

Summer Sermon Series: It's Worth Repeating

“Simon, Simon”

(Luke 22:31-34)

Introduction

➤ This summer, we have been studying repeated words in Scripture (there are only about fifteen of them in all of Scripture, not counting the twenty-five “Truly, truly” statements from Jesus recorded in John’s Gospel). This was used for emphasis (not too unlike our underlining words or putting words in all caps). Sometimes it was used to express sincerity or earnestness. Sometimes it was used to convey importance or seriousness. Sometimes it was used to warn or admonish.

This morning, we are going to look at the occasion when Jesus gave Peter a sobering insight into the spiritual battle he was about to face.

Luke 22:31-34 ~ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.’ ³³Peter said to him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.’ ³⁴Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.’”

➤ The context of this passage is the “upper room” discourse (see Lk.22:12), where Jesus taught His apostles just hours before Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. It was there that Jesus washed the apostles’ feet, instituted the Lord’s Supper, and taught them many things. Jesus was preparing them for His death and warning them of the trials and temptations that would come as He was arrested, tried, tortured, and eventually crucified.

In the midst of His teaching, Jesus dropped a “bombshell” on the disciples by saying that one of them would betray Him. This pierced every one of them to the heart (with the possible exception of Judas).

Luke 22:21-22 ~ “But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²²For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!”

Matt 26:20-25 ~ “When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹And as they were eating, he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ ²²And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I, Lord?’ ²³He answered, ‘He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’ ²⁵Judas, who would betray him, answered, ‘Is it I, Rabbi?’ He said to him, ‘You have said so.’” (see Mk.14:17-21)

Strangely enough, and yet also not surprising, the disciples would later argue over which one of them was the greatest.

Luke 22:23-24 ~ “And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. ²⁴A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.”

➤ As we can see, the apostles are a mess – emotionally distraught, physically exhausted, mentally frazzled, and spiritually frail. At this point, they have spent three years with Jesus – hearing Him teach and preach, having a front-row seat to His countless miracles, seeing Him loved by some and hated by others. They knew that tensions were mounting as the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead, and had already tried to kill Him many times (but He evaded their attacks and schemes because it was not His time).

➤ Now, as we turn to Luke 22:31-34 (these verses unique to Luke's Gospel), Jesus telling the apostles, specifically Peter, that Satan is on the prowl and desires to devour them (1Pet.5:8). This news, of course, was hard for them to hear, but a necessary warning that they needed to heed. The same is true for us today. May this passage serve as a warning to us that we not be ignorant of, or indifferent to, the devil's schemes (see 2Cor.2:11; Eph.4:14; 6:11). We can divide this passage with five distinct headings, each revealing an important aspect of this narrative and important teaching for us to understand.

1. Jesus' exhortation (vs.31a)

➤ Right away, we can notice something interesting about Jesus' use of repetition here. In speaking to Peter, Jesus used the name Simon: "*Simon, Simon*" (vs.31a). "Simon" (*Simōn*) was Peter's given name (see Matt.4:18; 10:2), his full name being "Simon Bar Jonah" or "Simon son of John" [or Jonah] (cf. Jn.1:42; 21:15, 17). The name Simon is from Hebrew origin and means "hearing" or "hearer."

Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter (Jn.1:42). Peter is a Greek word (*Petros*) which means rock or stone ("Cephas" is Aramaic for rock) – a rock that is larger than a "stone" (*lithos*) but smaller than a large immovable rock (*petra*). *Petros* is a piece of (from) a large rock, boulder, or cliff, and *petra* is a rock, boulder or cliff.

Matt 16:15-18 ~ "[Jesus] said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter [*petros*], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"

Hidden in the Greek text, verse eighteen, is an important play-on-words. (vs.18). The word "*Peter*" (*petros*) refers to "a movable rock/stone" and the word "*rock*" (*petra*) is from the word for "an immovable rock." Jesus was not referring to Peter, or even to the apostles in general, but to the truth Peter had just declared: that Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matt.16:16). The true church is built on the massive, immovable, indestructible truth that Jesus is the Christ [i.e., Messiah], the Son of the living God.

➤ Jesus often called Peter by his given name ("Simon") when He needed to get Peter's attention (sometimes similar to my mom calling me "David Michael Woodruff!"). Sometimes it seems that Jesus used Peter's old name when Peter was acting like his old self (see Mk.14:37; Jn.21:15, 16, 17).

