

**The Gospel of Luke (#99);
The Trial of Peter**

On the night our Lord was betrayed and arrested, He had been fellowshiping with His disciples while they feasted upon their Passover meal. But very soon Jesus would be taken from them and His trial(s) would begin and the next day they would crucify Him. But His disciples also were to undergo trial, but of a different sort. Jesus had warned them in advance of what would soon come upon them. But in response, they all denied that they would falter in their faith and faithfulness to Him. Peter in particular affirmed that although all the others might “stumble”, he would not do so. We read in Matthew’s Gospel of this verbal exchange between Jesus and His disciples.

Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

‘I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

³²But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

³³Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.”

³⁴Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

³⁵Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”

And so said all the disciples. (Matt. 26:31-35)

Our Lord in declaring the defection of His disciples, declared, “it is written”, that is, it is the recorded prophecy of the written Word of God, that His disciples would abandon Him. It will indeed come to pass, “for it is written.” He quoted Zechariah 13:7, in which four hundred years before the event, the prophet revealed that God Himself would cause the death of the Shepherd of His people, which would result in His followers abandoning Him and fleeing for their own lives. The verse reads,

“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,
Against the Man who is My Companion,”
Says the Lord of hosts.
“Strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep will be scattered;
Then I will turn My hand against the little ones...”

Where Matthew recorded Peter having been the most outspoken of all the disciples, who all would forsake Jesus, Luke gives us more specific and personal details of Peter’s denial of Jesus. In our study of Luke’s Gospel, we arrive to 22:31 through 34, which read as follows:

And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

³²But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”

³³But he said to Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.”

³⁴Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.”

Through these verses we may receive instruction in the ways of God with His people and in the weakness of grace that may characterize our own profession of faith in Jesus Christ. We see that there is the danger of backsliding for the follower of Jesus Christ. Although we cannot fall out of God's saving grace, we can certainly experience a weakening of our faith and a diminishment of the grace to live faithfully before Him. We are all vulnerable and we are all susceptible to this danger of backsliding. But thankfully by the grace of God we may, even, will experience recovery and restoration, if we are taught by God from the Scriptures and we employ the means of obtaining the grace to recover and to persevere through our trials.

Let us preface our remarks on this passage by first rehearsing the way that God draws us to initial faith in Christ and the manner that He trains us to be His faithful disciples. When we first came to learn of the truth that is in Jesus Christ, significant changes began to take place in our lives. The *first* sensation that came to us in those early days was an *understanding of the truth of the Holy Scriptures concerning the person of Jesus Christ*. The Word of God describes this as the entrance of *light* into the soul. Psalm 119:130 reads, "The entrance of Thy Words gives light." This was a work of God's grace whereby He illuminated us to the truthfulness of His written Word and to its witness to the glory of His Son, for who He is, and for what He did when He came and lived among us in the world.

Second, there came with that light that God shown forth to us, *a mysterious infusion of spiritual life into our souls*. This life was characterized by a warmth of affection toward Jesus, prayer to the Father, and a reverence for His name, and faith in Him through His Word. This spiritual life was also evident in a conviction of guilt for our sin as well as godly fear in our desire to know and please Him. We wanted to do His will from the heart. And so, newness of life was evident in us on the one hand by a new understanding of God and His Son, but on the other hand by a new awareness of the weakness and corruption of ourselves. We became convinced and concerned of the presence and guilt of sin, and a sense of our own weakness to do the things that please God. It is as though we had known nothing of these things before. Some of us perhaps had heard and talked of these things, but through the grace of God we only then had come to know and desire these things personally and sincerely.

Then *third*, what was driven home to our souls was *the true nature of God* as a holy, just, Being, who will not set aside His justice for anyone. We had become *awakened sinners* so as to learn and feel deeply our guilt before God. We knew that God was holy and just, and that He would not lower His standards of righteousness and justice for anyone. God was one, "Who will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo. 34:7). This conviction was heavy upon us, heavier on some more than others. We each said of ourselves, "There is a God, and I am a guilty sinner before Him." For some of us a sense of despair arose in our hearts. We came to call upon God for mercy and forgiveness, but we did not gain peace in our souls at once.

