Delivered to Satan, Part 1
1 Timothy 1:20
54-9

For this morning, I want you to open your Bible to 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 18 through 20. First Timothy chapter 1 verses 18 through 20. This is a very brief section of Scripture, a rather clear one as we have found out in our last two studies together. But in spite of its brevity and in spite of its clarity, it has given rise to three messages as of today, and I won't even finish today, and so there'll be a fourth next Lord's day on this brief passage. The reason for that is because it opens to our thinking so much very important and quite profound truth. Let me read these three verses to you and then get into what it is that the Lord has given us for today.

First Timothy 1:18: "This command I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which pointed to thee that thou by them might war a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience which some having put away have made shipwreck concerning the faith, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander whom I have delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

My intention for this Lord's day was just to finish up the third point in the outline and move on next Lord's day to chapter 2. But as I began to look at verse 20, which was the final point in this brief outline looking at the passage, I was struck by the statement "whom I have delivered unto Satan." And I found myself pressed to pursue the meaning of that idea. What does it mean to be delivered to Satan? And so as we understand the significance of verse 20, we must understand a greater context of being delivered to Satan. Then this will make good sense to us.

So if I might, this morning and next Lord's day, I want to expand that idea of being delivered to Satan. I even desire to illustrate it with some very pointed and specific illustrations out of our own congregation so that we'll understand exactly what that phrase comes to mean. It is a frightening line, "delivered unto Satan." It is a startling thought that someone would be given over to the devil himself, but that is precisely what it says, that is precisely what Paul has done to these two men, and it is precisely what he is inviting Timothy to do as well to others who are worthy of such a fate. It is a portion of the ministry of the church, as it is a ministry of God Himself, to deliver people to Satan.

Now, the word "deliver" in verse 20, paradidōmi, means to hand over, to give over, to commit. Or the best translation to get the sense here, to abandon – to abandon. Hands off is the idea, to remove protection and abandon someone to Satan. It is the same word in Acts 15:26 that the Authorized version translates "hazarded." Because it intends to convey the idea of being exposed to great danger, to be out from under any insulation, any protection, any shelter, and given over totally to Satan.

Now, Paul did this in the church at Ephesus, as he says, and he invites Timothy to carry on the same kind of work. So it is a work of importance and it is a work of God. There is a parallel to this, one

other passage which uses the same terms, and I want you to turn to it in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. First Corinthians chapter 5 speaks of a person who is guilty of a form of incest in the church, and it says in verse 5 of this person, this person living with his father's wife in a fornication relationship, verse 5: "Enjoins the church at Corinth to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." Those two places, 1 Timothy 1:20, 1 Corinthians 5:5, are the two places in the New Testament where we have the idea of abandoning someone to Satan explicitly stated in that way.

Now, listen carefully to what I say because it's essential that you understand this. There are some people who go around today and say there are no conditions under which any Christian should ever be subject to Satan. I hear that from Charismatic people continually, and that is not what the Scripture teaches. The Scripture clearly teaches that not only is it a possibility to be handed over to Satan but it is a ministry of the church to do that. There are times and places and circumstances under the plan of God in which individuals are definitely to be turned over to Satan, and there are times and occasions when God Himself does that very thing.

Now, listen carefully as we analyze this biblically. Being turned over to Satan in both of these references that I have mentioned to you has the idea of being put out of the church, of being disfellowshipped – or in the old terminology, excommunicated. It has the idea of being cut off from any further association with the saints of God and the Lord's table. It would be, in the terms of Matthew 18, to take one who has by continual sin been put out of the church and treat them like an unbeliever. It is to say, then, that to turn someone over to Satan means that prior to that, they were not fully in his power else there could be no turning over, there could be no committing and no abandoning to Satan if they were already in his power.

Now, 1 John 5:19 says the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one. The world is already in his hands. The world has already been delivered to him by sin. The instruction to the church to turn someone over to Satan means that that someone is not at that time fully in Satan's control. So we must, therefore, be talking about people who are in one way or another under the umbrella of protection provided by the church, and there is in the church the insulation and the protection and the care and the love and the blessing of God. So we're talking here about people who are under the care of the church or within the community of redeemed people, under the protection of God, a part of the pouring out of His blessing who are at some point in time put out of that protection and left fully exposed to Satan.

