

Peter Denies, Jesus Intercedes**Luke 22:31-34, 54-62**

One of the most refreshing things about the Bible is that it is deeply honest about life. If you read the stories throughout either the Old Testament or New Testament you see that there is no sugar coating what life is like for the people within its pages. Even for those people that we consider to be heroes of the faith, Scripture does not try to hide the fact they were still deeply flawed individuals. They were people who struggled with sin and failure.

And this is refreshing not because we want to take pleasure in or be entertained by the worst moments of a person's life, but because it makes them more relatable to us. It's hard to relate to a king, until we read about his sinful desires and behaviors. It's hard to relate with men and women who literally spoke with God, until we read about their fears, doubts, and hangups. And it's hard to relate to the disciples who walked and talked with Jesus, until we read about their shortcomings and blunders, and Peter certainly had his fair share.

Of the 12 disciples, Peter is the most well-known. He was the first to be called by Jesus to follow him. He walked on water. He saw the Transfiguration. He was the first to profess Jesus as the Christ, whose profession Jesus said would be the foundation of the church. He was zealous, outspoken, a leader. He was maybe the most promising disciple of the bunch. But our passage this morning focuses not on the highest moments of Peter's life with Jesus, rather it is all about the lowest moment of his life: his denial of Jesus.

This is a powerful scene. One that is painful to read and imagine, but is actually more relatable than we'd like to admit.

As difficult as it is for us to read and as difficult as it probably was for Peter to affirm as truly having happened to be inscripturated for all time, we will find some very helpful and important lessons here.

I want to point out three main lessons from this text today: 1) the warning of Satan's attacks, 2) the challenge to our witness, and 3) the comfort of Christ's intercession. So, let's go ahead and read the entire passage first and then we will go back through it.

Just a reminder this is still in the upper room where they have observed the Passover meal, just before they go out to the Mount of Olives where Jesus will be arrested.

Luke 22:31-34, 54-62

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.”

54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. **55** And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. **56** Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” **57** But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” **58** And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” **59** And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” **60** But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. **61** And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” **62** And he went out and wept bitterly.

Again, this is the lowest moment for the most promising disciple of Jesus, but there is much to glean from this account.

1. The warning of Satan’s attacks

Luke 22:31

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat...

Now, the pronoun “you” in the original language is actually plural. So Jesus was warning all of the disciples, which can include us today, of this truth but wanted Peter especially to hear it.

And it was the warning that Satan “demanded to have you.” He wanted to destroy you. He wanted to “sift you like wheat.” Jesus used an analogy from harvesting wheat to describe Satan’s desire for the disciples.

The idea here is that after harvest, the wheat needs to be sifted or winnowed. It is the process of removing the chaff, the inedible part of wheat from the grain. One of the ways it could be done was after it being threshed the farmer could throw the wheat in the air and the wind would blow away the chaff and the grain would fall to the ground.

It was an analogy that was used before in the gospels. If you remember earlier in Luke, John the Baptist describes this when talking about God's coming judgment...

Luke 3:16-17

16 John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **17** His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

In other words, the chaff was a picture of those who are not followers of Christ. And back in Luke 22, Jesus said, guys, Satan wants to see you end up like chaff. He wants to see your faith destroyed. He wants to see that you are blown away at the judgment.

And this is a good reminder to us that Satan is real and his desire has not changed. He desires to see more chaff than grain.

C.S. Lewis wrote many famous works, and one of them is a book called *The Screwtape Letters*. In it, Lewis presents letters from a more senior demon, named Screwtape, to a junior demon, named Wormwood. Wormwood has a mission, to tempt someone who has recently converted to Christianity. And in this fictionalized series of conversations, Lewis explores the tactics of Satan's temptations. But ultimately, Wormwood fails and the person dies without being tempted away from Christ. And the very last letter in the book, it is implied that Wormwood was afraid that Screwtape would be upset and was seeking affirmation that Screwtape still loved him. This is what Lewis wrote...

"I have always desired you, as you (pitiful fool) desired me. The difference is that I am the stronger. I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on...(signed) Your increasingly and ravenously affectionate uncle, Screwtape"¹

What Lewis tried to portray is the biblical teaching that Satan is a ravenous being with a pride-fueled mission to destroy as many people as possible. And that being was there in Jerusalem with the desire to destroy the disciples.