But then *fourth*, after some time, shorter or longer with different persons, *the Lord revealed to us the way of peace through Jesus Christ*. Saving faith was born in the soul. The mercy and grace of God in Christ began to push away the doubts and fears of God's wrath. We saw through the gospel the satisfaction of God's justice toward guilty sinners in the death of His Son on Calvary. We came to see that our only hope was in what God does for us and in us, not what we could do for God. A measure of hope arose in us through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ as an atonement made to God for our sin. We wondered why we had never seen it and believed it before. The way of the gospel seemed now so simple and clear. We were no longer looking to ourselves and the guilt of our sin, but we came to focus and trust God for the full pardon of sin that is promised in Christ. Our fears dissipated. Peace was secured. We as believers came to rest and rejoice in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation from sin and for the gift of righteousness unto eternal life. We then anticipated receiving from God's merciful hand blessing and glory, as we looked unto Jesus and all that God promised us in Him. The pleasures of this life, the cares of the world, the former things to which we so devoted ourselves, no longer controlled us. They continued to plague us, but they no longer were masters of us. We had become numbered among the happy believers in Jesus Christ.

It seemed to us, having arrived to the place of blessedness, that we would continue to experience in increasing measure this state of joy and peace. We assumed, and perhaps were told by others, that once having entered into faith and now enjoying the fruit of God's grace in our soul, that we would experience unabated the presence and assurance that is in Christ. But this is not generally how the Lord deals with His people, *for this is when trials of faith enter our lives that we had not anticipated*.

Most of us would probably like to view ourselves as stable Christians. We walk with the Lord daily. But the truth of the matter is that most of us are not as stable as we ought to be. The Christian life is not

generally characterized by consistent communion with God and always living fully according to His Word. Decay and recovery, backsliding and renewal, commonly characterize the Christian life. Our hearts are easily hardened, and they often so become. An older writer, **Octavius Winslow**, wrote of our tendency toward backsliding:

If there is one consideration more humbling than another to a spiritually minded believer, it is, that after all God has done for him,--after all the rich displays of His grace, the patience and tenderness of His instructions, the repeated discipline of His covenant, the tokens of love received, and the lessons of experience learned, there should still exist in the heart a principle, the tendency of which is to secret, perpetual, and alarming departure from God. Truly, there is in this solemn fact, that which might well lead to the deepest self-abasement before Him.¹

We are prone to wander, but when we do, we then seek and, thankfully, receive restoration. God has placed in us a nature and has sensitized our conscience that makes us miserable when we sense we are not right with Him. Although we may think that we enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, we grow to long for the Lord's blessing to be renewed and experienced. Thankfully, God brings recovery to His own. He is the Restorer of souls. He comes to them in their sin, even though they have neglected Him or forsaken Him, and through His own power He secures their restoration.

The reason for trials in the purpose of God is to make His people holy before Him and fruitful for Him. Our Lord Jesus said it this way,

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (John 15:1-3)

Pruning needs to take place on all of God's branches. This work of God is sharp and severe. We are suddenly cut down significantly. A pruned vine is not a pretty sight, but it is one ready for fruit bearing. The fact is that the new believer, though fresh with knowledge and invigorated with zeal, has much about him that needs removed. He sees himself quite fit and full; after all, he loves the Lord. He is zealous for the things of Christ. He has come to love the things that God loves and to hate the things that God hates.