Now, this could be true of believers or unbelievers. You say, "How so?" Because there are unbelievers in the church as there were unbelievers within the community of the redeemed in Israel who, by virtue of their association with the people of God, were therefore under certain amount of protection, and by virtue of a splash effect, people who are around those who are receiving the showers of blessing are also going to get wet, and so God has given even to an unbeliever by virtue of his proximity to or his involvement with the redeemed community a certain amount of protection, a certain amount of blessing.

Let's look at some illustrations of that. The first one is in Genesis chapter 18 – Genesis chapter 18 – and I think you're going to see some very startling things as we examine this. In Genesis chapter 18 and verse 26, God had articulated that He was going to destroy the city of Sodom, a city filled with evil, a wretched city known for its flagrant violent homosexuality, and in verse 26, the Lord says, in His conversation with Abraham, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I'll spare all the place for their sakes." Isn't that amazing? You have a whole city, the sin of which has risen to the

nostrils of God, gross evil, a whole city which deserves the wrath of God to be poured out, and the Lord says, “If I can find 50 righteous people, I’ll spare the whole city.” Now, that’s the insulation that comes to the undeserving simply because of their proximity to the righteous.

Abraham says, “What about 45?” in verse 28, and the Lord says, “All right, if I can find 45, I won’t destroy it.” Abraham’s on a roll at this point, so he says, “What about 40?” The Lord says, “I’ll not do it for 40’s sake.” “Suppose 30?” “I’ll not do it for 30.” Gets all the way down to verse 32 and he says, “What about ten?” And the Lord said, “Suppose there shall be ten.” Abraham says the Lord said, “I won’t destroy it for ten’s sake.” Amazing. A whole city of thousands and thousands of people would be spared because of God’s desire to be gracious to ten people who belong to Him. By the way, there weren’t ten, and God did destroy the city.

But the point is this: proximity to and involvement with the redeemed people of God acts as a protection and an insulation even to unbelievers, and that can be seen in the history of Israel. There were within the nation Israel many unbelieving Jews, many, in the words of Paul, Jews who were not true Jews, were Jews by nationality but not by faith, and yet all of God’s abundant blessing to the nation, giving them the promised land with all of its riches, pouring out the wondrous blessing of the ceremonial sacrificial system and the priesthood, all of God’s protection and care and defeating of their enemies was a blessing to the secular Jew in that nation as much as it was in one sense to the religious Jew for it acted as a protection and insulation for the unbeliever as well.

The point is the same in the church. The church has unbelievers in it who, by virtue of just being in the church visibly, by attending and associating, are therefore the recipient of the blessing that the Lord pours out on His church in a secondary sense. To see that illustrated, turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 where it is most significantly made clear, and here, Paul is discussing marriage and the question of whether an unbelieving partner should – a believing partner, rather, should stay with an unbelieving partner – if you’re a Christian wife, should you stay with a non-Christian husband; if you’re a Christian husband, should you stay with a non-Christian wife, and in verse 14, Paul answers the question by saying, “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband,” and then goes on to say, “Else were your children unclean but now they, too, are sanctified.”

In other words, an unbelieving spouse and children within a family where there is a unbeliever are all the beneficiaries of God’s blessing. Sanctified doesn’t mean they’re saved, it doesn’t mean they receive redemption by virtue of their family relationship. What it does mean is that there again is that splash effect; they’re around when the showers of blessing come and they get wet. So the point that Paul is making is: Don’t unload your un-Christian spouse because of the benefit to him or her in just being around you when God pours out His grace, and even the children are blessed and often led to salvation.

So the idea, then, is this: that there is in the shelter of the people of God a protection from the full blast of Satan’s evil designs, and we could conclude in the Old Testament that an unbelieving Jew in the nation Israel was better off than an unbelieving Jew outside the nation Israel where there was no promise of covenant protection, and we can conclude in the new covenant that an unbeliever associated with the church and involved with the church is better off than an unbeliever out there under the full fury of Satan and lying in the arms of the wicked one, simply by virtue of the fact that as God is good to His own, those who are in proximity to His own will benefit in some way from that goodness, and that explains why there are people who want to hang around the church even though

they do not want to receive the Christ who is the head of the church.