As easy as it is to come down on Peter for his denial of Jesus, we have to remember that he wasn't only facing the weakness of his flesh, but a real enemy in Satan.

In fact, as we can imagine this experience left an unforgettable lesson in his mind and he would later write to Christians experiencing persecution...

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 171-175.

1 Peter 5:8-9

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.

And I think we don't really talk about Satan, demons, and spiritual warfare very much. We all face the same enemies: those being the world, the flesh, and the devil. We talk about the world a lot and we talk about the flesh a lot, but we don't talk about Satan very much. And that might be because we just don't know very much about him or it might be because we are afraid that our conversation might take a strange turn as it does with some groups when it comes to this topic.

But this was true in the first century, and this is true in the 21st century. Satan desires your fall. He is our real enemy, our true enemy, who will stop at nothing to see that you and I are sifted like wheat.

And so we should be aware of him and his very real threat on the Church as a whole and on us as individual Christians. As Paul said to the church in Ephesus...

Ephesians 6:10-12

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.

We can't afford to ignore this reality. We must "be watchful" and resist him. We must be strong in the Lord, putting on the whole armor of God, the armor of Scripture, faith, righteousness, and so on.

So, Peter was facing an attack by Satan and we face his threats as well. But this scene from Peter's life also presents to us...

1) A challenge to our witness

Peter was hardly concerned about Satan's attack on him. He confidently declared that he would never turn away from Christ, just the opposite, said, "I am prepared to be arrested with you and for you, and even more than that I am ready to die with you."

And to Peter's credit, he did follow Jesus after his arrest, albeit, the text says, "from a distance." But the others weren't there. So, here is Peter trying to make good on his claim that he was with Jesus until the end, but gathering around a fire with others there, he is confronted three times.

First a servant girl, then two different men, during the evening recognize Peter and say, “Aren’t you one of those who followed Jesus?” To which, of course, Peter says, “Me? Nah, I don’t know who you are talking about. Whoever you are thinking about, it isn’t me.”

And the rooster crows, just as Jesus said it would.

When we read this story, if we are honest with ourselves, we can relate to this far more than we’d like to admit. Think about it. How many times have you been around your Christian friends or family, had a great discussion about Jesus, the gospel, faith, spent time in prayer, talked about church, and then be around non-Christian colleagues, friends, or family and Jesus never comes up, or if he does come up you find yourself timid, embarrassed, or afraid to say anything?

We’ve all been there. And the reason is, that **it is far easier to follow Jesus when we are surrounded by other followers of Jesus than it is to follow Jesus when we are surrounded by opponents of Jesus.**

Again, think about Peter and all the incredible moments in his faith journey. Every time, he was with Jesus and the disciples. But now, both Jesus and the disciples are gone. Now, he is all by himself facing the glares and accusations of others, and he folds.

The hard truth is, one of the greatest tests of our commitment to Christ is when we are around those who reject Him. And when we are around the campfire, so to speak, at the office, at school, with friends, we will either embrace the cross of Jesus, or we will avoid the cross of Jesus.

Out of fear of being seen as naive, archaic, bigoted, narrow minded, or gullible, we will deny knowing and loving Christ. And by the way this can be done a few ways, whether we outright say we don’t follow Jesus, like Peter. Or, we are silent when it comes up in conversation. Or, we try to make Jesus more palatable by changing his controversial teachings. For example, in our cultural moment, it is somewhat easy to follow Jesus in the public sphere until the topics of gender roles, sexuality, or the exclusivity of Christ for salvation come up. Then, it becomes difficult. So to ease the difficulty some try to say they follow Jesus, but not the way that Christians have historically followed Him in those areas. Again, one of the greatest tests of our commitment to Christ is when we are around those who reject Him.

And the truth is, we are all Peter at sometimes aren’t we. We gather with the church, gather with our grace group, and then we go out and at the first sign of opposition our demeanor changes.