But herein lies the problem. Under the surface of his profession there lies deep corruption that perhaps only the Lord sees clearly. There exists a measure of *self-righteousness* and *spiritual pride* that resides in the new believer's heart. The immature believer sees himself quite advanced, but he does not see himself clearly. For even while he is rejoicing, or attempting to rejoice in that he knows and loves God, his life is a troubled one. For he continues to have problems and difficulties, even as he tries to walk in love before God. But in these early stages of walking with the Savior, he does not see that the problems and difficulties lie mainly in himself. To him, others are the cause of his difficulty and sometimes misery. All he wants to do, as he sees it, is to walk with Jesus simply and sincerely, but other people and other things will not allow him to do so. He becomes frustrated and impatient. Perhaps for a while he becomes discouraged and embittered with others about him. In reality his major problem is not with externals--people and events outside himself, but the problem is spiritual and resides in him. But he does not see it. Mixed with his faith is carnal presumption. Intermingled with his love, is a counterfeit and shallow sentimentality. He does not know himself. He thinks too highly of himself and too lowly of others. He is as proud Peter who says to his Lord, "I love You more than the others." Although he may try not to do so, and perhaps claim that he does not, he tends to look down on others about him. He believes that they do not have the same degree of knowledge or the same measure of love for Christ that he himself possesses. He is as Peter was, when Peter expressed his love for the Lord Jesus, "Although all others may forsake you, I will lay down my life for thy sake." In short, this believer has in the root of himself a self-righteousness, a sense of self-sufficiency, and a sense of self-worth that must be cut out of him as a vinedresser prunes the fruitless branches of his vines. These sinful delusions must be surgically cut out of his soul. The Great Physician has ordained trials as the

¹ Octavius Winslow, **Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul** (Banner of Truth, 1993, orig. 1861), p. 9,

instruments by which He performs spiritual surgery on His people. And this work of grace is displayed before us in His work of grace in Peter through this great trial of his faith.

John Newton (1725-1807) wrote a hymn of this common experience of the child of God when he encounters trials, even as he is seeking to know and to be obedient to Jesus Christ. The hymn is entitled, “**I Asked the Lord That I Might Grow.**” Here are the words:

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek, more earnestly, His face.

’Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer!
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour,
At once He’d answer my request;
And by His love’s constraining pow’r,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell

Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,
Wilt thou pursue Thy worm to death?
’Tis in this way, the Lord replied,
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,
From self, and pride, to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may’st find thy all in Me.

God’s sanctifying work of grace is evident in this account of Peter’s failure. As humbling and difficult as it was for him, the Lord used this event to teach and train Peter to become a fruitful servant in His kingdom.

As we consider more carefully the few verses before us, we may see the following major divisions:

1. Our Lord’s announcement to Peter (22:31)
2. Our Lord’s prayer for Peter (22:32)
3. Peter’s presumption before his Lord (22:33)
4. Our Lord’s pronouncement to Peter (22:34)

Let us consider each of these matters.

I. Our Lord’s announcement to Peter (22:31)

“*And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat’*” (22:31). Jesus saw the danger that was before Peter. And the Lord Jesus of course knows the dangers that lie before each of us. Sometimes those more mature than we are see the precipice before us long before we take the great fall. Satan was after Peter, but Peter had been unaware of the danger that was before him. From these words we could conclude a number of things and, I dare say, we could speculate on many more things, and I am tempted to do so, but time is a good restrainer. But we can make these few points.

First, we see that *satan had to ask permission from God to do harm to Peter*. Jesus had said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, satan has asked for you.” Satan is, and always has been, subject to God’s sovereign rule. God lets the devil have his way frequently so as to bring judgment on persons. At other times the Lord allows satan to afflict His people, in order to prove them and glorify Himself through them. Consider how God allowed the devil to afflict Job very severely. Satan had to gain God’s permission before he could attack Job (cf. Job 1). And here Jesus said to Peter that the devil “has asked for you.”

Second, we see that *our Lord Jesus, even while on earth, was aware of events occurring in heaven*. He knew of Satan's desires and designs. During the days of His flesh, the human nature of Jesus was localized in His physical body. He had a human soul and human body with all of its limitations. But in His incarnation, Jesus was also the eternal Son of God. In His divine nature, He had all the attributes of the Godhead, including His spiritual, eternal essence, His omnipotence (having infinite power), omniscience (knowing all things), and omnipresence (being everywhere in His fullness). Even while Jesus in His human nature was ministering on earth, "all the fullness of the Godhead" was in Him bodily, but His divine nature was omnipresent everywhere, including in heaven. It was said of Him, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man *who is in heaven*" (John 3:13).² Even when the Son of Man was living and ministering on earth, in His divine nature, He was in heaven, indeed throughout His creation in fullness.