Now, it is important to note, then, that for someone to be delivered over to Satan means that they are put out of the insulation and protection of that believing community and they are given over fully to Satan, God withdrawing all of His hand of protection which they, to whatever degree, have enjoyed. Now, I want you to understand how this works, so I want to go back to the Old Testament and I want you to see, as well as the New Testament this morning, that God has – listen carefully – for his own reasons personally put people out from under the protection of the believing community and into Satan's control. God Himself has done that, and I want you to see that from several biblical illustrations.

Let's go back to the book of Job, and this is where we begin, the book of Job. In Job chapter 1, we are introduced to this man who was perfect and upright and feared God and shunned evil. It describes him as a man who had ten children, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 she asses, a great household. This man was the greatest of all the men of the East. His sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day, and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and drink with them, and when the days of their feasting were finished that Job sent and sanctified them and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all, for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus did Job continually. This man was so spiritually conscientiousness that he not only kept his heart right before God but he offered sacrifices for his children on just the presumption that they may have thought something in their heart that was wrong and he wanted to be sure that sin was covered. This is a good man, the best of men, as well as the most prosperous man in the East.

Now, in verse 6, there is a day when the sons of God – that refers to angels – came to present themselves before the Lord. Now, we don't know what day it was, we don't know what the occasion was, we don't know what the circumstances were. That's as much as we know, that angelic beings came before the Lord and Satan came with them, he being that fallen one, Lucifer. He came and the Lord said, "Satan, where did you come from?" And Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it," which tells us where he spends his time, and the Lord said unto Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? Have you considered My servant?"

You see, Satan is always wanting to diminish the work of God, always wanting to destroy the work of God, always wanting to show God up, and I'm sure he was there to make some accusation against God before all the rest of the angelic beings that were there. He wanted to make God look bad, that's his desire, and so God says, "Have you looked at My servant Job and what a good man he is?" And Satan answered the Lord and says, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" "You think he loves You and trusts You and believes in You the way he does for nothing? You think he does that just because it's in his heart to do that? Why, You made a hedge around him and around his house and around all that he has on every side, and You bless the work of his hands, and his substance has increased in the land. Why do you think he worships You? Because he's a pragmatist. He knows who's delivering the goods. I mean, it's simple, he knows how to open the floodgate. He does his thing for You and You unload on him, all the blessings. Of course he's good but not for nothing." "Put forth Your hand now," Satan says in verse 11, "touch all that he has, he'll curse You to Your face." "Take away his stuff and he'll curse Your face."

And the Lord said to Satan – follow this: “Behold, all that he has is in your power.” Underline that. “Behold, all that he has is in your power.” God turned Job over to Satan, no question about it. God turned Job over to Satan. That was a divine act by the sovereignty of God. “Only upon himself, don’t put your hand.” “You can do anything you want to his stuff, but don’t touch him.” So Satan went out of the presence of the Lord. He was turned over to Satan. “And there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house. There came a messenger to Job and said the oxen were plowing and the ass is feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them, took them away. They have slain the servants with the edge of the sword and I only am escaped alone to tell you, and while he was yet speaking, there came also another and said the fire of God has fallen from heaven and has burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them and I am only escaped to tell you.”

Satan did several things. He got inside and infused hatred into the Sabeans. They came and wiped out some of his animals. Satan got some people to start a fire, burned up all his crops and all of his sheep. The Chaldeans came, he motivated the Chaldeans. You see, Satan moves upon all kinds of human agencies. They fell on the camels, carried them away, slew the servants with the edge of the sword – lost it all. Verse 19: “And there came a great wind from the wilderness, smote the four corners of the house where everybody was having a banquet. It fell on the young man and they’re dead and I’m the only one escaped.” Just wiped him out. Just wiped him out, all of his crops, all of his animals, all of his sons, and Job tore his mantle, shaved his head, fell on the ground and cursed God. Is that what it says? Fell on the ground and what? Worshiped, and said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away.” Listen to this line – what? “Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

