His trial and recovery was another way that God could demonstrate the power of saving faith.

It was like a preview of the High Priestly work of Christ who always intercedes for those who are His own. And that's why our faith never fails. If it fails, it isn't the real thing. "They went out from us

because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us," 1 John 2:19. Strengthen the brothers. You're going to go through a trial and a temptation and a failure that will be so devastating that in human strength you wouldn't survive it, but it will be a time to prove to you how faithful Christ is to hold His own, even at their weakest hours. Use that to strengthen others.

If you read 1 Peter, Peter's first letter, start in chapter 1, read all the way to chapter 5 and see how many times Peter tries to strengthen others to be able to endure trials. That's one of his recurring, constant themes. He became strong. He became strong, an encourager to others to endure trials. And Jesus saw that. Yes He saw that Peter would deny Him, prophesied it. Yes, He also saw that Peter would become a source of strength to others. And he did become the great preacher of the first eleven chapters of Acts, became the great preacher on the day of Pentecost, the great preacher who brought the church from a standpoint of the truth being proclaimed into its beginnings and thousands of people in a matter of weeks came to Christ under his great preaching.

Trouble with Judas, yes. But only what was determined by God. Trouble with the Apostles, yes. And even though they were selfish and self-willed and arguing about which one was the greatest, the time came when all of that faded away and they were empowered by the coming of the Spirit of God and became great preachers and carried the gospel in its initial phase to the ends of the world. Trouble from Satan, yes. But Satan only operates within the boundaries that God allows and Satan does what he does in order that God may put His glory on display. Trouble from Peter, yes. Trouble from the defection and scattering of the Apostles, yes. But they were all regathered, they were all empowered by the Spirit, they all carried the glory of the gospel forward.

There's one more, one more source of trouble, verses 35 to 38, the hostile world. They're fomenting now to take Jesus to the cross. And after that, ongoing persecution of those who will be faithful to preach the truth. And we'll look at that next time. And it is a powerful portion of Scripture.

Father, we thank You for the glimpse we have here of the great intercessory work of Christ on behalf of His own which we are. Oh what a joy it is to know that no matter what we go through, no matter what manifest weaknesses we have, no matter what failures are exhibited in our lives, no matter how deep and severe the trouble we cause the Lord, He never lets go of His own. Our faith cannot fail because of the work of the one who prays for us, even as He prayed for those men. Thank You, thank You, O Lord. Thank You for loving us everlastingly. In the name of Christ, amen.

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