Imagine again the scene in Luke 22. Peter had just boldly declared he would be arrested and go to death with Jesus and he locks eyes with Jesus after denying Him, of

all moments, while Jesus was under arrest. Jesus was really going to the cross in that moment and Peter bailed. Jesus stood alone.

And for those moments when we fail to acknowledge Jesus, Jesus stands alone. But followers of Jesus are called to follow Jesus. Even when following Him takes us to the place of the cross.

Listen to how the author of Hebrews put it in Heb. 13...

Heb. 13:12-15

12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. **13** Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. **14** For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. **15** Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

The author of Hebrews is saying, remember how Jesus endured the reproach at his arrest, trial, and crucifixion? How he was taken outside the city where despised things and people were taken? Followers of Jesus go there. And we go there, because Jesus is there.

And notice how the author reminds them that we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come. We should have a healthy detachment of this world because we recognize that our true eternal home is to come, and as we recognize that, it becomes easier and easier to hold the opinions of others loosely, welcome the reproach of the world, because our eyes are fixed on Christ, the One who is outside the camp.

Probably the most powerful moment of this account is that when the rooster crows, Luke tells us that Jesus, who is nearby, looks at Peter and Peter is shattered. Think about that.

You might know that feeling too. Thinking about those times that our lives and words denied Jesus.

It can be incredibly discouraging to be so on fire for Jesus one moment only to have that fire extinguished because of opposition or the fear of what others might think.

Our lack of faith is discouraging, because we know, Jesus has done so much for us, he has gone to great lengths for us, and we can't stand for him? Between Satan's attacks and our weakness, we stumble, but the good news from this passage is that our perseverance is not ultimately up to us, but up to the One who saved us in the first place...

Notice with me...

2) The comfort of Christ's intercession

Luke 22:31-32

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.*"

Jesus looked at Peter and said, Satan is demanding you, but he has to go through me first. Satan's demand is countered by Jesus' intercession. Notice Jesus said that Peter would not ultimately be sifted like wheat by Satan, because he tells Peter, "when you have turned again," in other words, when you come back to me, here's what you are to do.

And this will happen because Jesus prays for Peter. He prays that his faith, though tested, though challenged, will not fail. Jesus has interceded for him.

And the amazing truth is that Jesus has prayed for *you* and *continues to pray for you* as well.

In John 17, in John's gospel, he records that Jesus prayed for his disciples in the upper room before they left to go to the garden where he would be arrested. And part of his prayer for the disciples was that the Father would "keep them" and that none other than Judas would be lost.

He'd go on to pray...

John 17:15

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one

In other words, Jesus prays that they are not sifted like wheat by Satan.

But then, he went on to pray...

John 17:20

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word..."

Understand, in the upper room, *Jesus prayed for you.*

And this prayer has been called the "High Priestly Prayer," because Jesus, in praying for his disciples, acts as a high priest. And to understand that we have to understand who the priests were, so follow with me here...

It was the priest's job to serve in the tabernacle, or later the temple, the place where God dwelled with his people. The priest acted as a mediator between the people and the Lord. He would offer sacrifices on their behalf, among other duties, all through the year, but the most significant day of the year was the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur. It is when the high priest would enter into the section of the temple known as the holy of holies, into the presence of God.

And to enter, the high priest had to wear a certain coat, bathe, bring incense, and sprinkle blood seven times on the mercy seat and the altar. Ex. 28 tells us that the high priest would enter the holy of holies wearing the names of the sons of Israel on a breast piece, a symbol of going before God on behalf of the people. He was the mediator. There would then be a sacrifice of a goat for the sins of the people, and a prayer and sending away of another goat to symbolize how their sins had been removed.

The point is, this high priest went past the curtain that separated God and Israel, bringing the name of the people before God.

Now, catch what the author of Hebrews says about the way in which Jesus has become the ultimate and final high priest...

Hebrews 8:1

1 Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven...

So, because Christ has offered the perfect sacrifice once for all, he, too, has entered into the presence of the Father. He is seated at the right hand of the throne. And it's easy to read that and think that Jesus has ascended and he's just sitting back with his feet propped up until it's his time to come again.

But notice how he goes on to describe Jesus...