And in all this, Job did not sin, nor charge God with some kind of folly. You say, “What’s the point?” The point is this: God made a point to the devil and to the whole world of people who’ve ever read that account, and the point is this: that true saving faith is not dependent on positive circumstances. That’s the point. What a point. See, the devil thought, “Well, these people follow You because You give them all the stuff.” And what the Lord is saying is: “I’ll tell you this, that when I redeem a life and when I transform a life and when a soul is converted and when a man truly loves Me, that love is not built on circumstances.” And in a sense, Job is just almost superfluous to the point here. God is making a point with Satan, and to make the point He uses Job, and the point is to show the strength and the continuity and the unwavering character of true saving faith, true love for God. Tremendous.

I hear all the time out of the book of Job that Job is to teach us how to deal with suffering. Job, the whole point of Job is to show the character of a godly man, and the character of a godly man is that he loves God and worships God not because of what God has done in giving him things, but because of a pure devotion alone. He trusted God.

Satan came back. Another time there was a meeting in chapter 2 and Satan goes through the same conversation. God says, “Have you considered My servant Job?” and he says, “Let me at him again.” And so in verse 6 chapter 2, the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he’s in your hand. This time you can hit him but you can’t kill him. You can’t kill him.” Satan went right out of the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to his crown. Mark it, folks, Satan can bring disease. Satan can bring disease, and here is Job with a broken piece of pottery, scraping off the scabs and boils as he sits in the ash pile, and that was a symbol of his mourning and his sadness. And his very helpful wife – who was not a Proverbs 31 woman – comes up and says, “Curse God and die.” And he said to her, “You’re a foolish woman. Shall we receive good at the hand of God and

not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

This is incredible. God is making a monumental point about the nature of true salvation, about the nature of true godliness, about the nature of a really upright heart. The person who really loves God is not the person who loves God because of what he gets, but the person who loves God because of who he is. That's the point. And you say, "Well, it wasn't very fair to make Job the illustration just to make a point." Oh? You've got to see beyond just the life of one individual to the fact that God was making a point for all eternity. He has the sovereign right to do that.

Well, you know how the rest of the story goes. He has a bunch of well-meaning friends who come over and give him a bunch of baloney from chapter 4 to chapter 37. That's, you know, 33 or 34 chapters of doubletalk. In the middle of it all, Job is sad and he's heartbroken. Chapters 3 through chapter 10 chronicle Job's sorrow, and he's really hurting. He's in pain. "Oh, that my grief were thoroughly weighed and my calamity laid in the balances," chapter 6 verse 2. Chapter 10, he says, "My soul is weary of life." And he says in verse 2 of chapter 10, "God, do not condemn me. Show me why You're contending with me." "What are You doing to me? I just want to know what's going on. I can't understand it. I can't explain it. I've lost my crops, my animals, my sons, my home. I've lost my health. All I've got left is a wife that I'd really like to trade in for a few of the other things that I lost – and in all of this, I don't have any clue about why this is going on. Why are You doing this?"

There's no answer. The heavens are vaulted. They're absolutely silent, and in the vacuum in the silence of God come all these other people with their wrong answers. Finally – wonderfully – in chapter 38, God speaks, and it says, "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind." You know what the Lord said? The Lord didn't say, "Well, look, Job, I want to tell you about this. Now, here's why I'm doing this, see. First of all, Satan came up there one day and he said" – listen, Job didn't know that until he read this book later, which he probably never did. He didn't know. He didn't know what was going on in chapter 1 and 2. That happened in heaven – he didn't know that.

And when the Lord comes, the Lord doesn't tell him. The Lord just says, in effect, "Why are you even asking those kind of questions? Where were you when I made the world? Where were you when I laid out the foundation? Where were you when I created mountains and seas? Where were you when the morning stars and the angels sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy at the creation? What do you know about life? What do you know about death?" In other words, what He's saying is "I'll do exactly what I want and who are you to question Me?" And He just reveals Himself, His omnipotence, His character.

