



Luke 22:35-38 - The Sifting of Satan and God's Providence

Opening Discussion: How does the theological idea of God sovereign and providential work affect your faith? Is it a concept that scares you, encourages you or both? Why?

- As we begin this morning, I want to take a moment to talk to you about the theological concept of God's providence. This is an important concept because as we move forward through Christ's suffering because we are going to be reminded again and again that we are called to walk in the footsteps of Christ's suffering. To embrace this call we must understand God's providential work.
- The word "providence" (from the Latin providentia and root providere) means "to see beforehand". This doesn't mean God merely sees and understands what will happen, but that the Lord also prepares what needs to be prepared to accomplish his will. This concept is probably most clearly visible in Abraham being asked in Gen. 22 to sacrifice his son while God was preparing an alternative sacrifice with the ram caught in the thicket.¹
- If God is providential, we tend to ask a logical question: Was God providential over sin? This has been a discussion since the fall of Adam and Eve in Gen. 3.
- The Westminster Confession 5.4 makes this statement: "The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God manifest themselves so completely in his providence, that it extends even to the first fall and all other sins of angels and men—not by a bare permission, but by a permission which has joined with it a most wise and powerful limiting, and otherwise ordering and governing of them in a varied administration, for his own holy purposes. However, the sinfulness comes from the creatures alone and not from God, who, because he is most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin."²

¹ Joele R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology Vol. 1: Revelation and God*. (Wheaton: Crossway. 2019), 1059

² Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith, A readers Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 73

- What the Westminster Divines were saying is that God created within man a will that had the ability to sin, but is not responsible for the sin that resulted.³
- When you read the Genesis account of the fall of man, you see God referenced by Satan, but God was not involved in the first act of sin. That happened solely on the will of choice by Eve and later Adam.
- Puritan Theologian Steven Charnock said, “Though God created man changeable, yet he was not the cause of this change by his fall....[Man] was not determined by God influencing his will by any positive act to that change....He did not incline him to evil.”⁴
- Oxford Theologian Elisha Coles stated that we can see Biblical examples of “the Lord’s overruling the designs and actions of men to bring his own counsels to pass.”⁵
 - Examples of this would include:
 - Rebekah and Jacob deceiving Issac so that Jacob would be elevated over Esau according to God’s purposes. (Gen. 27)
 - Joseph being sold into slavery so that the nation of Israel might be fostered and preserved. (Gen. 50)
 - The most astounding example is what we will read over the next few weeks about Satan’s manipulation of the Romans and Jews to murder God’s Son, all under the providential purview of God’s Gospel plan!
- The apostle Paul stated in Romans 11:32: “God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all”.(ESV)⁶ Without the ability to sin according to God’s providence, we would not have fully experienced the real and redemptive relationship God has purposed for us and to know his gracious character.

³ James 1:3

⁴ Steven Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:150-51. Sourced from Beeke and Smalley *RST Vol 1*. 1069

⁵ Elisha Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God’s Sovereignty* (Philadelphia: Smith and English, 1854), 30 Sourced from Beeke and Smalley *RST Vol. 1*. 1069

⁶ “The word translated as “consigned” (*sykleiō*) means to shut up or imprison together (Luke 5:6; Gal. 3:22-23). Man’s state of slavery to sin is God’s righteous will. Beeke and Smalley, *RST Vol 1*. 1069

Question: When you first came to Christ, did you have an awareness of God's providence? Would this theological concept have encouraged you to come to Christ and made it a struggle? In either case, why do you think that is?

- Hold on to God's providence as we look at this statement Jesus makes to Peter in this important teaching moment.
- **[31] "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, [32] but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." [33] Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." [34] Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." (ESV)**
 - I spoke last week during our Child Dedication Service about the significance of our names. Jesus' choice of name here appears to be intentional because he had given Simon the nickname of Peter. This was a significant compliment toward Simon as someone who was solid like a rock, yet Jesus was warning Peter (the Rock) that his strength had limits in the flesh.⁷ Simon was his given name, and it is that name that Jesus chose to use in addressing him.
 - As I stated last week, here are the encouraging take-away's from this significant moment:
 - Jesus prayed for Peter!
 - Peter didn't understand his own weakness.
 - God had a plan for Peter that would result in ministry to others.
 - Jesus, for the benefit of everyone, chose to speak to Peter about what it looks like to endure the sifting of Satan. This was a benefit for everyone present because we all suffer as the victims of Satan's ultimate plan (through his evil forces) to scatter and isolate believers.
 - Jesus used the illustration of sifting wheat. Sifting of wheat is the process of separating wheat grains from unwanted materials such as stones, dust, chaff, and other impurities. It would seem this should be a positive illustration of removing what is bad from what is good, but Jesus is using this illustration for

⁷ Ryken likens this name to "Rocky". Philips Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Luke Vol. 2* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R 2009), 486

Satan removing what is good from what is bad and leaving the bad to be consumed.

Question: has there ever been a time in your life when a “sifting” took place that caused you to let go of what was good and necessary to your sanctification? Are you willing to share that experience?