Hebrews 8:2

2 a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

Jesus, in heaven right now, acts as a minister. He continues to be the ultimate high priest who serves in the sanctuary, in the presence of God.

His ministry is not completed, now it is just based on his perfect sacrifice. He continues to intercede for us.

Hebrews 7:25

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Romans 8:34

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Again, Jesus prayed for you in the upper room the night of his arrest and He prays for you in the presence of God continually. He lives to intercede for you.

And just listen to how those petitions are described in Heb. 2...

Hebrews 2:11-13

11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, **12** saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” **13** And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

It’s an incredible picture, that Jesus unashamedly calls us brothers in the presence of the Father. It’s as if, in the sanctuary he proudly wears the names of his brothers and sisters on his chest like the OT high priest and advocates for us, saying, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”² In other words, Behold, these are my brothers and sisters. These are the ones you gave me.

Again, Jesus intercedes for his people...

Which ought to **both challenge us and comfort us**. It should **challenge** us because, so often, like Peter, it is easy to think that our faith and commitment is by our own doing. That maybe even though Jesus gave us faith when we first believed, somehow we are the ones now who are maintain that faith. It’s as if Jesus just gave us a little nudge in the right direction but we are the ones who keep our legs moving. But, if that’s the case, like Peter, we are in danger of becoming prideful, only later to fall.

It’s easy to make promises and vows to demonstrate our commitment, but you ought to do so with humility. Jesus is the one who saved you and he is the one who sustains you. But because his work is perfect, you will be saved. Jesus is a much better Savior than you are. To try and exalt your own faith is to steal glory from the one who gave it to you and sustains it for you. So, Jesus’ intercessory ministry challenges our self-confident spirituality.

But, Jesus’ intercessory work should **comfort** us as well. Because, our tendency to have feeble and weak faith, is not a surprise to Jesus. He would not be praying for you if he didn’t know that you needed it. And when we deny the Lord, he is gracious to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, even the most shameful of betrayals, like Peter’s, because Jesus will not lose any of His own.

² For more, see Patrick Schreiner, *The Ascension of Christ* (Bellingham:Lexham Press, 2020).

Another C.S. Lewis classic, is his *Chronicles of Narnia*, and it tells the fictional story of siblings who enter into the land of Narnia through a magical wardrobe. And in one of the books in the series, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the story is told of how they enter into Narnia only to find that the land had been taken over by the evil White Witch. However, the people of Narnia believed that the great Aslan, the Lion, would return and make all things right again.

Well, in the story, one of the boys is tricked into following the White Witch, but is eventually freed by Aslan. The White Witch comes to visit Aslan's camp and points out Edmund, the boy, to Aslan, making accusations.

Lewis wrote this for that scene...

*"You have a traitor there, Aslan," said the Witch. Of course everyone present knew that she meant Edmund. But Edmund had got past thinking about himself after all he'd been through and after the talk he'd had that morning. He just went on looking at Aslan. It didn't seem to matter what the Witch said."*³

The truth that Lewis was trying convey here, is that the Lord is faithful to forgive and cleanse us. He is ready to restore us (just like he eventually does with Peter in John 21). After we repent, we just keeping looking to Jesus. It no longer matters what the accuser demands or desires. Jesus has the final word.

So, we follow Jesus, as committed as we possibly can be, but we know and believe that our ultimate preservation is due not to our own strength but to Christ's. He is a gracious, High Priest, and Savior. So, let's look to Him in faith and rest in his finished work on the cross as *well* as his continued work in heaven.

VERSES

Luke 22:31-34

Luke 22:54-62

Luke 22:31

Luke 3:16-17

1 Peter 5:8-9

Ephesians 6:10-12

Hebrews 13:12-15

Luke 22:31-32

John 17:15

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: Collins, 1998), 175.

John 17:20
Hebrews 8:1
Hebrews 8:2
Hebrews 7:25
Romans 8:34
Hebrews 2:11-13

SERMON DISCUSSION

Do you give much thought to the idea of spiritual warfare? Why or why not?

What “campfire” in your life presents the greatest challenge for you to speak up for Christ? (ex. work, family, friends, school, etc...)

How does Christ’s ongoing intercessory ministry encourage your faith?