And finally Job gets the message in chapter 42. "And Job answered the Lord and said, "Oh, I see, I get it. You can do everything, and no thought can be withheld from You, and who's ever going to hide counsel without knowledge; therefore, have I uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." You know what he says? "God, I understand. You're God, You're sovereign, You can do anything, You know everything, You have all the privileges. I'm a fool for even opening my mouth. I apologize. I've been talking about things far beyond my understanding, which I knew not. Too awesome for me to understand." "So hear me, Lord, hear me, and this is what I want You to hear. I had heard of You with the hearing of mine ear, but now my eyes seeth You." What does he mean by that? "I knew about You only from hearing; now I know about You from personal experience. I've seen You in action, and I hate myself and repent in dust and ashes."

This dear man showed his godliness. He had the right response. "Oh, God," he said, "the sin in all of

this is my sin, for not recognizing Your sovereign right to give and take away. What I said in the beginning is true, the Lord gave, the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Who was I to ever question? God, You had every right to do what You did."

Listen, the whole point of this book is to show the character of genuine godliness, is to show the unbreakable reality of a redeemed soul that under no pressure will he abandon his God, under no pressure will he deny his God, under the loss of everything, he stands true. Someone came to me this morning after the first service and said, "I think now for the first time I understand why God has brought suffering into my life. I never could understand it. We've examined every single possible reason and now," he said, "people are always saying to me, 'I can't believe that you can have such great faith in God in the midst of this,' and now I understand that that's the point."

If nothing else, it demonstrates the character of true conversion, see? Of true love for God, and it led Job from a limited understanding of God to an even greater understanding for God. And, of course, God poured out blessings starting in verse 7, gave him back more than he had to begin with. God blessed him with tremendous abundance, and he died but not until he was old and full of days, verse 17 says. He had the most beautiful daughters. God gave him the most handsome sons. God gave him the finest crops. Yes, there comes a time when God will reward the faithful person. But for a time – mark it – the Lord, in His sovereign purpose, may choose to turn one of His own over to Satan for His own purposes, if for nothing else than to demonstrate to a watching world the strength and character of genuine conversion so that the world will see people who love God not for what He gives but for who He is. And our weak, insipid, shallow pop theology of today is ignorant of that. Job was used by God to prove the character of true love for God, true devotion to God. What a thought.

And it was not without great benefit to him because he learned about God's sovereignty, and he learned a deeper love of God. He found in himself some sins he didn't know he had and he understood the necessity of submitting himself to divine rule no matter what it involved. A true believer, then, can be given over to Satan to bring greater glory to God. But Satan has limits to what he can do, right? First, God said to him, "You can't touch him." The second time around, "You can touch him but you can't" – what? "You can't kill him." There's always a restraint even when one is turned over to Satan.

Do not be surprised, beloved, if within the church of Jesus Christ there are some who, unable to find any reasons why, end up in a situation where it looks like God has totally removed His hand of protection and blessing, and they are in the same quizzical confusion of a Job, they can't understand why it happened, they cannot humanly explain why it happened, and the answer is somewhere on a divine level, which may or may not become known to us. But God has His holy purposes, and in His grace there will come a restoration and a time of great blessing.

Now turn with me as another illustration of this to Matthew chapter 4, and I want to show you something that is equally amazing. Matthew chapter 4. Now, here we find another act by which God turns over someone to Satan, and this time it's one who is even more upright than Job, one who is even more perfect than Job, one who was utterly and absolutely and totally without sin, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Notice Matthew chapter 4 verse 1. "Then was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness." Led up by the Spirit. Mark 1:12 says He was impelled by the Spirit. For what purpose? Notice: For the purpose of being tempted – or tested – by the devil.

Now, listen to that. God not only turned Job over to the devil, He turned Christ over to him also.

That's exactly what it says. He turned Christ over to Satan. As God put Job in Satan's hands and proved the character of true salvation and proved Job's character, so God put His own beloved Son in the hands of Satan to prove His character and to show that He would not break and that He would not waver and that He would stand true as the perfect God-man. And you'll notice in verse 2, this temptation went on for 40 days and 40 nights. I believe that the temptation not only came at the end, but I believe if you compare all the gospel records, you will find that there was temptation through all of those times.