Third, notice that *both the Lord and the devil are in the "sifting" business*. Jesus told Peter, "Satan wants to sift you as wheat." Here "wheat" is an emblem of faith. Satan wants to so blow the winds of adversity upon you that your faith will be blown away and only chaff remains. What Satan wanted Peter to do was to apostatize from Christ, to stop believing and to cease to follow Him as His Lord and Saviour. But notice that the Lord Jesus is also in the sifting business. But He uses the wind to blow the chaff away so only the pure grain of faith remains.

II. Our Lord's prayer for Peter (22:32)

After Jesus gave Peter His pronouncement, Jesus assures Peter that He had prayed for him.

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. *³²But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.*"

Here we see *the need for and the effectual nature of the prayer of Jesus for His own*. As the high priest on behalf of all of God's elect, Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for the saints, that is, all Christians. We read in Hebrews 7:25 these words, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." But we may be assured that Jesus also prays for all His elect who will yet become Christians. We read of His prayer on behalf of them (i.e. us) in His high priestly prayer of John 17:20f, which reads,

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those *who will believe in Me through their word* (i.e. the apostles' word); ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

What Jesus asks of the Father is always granted to Him. He prays that His disciples will be kept in the hour of trial, and that trial will not overthrow your faith, even though the devil in all his fury is vented against you. Christ prays for His own with effectual prayers. Our requests are not always granted to us. If we ask with wrong motives, if we have rebellion in our heart, if we pray for things not according to the will of God, our requests remain unanswered. But all of our Lord's prayers are effectual. Jesus said, "Satan wants you, Peter, but I have prayed for you." See how dependent we are upon our Lord Jesus. Forces all too subtle and powerful would ravage us if it were not for our Lord's intercession on our behalf as our high priest before the Father.

Jesus said that He prayed for Peter "*that your faith should not fail.*" The Lord is the one who enables us by His grace to first have faith in Him unto our salvation. And the Lord will see to it that the faith of His

² Granted, there is debate about the authenticity of the Greek words whether or not they were originally penned by John, but regardless, given the divine nature of the Son of God, the truth is that His divine nature was not confined or restricted to His human body. "It could be said that in His divine nature Christ continued to dwell "in heaven" even during His life on earth." R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson Pub., 1995), 1665.

in each of His people will continue to exist even unto their full and final salvation (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5). **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) wrote,

The continued existence of grace in a believer's heart is a great standing miracle. His enemies are so mighty, and his strength is so small, the world is so full of snares, and his heart is so weak, that it seems at first sight impossible for him to reach heaven. The passage before us explains his safety. He has a mighty Friend at the right hand of God, who ever lives to make intercession for him. There is a watchful Advocate, who is daily pleading for him, seeing all his daily necessities, and obtaining daily supplies of mercy and grace for his soul. His grace never altogether dies, because Christ always lives to intercede" (Heb. 7:25).³

We also understand through our Lord's words that *the Lord's prayer for Peter did not remove the trial or his failure; rather, it reversed the outcome of the trial so as to render spiritual benefit for Peter rather than harm*. There may be two people, one a Christian and one a non-Christian, who experience identical calamity, but one will be helped by it, the other may be destroyed by it, due to the sovereign work of God's grace in the matter. Being a Christian will not spare you from tragedy, but it does assure you that it will not destroy you, but rather produce that which is truly good and right.

But it is clear that *through the prayer of Jesus, the works of the devil are thwarted*. The Holy Scriptures teach the perseverance in faith and obedience of the true believer, for there is no salvation promised to one who does not persevere in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. This should be emphasized to drive home our responsibility to be watchful and to employ the means God has given us to stand. But this emphasis may result in a timid soul becoming fearful because he/she is so aware of weakness and sinfulness. But be assured of this: The Lord has prayed that your faith will not fail. It cannot be extinguished, for God is keeping You by His omnipotent power through faith. Peter later wrote of this assurance:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵*who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Saving faith is born and sustained by the grace of God. It is what comes forth from a renewed heart, one born again by the Holy Spirit. That principle of life is as a seed in the soul that cannot be extinguished, but it will endure and will bring forth fruit in the one truly regenerated by the Spirit of God. This is declared by John the Apostle in 1 John 3:9, which reads, "Whoever has been born of God does not (habitually) sin, *for His seed remains in him*; and he cannot (habitually) sin, because he has been born of God." **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote on this verse these words,