Here, in Luke 22:31 (the only recorded instance of this happening), Jesus used Peter's old name in repetition! But that was not all Jesus did to get Peter's attention. Jesus said, "*Simon, Simon, behold*" (vs.31). The Greek word translated "*behold*" (*idou*) is an interjection that can mean "pay attention!", or "look!", or "listen!"

Jesus not only called Peter by his old name, and used that name in repetition, He followed that immediately with an exclamation. These three words would have been an intense wake-up call for Peter. And we'll see why.

2. Satan's aspiration (vs.31b)

➤ What Jesus told Peter was ominously terrifying: "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat*" (vs.31). Loose translation: Satan was to disintegrate (disassemble, dismantle) your spiritual life!" The sifting metaphor is a powerful imagery. For the process of sifting wheat involved separating the wheat from the chaff by beating or rolling over the wheat. The devil wanted to thoroughly test/try Simon. Satan wanted to thresh – or, to put it in our contemporary vernacular, "thrash" – Peter's faith and life. Satan had asked Jesus if he could take apart, dismantle, the apostles' faith – and Jesus did not say "no." Jesus forewarned Peter, and all the apostles, that they would be relentlessly and ruthlessly attacked by the devil.

➤ But it was not just Peter that Satan was after. Satan was after all the apostles:

Luke 22:31 ~ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [2nd, per. pl.], that he might sift you [2nd, per. pl.] like wheat”

➤ Unlike Judas (Lk.22:3), Peter was a true believer and so Satan could not possess him. But Satan could certainly attack, deceive, and oppress him. To be sure, Satan cannot control or command the will of God. God is sovereign, Satan is not; God is Creator, Satan is creation; God is deity, Satan is an angel; God is the judge, and Satan will be judged. In saying that Satan “*demanded*” (*exaiteō*; aor., mid., ind.) Jesus was simply telling Peter of Satan’s desires and plans. Notice that Satan is subservient to God, and his will is subject to the will of God.

Job 1:6-12 ~ “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. ⁷The Lord said to Satan, ‘From where have you come?’ Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.’ ⁸And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?’ ⁹Then Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘Does Job fear God for no reason?’ ¹⁰Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.’ ¹²And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.’ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.”

➤ Although there is great mystery in this, we know that Satan can do nothing that God does not allow him to do. Satan is a defeated foe; his end will come at the hand of God, according to the sovereign will of God, and for all eternity (see Jn.16:11; 1Jn.3:8; Rev.12:12; 20:1-3, 7-10). Essentially, Satan had to ask God for permission to thrash the apostles. And, though always under the sovereign authority of God, God gave Him permission.

3. Jesus’ intercession (vs.32)

➤ Notice that Jesus did not tell Peter that He told Satan, “No”: “*but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*” (Lk.22:32). Rather than assure Peter that Satan would not (or could not) touch them, Jesus assured him that He – Jesus – was praying for them. In fact, technically, Jesus told Peter that “*I have prayed for you*” (vs.32; aor., pass., ind.). This Jesus said specifically to Peter [all four “you” pronouns, in verse 32, are 2nd person singular]:

Luke 22:32 ~ “but I have prayed for you [2nd, per. sg.] that your [2nd, per. sg.] faith may not fail. And when you [2nd, per. sg.] have turned again, strengthen your [2nd, per. sg.] brothers.”

➤ Of course, this does not mean that Jesus was not praying for the other apostles, but that Jesus was specifically talking to Peter about Peter. Notice what Jesus was praying for: 1) Peter’s perseverance (“*that your faith may not fail*”), 2] Peter’s repentance (“*when you have turned again*”), and 3] Peter’s future ministry (“*strengthen your brothers*”).

John 21:15-17 ~ “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed [*boskō*] my lambs.’ ¹⁶He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend [*poimainō*] my sheep.’ ¹⁷He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed [*boskō*] my sheep.’”

➤ This is exactly what Peter did. After the Day of Pentecost, Peter became a faithful spiritual leader in the Christian community in Jerusalem. The apostle Peter stumbled in his Christian walk, but he never renounced or abandoned his faith in Christ. Scripture and history record that Peter was a faithful follower of Jesus Christ – an influential leader in the Christian church in Jerusalem, and faithful preacher of the Gospel – to the end of his life. He was arrested, beaten, and eventually martyred for his Christian faith, and did not shrink back from his faith in Jesus Christ.

✓ Illust: According to Christian tradition, Peter was crucified in Rome under Emperor Nero Augustus Caesar. These reports indicate that Peter died a particularly cruel martyrdom. Before he himself was crucified, he is said to have been forced to witness the crucifixion of his wife. In his Ecclesiastical History, the early church Father Eusebius writes that Peter stood at the foot of his wife's cross and kept repeating to her in encouraging and comforting tones, "Remember the Lord. Remember the Lord." After she died, it is said he pleaded to be crucified upside down, because he felt he was unworthy to die as his Lord had died – his executioners obliged him.