Now, a fast of 40 days and 40 nights is a tremendously weakening experience. Jesus is at a highly vulnerable point, and at the end of those 40 days and 40 nights, there was a great culmination to that temptation, but that is not to say that the temptation didn't come until the end. I believe He was tempted through all of that and a great culminating temptation at the end. It was a time of great weakness physically when He did not eat or drink. It was a time of great aloneness. And I read one of the Puritans this week who said that Satan is a pirate who looks to find a vessel that sails without a fleet.

And Satan is a pirate who looks to find a vessel that sails without a fleet, to find some believer isolated and alone without the protection of others, and there is Christ alone 40 days and 40 nights, weak, in a place that George Adam Smith called the devastation of yellow limestone, a place of barrenness, on the precipice overlooking the Dead Sea on the back side of the plateau of Jerusalem, and there the devil comes to Him by design from God who led Him there by His Spirit and tempts Him and tempts Him in the areas where He had a right.

First of all, tempts Him to bread. And was He not the Son of God and did He not have a right to eat and did He not make everything that was made? And if He could make bread for a multitude, could He not make it for Himself? And then tempted Him to dive off the temple and thus be hailed as the Messiah and take the right that was His, and was it not His? And then to take the kingdoms of the world, and were they not His by promise? He tempted Him in the areas where He had a right, but Christ resisted in the midst of weakness and aloneness all of those temptations. Verse 11 then says, "The devil left Him and the angels came and ministered to Him."

God put His own Son in the hands of Satan and then blessed Him in the end with a ministry of angels for having passed the test, as He blessed Job for having passed the test. Yes, God by His own sovereign design may choose to put one of His very own – even His own Son – into the hands of Satan to bring Himself greater glory.

Second Corinthians chapter 12. Second Corinthians chapter 12, Paul says, "It's not expedient or fitting for me, doubtless to glory, or to boast." "It's not right for me to boast," he says. "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." And he had had so many visions. You know, he'd seen Jesus Christ risen from the dead. He had revelations. He says I – referring to himself – he says, "I know a man – he speaks a rather second-handed here because, again, he doesn't want to boast, and this man, "whether in the body, I can't tell, or out of the body" – he can't really define it – "was caught up into the third heaven" – that is, the dwelling place of God. "He was caught up" – verse 4 says – "into paradise." Verse 3: He doesn't know whether it was in the body or out, he doesn't know the actual spiritual dynamics of what happened, he just knows he was there. He heard unspeakable words which are not lawful for any man to utter. "But I won't glory on such a one, I myself will not glory. The only think I'll boast about is my infirmity."

I mean there was a great temptation in the life of Paul because of his many successes and visions and revelations to be very boastful. “But I won’t do that. I would desire to boast” – verse 6 – “but I’m not going to be a fool. So I’ll say the truth, but now I forbear – I hold back – lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be or hears of me.” “I don’t want anybody having an unfair or exaggerated opinion of me, so I don’t boast, even though I’ve had these things.” “But I have to confess,” he says in verse 7, “it’s not just me that’s restraining” – verse 7 – “unless I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations.”

In other words, “What keeps me from doing this is” – watch this – “there was given to me” – and I believe the implication there is God has brought that, God has allowed that. This is a godly man, this is a holy man, this is an upright man like Job was an upright man. This is a man who knows the Christian experience like perhaps no man who ever lived, other than the God-man Himself, so he is not a sinful man; he deals with those areas of his life before God. “And yet there is given to me a thorn in the flesh.” I want you to notice that the Lord gave him this and yet it is called in verse 7 “a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I should be exalted above measure.”

Listen to this: I believe that this text tells us that the Lord turned Paul over to Satan at least in this regard. He gave Satan the right to inflict him – I don’t believe that’s the work of God, I believe that’s the work of Satan – but I believe God intended that Satan be allowed to do that to keep Paul weak so that he would be dependent. Men with great gifts need that because they tend not to be dependent. God sent Paul into Satan’s arena to be buffeted. The word “buffet” is used in Matthew 26:67 in describing Jesus on trial when they punched Him. It has a root word meaning “knuckles,” and it has to do with blows of the fist that crush the tissue and the bone, and he says, “I’ve got this thorn in the flesh that drives its knuckles into my body. It is a messenger from Satan.”