To be born of God is to be inwardly renewed, and restored to a holy integrity or rectitude of nature by the power of the Spirit of God. *Such a one committeth not sin*, does not work iniquity nor practice disobedience, which is contrary to his new nature and the regenerate complexion of his spirit; for, as the apostle adds, *his seed remaineth in him*, either the word of God in its light and power *remaineth in him* (as 1 Peter 1:23), *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*), or, *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*; the spiritual seminal principle of holiness remaineth in him. Renewing grace is an abiding principle. Religion, in the spring of it, is not an art, an acquired dexterity and skill, but a new nature. And thereupon the consequence is the regenerate person *cannot sin*. That he cannot commit an act of sin, I suppose no judicious interpreter understands. This would be contrary to chapter 1:9, where it is made our duty to confess our sins, and supposed that our privilege thereupon is to have our sins forgiven. *He therefore cannot sin*, in the sense in which the apostle says, *he cannot commit sin*. He cannot continue in the course and practice of sin. He

³ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on the Gospels; Luke, vol. 2** (Banner of Truth Trust, 1986, first pub. 1858), 411.

cannot so sin as to denominate him a sinner in opposition to a saint or servant of God. Again, he cannot sin comparatively, as he did before he was born of God, and as others do that are not so. And the reason is *because he is born of God*, which will amount to all this inhibition and impediment. 1. There is a light in his mind which shows him the evil and malignity of sin. 2. There is that bias upon his heart which disposes him to loathe and hate sin. 3. There is the spiritual seminal principle or disposition, that breaks the force and fulness of the sinful acts.

The same prayer that upheld Peter will uphold all true believers steadfast to the end. The grace of God will see us through trials which would destroy a person who lacks saving grace; but our Lord gives sufficient grace to all His own. Although Peter was in great danger due to Satan desiring to destroy his faith, because Jesus had prayed for Peter, Satan's ability to destroy him was rendered ineffectual. Satan's work to destroy Peter turned out for the benefit of Peter and brought about indirectly the great ministry that characterized the Apostle Peter.

Jesus gave Peter a word of instruction: "*and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.*"

The charge He gives to Peter to help others as he should himself be helped of God: "*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren; when thou art recovered by the grace of God, and brought to repentance, do what thou canst to recover others; when thou hast found they faith kept from failing, labour to confirm the faith of others, and to establish them; when thou hast found mercy with God thyself, encourage others to hope that they also shall find mercy.*" (Matthew Henry)

III. Peter's presumption before his Lord (22:33)

We might think that Peter might have been very appreciative for the concern and protection that Jesus had secured for him. But his response to Jesus indicated that Peter did not think he needed the Lord's help in these matters. We read Peter's words to Jesus, "*Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.*"

This was a sincere desire and intention of Peter, as "all the true disciples of Christ sincerely desire and design to *follow Him, whithersoever He goes*, and whithersoever He leads them, though into a prison, though out of the world." But though Peter had the desire and the resolve, he had not the ability to carry through with his intentions. And so, this was not a true statement of faith by Peter, but it was a betrayal of his pride and self-confidence, of his error and ignorance, of his presumption, not faith. It was a foolishness. Peter was sincere, but all too secure in the estimation of himself. He had too high a view of himself. He had too little a view of Satan. He had too low a view of Christ. Peter said in effect, "Though prison threaten me, though death stares me in the face, Lord, I, even I, will stand with you." And in a few hours it would not be a rack or a point of a sword that would shrivel his valor, but the flippant tongue of a young maid.