- What Jesus teaches next is a brand new message to his disciples. He'll start this new teaching by reminding them of how things had occurred in their ministries in the past.
- **[35] And he said to them, “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.”**
 - Jesus was referencing Luke 9:1-6 and Luke 10:1-12.
 - Luke 9:1–6 Jesus sent out his 12 disciples and told them to preach the kingdom and “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics.”
 - Luke 10:1–12 Jesus sent out 72 other followers and said something very similar and told them they would experience the peace of God.
 - One of the reasons we really have to be careful to exegete Scripture with care is that we can create untrue and unkind motivations for following Christ. If we aren't careful to read and teach the whole counsel of God in scripture, we could wrongly deduce that when we follow after God in commitment and mission, we are promised to be provided for and experience peace. There are people who have experienced provision and peace, but many followers of Christ do not experience provision and peace even though they follow God faithfully.
 - There are times of peace when we follow Christ, but there are also times of war when the sifting of Satan's evil forces is very real! There are times when Satan is hell bent on separating believers from each other and separating individual believers from Gospel truth and faithfulness in their own lives.
- **[36] He said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. [37] For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” [38] And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And he said to them, “It is enough.”**

- I believe Jesus was speaking metaphorically here to help his disciples understand the fulfillment of prophecy.
- How do we know Jesus is not advocating for a violent defense? Well, if you keep reading you will discover one of these swords was used by one of the disciples (Peter according to John 18) to cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. This was an intended death blow that probably glanced off of a helmet. Jesus' response was curt: "No more of this!" (Luke 22:49). Jesus put the man's ear back on and went willingly with his captors.
- Additionally, 2 swords would probably not have been enough against the temple guard and Roman detachment. For the purpose of what God was going to accomplish, 2 millions swords would not have been enough to stop Jesus from being crucified. However, 2 swords were enough to illustrate the futile nature of stopping God's plans to lead Jesus toward the act of sacrifice he was about to fulfill.

Debate Question: We have a tendency to take passages like this and produce political viewpoints, in this case viewpoints on weapons and self defense. Do you see this as being an appropriate use of this particular passage? (Warning: This is the kind of question that can instigate an emotional response, so care and caution to show Christ-like love is advised.)

- In this section of his speech to the disciples, Christ's goal was to prepare them for the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He wanted them to understand that what was about to happen was part of God's will and it was unstoppable!
- Isaiah 53:10–12 [10] Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. [11] Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (ESV)**
- Jesus was predestined to suffer for us, and we are likewise predestined to walk in his footsteps. Do you understand that the suffering of the saints is part of God's will? If you don't understand this truth and you aren't ready to embrace this truth,

then you don't understand the Gospel and you are not ready to fully embrace the Gospel.

- **We are at war!**
- **The Apostle Paul said it this way:**
- **Ephesians 6:10–13 [10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.**
- Peter preached from experience, just like Jesus told him he would. I want to draw out some key words and phrases in Peter's first letter this morning that help us understand how to walk through suffering in the war of this life.
- **1 Peter 1:3 [3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**
- **1 Peter 1:13 [13] Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**
- **1. We must set our minds on the hope of God's grace.⁸**
 - The KJV states "Gird up the loins of your mind". This funny phrase comes from a time when men still wore robes. When they were going to travel long, hard and fast, they would tuck the bottom part of their robe up into a belt or sash. This allowed them to not trip as they moved. The idea here is to have a mobile hope, a hope that travels with you and keeps you from tripping.
 - There are a lot of things in life that will trip us up if we get too far into our own minds. Tie up the wandering loose ends of your anxieties and faith struggles, and tuck them into the knowledge that God is sovereign and has a perfect plan for you.

⁸ Rom. 8:6, 12:2; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:2

Question: How do you personally practice setting your mind each day the hope of God's grace?

- 1 Peter 3:13–17 [13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [15] but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (ESV)
- 2. We must honor Christ the Lord in our heart by having a good conscience.⁹
- There is a phrase in counseling: Choose your hard.
 - Being out of shape is hard, and so is getting in shape.
 - Being poor is hard, and so is working hard to change your situation.
- We are going to suffer for righteousness. That is already hard. Don't add to that suffering the chaos of sinful decisions!
- This is more than mental, it is spiritual. The desire to honor Christ has to come from deeper than mere choice of the mind. It must come from a heart condition. We must possess Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Question: what do is it mean for you to honor God from deeper than your mind, from your heart? Why is this important?

- 1 Peter 4:1-2 [1] Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.
- 1 Peter 4:6-7 [6] For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. [7] The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

⁹ Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:5, 1:19; Heb. 13:18

- **3. We must arm our minds with truth of the Gospel.¹⁰**

- The word “sober minded” means to be in the right head space.¹¹ It means that we are drawing our mind in a disciplined way back to truth.
- I repeat: you are the most influential preacher in your own life. Preach the Gospel to yourself daily!

Question: how can we practically keep our minds in the “right head space”? More pointedly, how do we mitigate discouraging distractions from our minds? (This is a great moment to review Phil. 4:4-8.)

- **1 Peter 5:6–10 [6] Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, [7] casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. [8] Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [9] Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. [10] And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.**

- **4. We must be humble enough to admit we can’t solve our own problems.¹²**

- Our fellow believers walk with us in suffering.
- Christ strengthens us in suffering.

Question: how can we more actively share our suffering with Christ and our church body? What does this practically look like?

- How does providence impact us today in our siftings?
 - **Knowing and recognizing God’s providence allows us to see...**
 - **Sin without defeat.**
 - The chaos of sin is never the whole story. Four Points Church is a living example of that truth!

¹⁰ Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:5

¹¹ (σωφρονέω) sōphroneō (Strong’s G4993) to be in one's right mind; to exercise self control

¹² Phil. 2:3-4; James 4:10

- **Suffering without discouragement.**

- God never wastes pain. Your patient suffering is precious to God.
- Psalm 56:8 [8] You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? (ESV)

- **Sanctification with determination.**

- What Satan means for evil, God means for good.¹³
- The same sifting Satan might use to remove the strength of your faith might very well remove the weaknesses of your lack of faith.
- James 1:2–4 [2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (ESV)

Question: are there any sufferings or sins that you would be willing to “share” with others right now in order to have encouragement and accountability?

¹³ This was Joseph’s response to his brothers’ apology in Gen. 50:20.