You think God could have prevented it? Sure. But God gave it to him so that he would not be proud but humble. Verse 8: “I asked the Lord three times to take it away.” “I asked Him.” Somebody will say, “Well, some Charismatic will say to us, ‘Well, he didn’t have enough faith.’” Don’t give me that. That’s foreign to the text. “Well, he didn’t claim his deliverance.” I don’t buy that either. Because it tells you exactly what the Lord said. He said, “Take it away,” the Lord said, “No, My grace is sufficient for you, My strength is made perfect in that weakness.” “I’m not going to take it away because it is enough of a weakness to allow My strength to be manifest.” So Paul says, “Gladly, happily, I will boast in my infirmities.” Why? “Because the power of Christ rests on me.” “I take pleasure in my infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses for Christ’s sake for when I am weak, then I’m” – what? – “strong.”

Now, beloved, God gave to Job disaster, turned him over to Satan. Why? That Job might be living proof of the character of a godly man, that Job might learn that God was sovereign, that Job might know God more intimately and better than he had ever, ever thought to know God because in his struggles, he was drawn to God in ways that his prosperity could never bring him. So God turned Job over to Satan for wonderful reasons and restrains Satan from ultimately destroying Job.

God turned Christ over to Satan to prove His purity. God turned Paul over to Satan, at least in this one area, so that Satan could be the instrument of God to keep Paul humble so that he would know where his strength was and therefore was a more effective servant. So the Lord turns Job over to Satan to prove himself to be a godly man. The Lord turns Paul over to Satan that Paul may be a greater, more effective servant. That he may learn humility and that he may learn dependence.

I want you to turn to Luke 22. Luke 22 and verse 31. In Luke 22 verse 31 – listen. The Lord said, "Simon, Simon" – He's talking to Peter – "Simon, Simon." He's calling him his old name because he sees characteristics of his old self – sin. So He chooses the old name to emphasize that oldness that He sees in his behavior, and He says it twice because of His compassion. "Simon, Simon" – it's pathos. "Behold, Satan has desired you." And I believe that is true – that is true of every believer. Satan would love to go around as a roaring lion and devour every believer and show God and show the angels. I think Satan would like the other angels to rebel. I think Satan wants to make his point, and if he could just capture the saved, if he could just have them abandon their salvation, if he could just swallow them up in his own evil kingdom, then he could win a victory over God, then he could checkmate God, at least in one point.

So Satan desires to have you, particularly did Satan desire Peter because Peter was so crucial to the development of the church, the great preacher God used in the founding years. Satan wants you, and he wants to sift you like wheat. In other words, he wants to blow you away. He wants your personality to disintegrate like wheat does when it's thrown in the air and just blows away the chaff. He wants to blow away your confidence and blow away your usefulness and blow away your trust in God and blow away your security and blow away your effectiveness. He wants you.

You think the Lord could have prevented it? Of course. The same Lord who will bind Satan for a thousand years in a pit in the book of Revelation could certainly have bound him here from touching Peter, but He didn't. Look at verse 32, "I've prayed for you that your faith not ultimately fail." "I've prayed for you that you're not going to ultimately lose your salvation. Just like He said, you can go so far with Job and no farther, you can go so far with Paul and no farther, you can go so far with Peter and no farther, you're not going to have ultimate failure of your faith. Then He says, "But when you return," which is to say, "I'm going to" – what? "I'm going to let you – I'm going to let you go, I'm going to let you go to Satan, and when you come back" – do what? – "strengthen the brethren."

Now, what was Peter being released to Satan to learn? To learn how to what? Strengthen others, right? He, being put through this situation, could then come back and strengthen others. In the case of Job, God was making a point to Satan, and God was making a point to the whole world of people who read the Bible that a true lover of God will not abandon that love and devotion though he lose everything. A great, profound lesson. In the case of Paul, He was teaching humility and dependence. In the case of Peter, He wanted someone who could tell others how it was to be in the clutches of Satan. When you've been through it and you come back, then God uses you to strengthen others.