Peter was proud, confident of his faith and love toward Jesus. He believed that he was more spiritual and courageous than any others who followed the Savior. But "He who thinks himself so much stronger than his brethren, is the very man who will prove to be weaker than any of them" (Spurgeon).⁴ His pride preceded his fall. He should have remembered the words of Scripture:

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Prov. 16:18)

"Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." (Prov. 26:12)

The trial would come from Satan, but the spiritual benefit or fruit that would from it would be due to the intercession and authority of Jesus Christ. Only after Peter experienced this great trial of faith, was he truly ready for spiritual leadership among the people of God. Only after this personal failure through which he became a humble man, did the grace of God enable him to become a pillar in Christ's church.

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, **Spurgeon's Popular Exposition of Matthew** (Zondervan, 1962), 236.

Luke 22:33 must be one of the all-time gaffs, one of those things we replay in our minds and blush at the remembrance: “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.” But he learned a valuable lesson here in the nature of faith:

***Faith is not presumption that I am able to stand,
But rather confidence that He is able to keep me.”***

In this event in Peter’s life we have a wonderful illustration of divine provision even in the midst of human ignorance and folly. The only reason Peter would not be sifted is due to the grace of God, but he thought himself all sufficient in and of himself to withstand any trial. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:12: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he stands take heed lest he fall.”

But in this event, we see ***the preparation of Peter for future service***. “Jesus said to him, when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (22:32b). If only we would learn through instruction! If only we would simply read the Word of God and apply it in a diligent manner we would save ourselves a whole lot of grief! But Peter would not take to heart the instruction until it was driven home to his heart through ***experience***. This event cured Peter of his presumption. Never again would he be known as the boastful, patronizing disciple, for he was cut down that night. And as a result he became a qualified leader of the people of God. He was made like unto a rock, a pillar, even the foundation, on which the church could rest.

And notice, here Jesus did not call him “Peter”, the rock, but “Simon, Simon”, as he was before Jesus had called to him saying, “Follow Me.”

And by calling him “Simon” instead of “Peter”, Jesus reminds him of his human weakness—he is, as regards his own powers, not “Peter”, “the rock”, but a mere helpless human being.⁵

Only after his own failure and our Lord’s restoration of him would Peter then become capable of “strengthening of the brethren.” Thereafter, when believers became arrogant and self-sufficient, Peter would warn them, “be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). When believers would become careless in their walk, unwatchful respecting satan they could see his words: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). When believers were later shaken from their steadfastness, they could read in his writings, “But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet. 5:10). Peter was writing in wisdom born from personal experience and failure in these matters. And in so writing, Peter strengthened and has strengthened many brothers and sisters in Christ over these many centuries.

And so, how does our Lord Jesus deal with His people? As the Great Vinedresser, with pruning hook in hand, He cuts the believer down severely. As a result, that which is false, that which is fleshly, is removed, so that which is true and truly valuable will increase. During this time of trial, which may be rather prolonged in duration, the believer may sense a withdrawal of God’s light and life. The things that before stirred him, do so no longer. What he thought was love for Christ wanes. The presence of Christ is no longer sensed as before. Rather, there increasingly arises in the wayward soul the awareness that something is wrong, desperately wrong. And it is not the wrong of others around us, but something about ourselves. We become keenly aware of the superficiality of our love, the shallowness of our understanding, the weakness of our praying. God no longer seems to be bestowing desire and strength as before. The soul may begin to feel abandoned. The believer sees his heart as cold and hard toward the things of Christ and His people. Interest in the Word of God is not as it once was. The power of the Word to convict of sin is no longer. Doubts as to one’s own spiritual state and standing enter the mind and heart. It now seems to him that perhaps his former joys and wonders were delusions.

As a result of trials, the believer begins to see that whereas before he thought himself quite advanced in his walk with Christ, he now sees how little distance he has transversed in his spiritual journey and he now sees clearly how far he has yet to travel. Before he was concerned about ***acts of sin***, but now he sees the

⁵ Norval Geldenhuys, **Commentary on the Gospel of Luke** (Eerdmans, 1983), 566.

problem to be much deeper. It is *indwelling sin* that plagues his conscience, for he now knows how weak his nature is and how easy and soon is his potential fall. The believer who is in trial now sees more clearly his need for Christ. He needs not only forgiveness, but he longs for deliverance.

But what he does not see, is that through the trial God has done a work of grace in him. He truly is a humble man now, though he probably would not describe himself as such. Pride is no longer; rather, there is a self-loathing, for he feels his failure keenly. He esteems others better than himself. There is a sense of weakness, even helplessness; in short, he sees his need for Christ as he never had before.

And so, now due to having experienced this terrible trial, he truly sees Christ in His glory. One once described the tried believer in this way:

Independence has been broken in pieces, and the soul brought to hang upon Christ for everything; pride has been cut down, and humility produced; a deceitful heart has been laid bare, and spiritual integrity created; hypocrisy has been detected and sincerity implanted; a form of religion has been crushed, and power set up in its stead; and empty profession of dry doctrine has been rooted up, and a realization of eternal things has been substituted...

The Christian thus learns that if he stands, God must hold him up; if he knows anything aright, God must teach him; if he walks in the way of heaven, God must first put, and afterwards keep him in it; if he has anything, God must give it to him; and that if he does anything, God must work it in him... He can no longer take a killing letter for a living rule, but is deeply conscious that it is only by being "married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that he can bring forth fruit unto God..."

While others boast of what they have done for God, he is glad that God has done something for him; while others are handling the shell, he is eating the kernel; while others are talking *of* Christ, he is talking with Him... While others are haranguing about the treasure of the Bank of England, he is pleased to find a few coins in his own pocket, stamped with the king's image and superscription...

Through the inward conflicts, secret workings, mysterious changes, and ever-varying exercises of his soul, he becomes *established* in a deep feeling of his own folly and God's wisdom, and his own weakness and Christ's strength, of his own sinfulness and the Lord's goodness, of his own backslidings and the Spirit's recoveries, of his own base ingratitude and Jehovah's longsuffering, of the aboundings of sin and the superaboundings of grace. He thus becomes daily more and more confirmed in the vanity of the creature, the utter helplessness of man, the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of the human heart, the sovereignty of distinguishing grace, the fewness of heaven-taught ministers, the scanty numbers of living souls, and the great rareness of true religion. Nor are these convictions borrowed ideas, floating opinions, crude, half-digested sentiments or articles of a creed, which may be right or may be wrong; but they are things known by him as certainly, and felt as evidently as any material object that his eye see, of his hand touches. (J. C. Philpot)

But the final outcome and outworking of the believers' trials is this, *they come to love the Lord Jesus sincerely and fervently*. This is what Peter declared in 1 Peter 1:8.

IV. Our Lord's pronouncement to Peter (22:34)

Peter was in no way to take to heart the Lord's words of warning to him. To end this verbal exchange our Lord made one final declaration. **Verse 34** reads, "***Then He said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.'***" Oh Peter, you should have known that your Master speaks only what is true and relates only that which will most certainly come to pass! These words will be pressed upon his heart heavily just a short while after Jesus made this statement. When Peter denied the Lord three times, he heard the rooster crow. Later in this chapter Luke recorded the event.

Immediately, while he was still speaking (his denial), the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ⁶²So Peter went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:160-62)

All of the disciples departed from the Lord that night. Let us not be as those who *backslide* from their profession. Perhaps at one time you were very tenderhearted before the Lord. But through your own neglect and failure, you did not attend to the well-being of your souls. You increasingly and more frequently transgressed God's Word, in violation of your former confession that you would abstain from sin and live for Him, and you sinned against their conscience. Perhaps you have allowed your heart to grown indifferent and then hardened toward God and God's people. It would be right and best to humble yourself before the Lord, to get alone with Him and pour out your heart to Him, confessing your sin and trusting Him to renew your spirit. Be like King David who knew what it was to stray and fall, but thankfully he knew also what it was to be restored. He caused his bitter experience to be made into a psalm, a song, giving glory to God.

Psalm 51

To the Chief Musician.

**A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him,
after he had gone in to Bathsheba.**

Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

³For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.

⁴Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just ^[a]when You speak,
And blameless when You judge.

⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

⁶Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.

⁹Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,

The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

¹⁶For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

¹⁸Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.