It may be that the Lord in His sovereignty will take a believer who is in some way disobedient, sinful, boastful like Peter was and say, "All right, I'm going to let you go. You think you can handle it on your own?" Peter says, "Though I'll forsake You, I'll never forsake You, boy, I'll stand with You, I'll die with You, I'll go with You to the end." "All right, if you think you're so great, I'll just test you," and He lets you go. A boasting Christian may find himself out from under the protection of God, given over to Satan, and what he'll learn is that you can't do it on your own, and so I believe the Lord literally delivered Peter to Satan so that when he came back, he would be a source of strength to everybody else. And Peter comes back in verse 33: "Lord, I'm ready to go with You to prison and to death." And, of course, when he had the chance, he denied Christ three times, right? And then in verse 62, he went out and wept bitterly, and I believe he repented and I believe he got his heart right with God.

The point is this: The Scripture indicates that people who are within the framework of the community of believers, whether you're talking about 1 Timothy 1, Hymenaeus and Alexander, who were pastors

in the church, whether you're talking about Old Testament characters like Job, whether you're talking about Jesus Christ Himself, whether you're talking about Paul or talking about Peter, these people who belong to the Lord's kingdom one way or another who are under the protection of it can for God's own purposes of remedial instruction and correction and training and illustration of great truth be brought into the dominion of Satan unprotected for God's holy purpose and glory.

Some are turned over to Satan for refining, some are – like Peter was. Some are turned over to Satan for greater effectiveness like Paul was. Some, for proving the validity of their faith like Job was, but in all of those, the greater glory goes to God in praising Him for the kind of salvation that holds a Job, the kind of power that humbles a Paul and that restores a Peter, and so God receives the glory in all those things.

Mark it, beloved. People within the fellowship of the church, be they believers or unbelievers – and in the cases that we've looked at today, they're all believers – can be put out for testing – for testing – to prove whatever it is that God would desire be proven.

Now, next Lord's day, we're going to see what happens to unbelievers and to some believers also within the church who are put out – mark this one – not for testing, strengthening, and proving but for chastening and judgment – for chastening and judgment – and that's a whole different issue, and that will take us right back to 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 20. Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we think about Job, and we are reminded that his being turned over to Satan lasted for years and years, long years, before he could know the recovery of all that he lost. When we think of the Lord Jesus Christ, we think of one who was turned over to Satan for a few weeks. For the apostle Paul, perhaps a few years. For Peter, just a day. And, Lord, we realize that You have Your purposes, and in these the purposes were for proving and refining and strengthening to Your glory that Job and Paul and Christ and Peter might be the most noble servants that they were, and so Lord, we acknowledge that should it make us better servants, we are willing to suffer whatever the enemy might bring, knowing that he can bring nothing to ultimately cause our faith to fail because we are kept in Your grace and power. And if it can enhance and enrich that ministry to which we are called, then let us suffer whatever might be and commit our souls in faithful keeping to the one who loves us and gave Himself for us, the one who says, "No man, not Satan, not anyone, shall ever pluck My sheep out of My hand." And so, Lord, if it can be for strengthening, for refining, for humbling, for greater usefulness, for the proving of the genuineness of our faith to the watching world, then do in our lives what is needful that You might receive the glory and we'll count it a privilege.

While your heads are bowed in just this parting time, I know that the Spirit of God has probed your mind and you're perhaps viewing things in your own lives in ways you've never viewed them before, even as I have. My prayer is that you'll understand the Word of God and its application to your heart. I also pray that if you're not right with the Lord, you might be right with Him because there is also that chastening. There are those who come under the power of Satan because the Lord is chastening them, to purge them from sin. We're going to see that next Lord's day, but even in what we've seen today, you can see that lingering in the background. If you are to be placed under the hand of Satan for a time or an area of life, be sure that it's for a holy purpose of greater usefulness to God and glory to His name rather than chastening or judgment.

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