➤ Jesus was interceding for him, and the other apostles, in prayer. The same is true for Christians today. We know that Jesus ascended into heaven, forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). We know that He ascended to the right hand of the throne of God (Rom.8:34; Heb.1:3; 1Pet.3:22). We know that Jesus is glorified and enthroned in heaven "*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come*" (Eph.1:21; cf. Acts 2:32-35; Phil.2:9-11; Heb.1:4). We know that He will one day return, at His Second Coming, to eternally receive all true believers and judge all unbelievers (1Cor.15:51-53; 1Thess.4:13-17; 2Thess.1:7-9; Rev.20:1-7).

But what is Jesus doing now? What has Jesus been doing since His ascension? Fortunately, we are not left guessing or speculating. In God's Word we read these important and encouraging words:

Heb 4:14-16 ~ "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Heb 7:23-25 ~ "The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵Consequently, 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."

1 John 2:1 ~ "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

1 Tim 2:5 ~ "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"

Rev 12:10 ~ "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.'"

➤ Right now, Jesus is up in heaven – enthroned at the right hand of God – praying (interceding) for all His disciples. As a Christian, you can be assured that Jesus is praying for you. But this ministry did not begin after Christ's ascension into heaven. Even while He walked on the earth, Jesus was praying for His disciples. In His High Priestly Prayer, we find specific details as to what Jesus prayed when He prayed for His chosen apostles (see Jn.17).

➤ As a Christian, you can be assured of this: Jesus – the one and only Son of God, the one and only Messiah and Savior from God, the sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords – is right now praying for your perseverance in Him. He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God praying that your faith

will not ultimately fail. And know this to be true: Christ's prayer is always in the will of God, and will always be answered in the affirmative by God. Those who are truly in Christ, though they may stumble and fall (Jms.3:2), will persevere to the end.

John 6:39 ~ "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

John 10:27-30 ~ "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."

John 17:12 ~ "While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

The apostle Paul resounded this same truth:

Rom 8:34-39 ~ "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. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Phil 1:6 ~ "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Likewise, Jude (the brother of James, and half-brother of Jesus) wrote this divinely inspired doxology:

Jude 24-25 ~ "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

➤ Christian, be assured, be encouraged, to know that Jesus Christ is crucified, buried, risen and ascended; that He is right now seated, in sovereign authority and power, at the right hand of God; that He lives to make intercession for you; that He is your divine advocate to the Father; that He is praying for you, that your faith will not ultimately fail; that He is indeed coming again!

4. Peter's declaration (vs.33)

➤ Upon Peter heard that Satan would attack him, Peter assured Jesus that he was ready for it: "*Peter said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death'*" (vs.33). This declaration is not surprising coming from Peter. For he often made great boasts of his faithfulness and resolve. But this was not necessarily empty talk. Peter seemed to truly think that he was willing to die for Christ if need be.

Notice the phrase "*with you*" (vs.33). Peter believed as long as Jesus was right there with Him, physically standing alongside him, he would live and die for Jesus. Peter knew that Jesus could raise the dead, heal the sick, calm the storm, and cast out demons, and he believed that with Christ by his side he could do anything.

Luke 22:47-51 ~ “While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?’ ⁴⁹And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, ‘Lord, shall we strike with the sword?’ ⁵⁰And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him.”

Matt 26:47-51 ~ “While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.’ ⁴⁹And he came up to Jesus at once and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ And he kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, do what you came to do.’ Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.” (see Mk.14:43-50)

John 18:3-10 ~ “So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ... ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)”

➤ But Peter was not alone in thinking that he was ready and willing to be persecuted and even martyred for Christ.

John 11:16 ~ “So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’”

➤ In fact, on the same night that Jesus told Peter that Satan wanted to sift all the apostles as wheat, all the apostles declared their unwavering allegiance to Jesus:

Matt 26:30-31 ~ “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” [cf. Zech.13:7]

➤ Peter, and the rest of the apostles, could not believe that Jesus would say such a thing. They could not imagine ever denying or forsaking Him as their Lord and Savior:

Matt 26:33-35 ~ “Peter answered him, ‘Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.’ ³⁴Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny [aparneomai; to deny utterly] me three times.’ ³⁵Peter said to him, ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny [aparneomai] you!’ And all the disciples said the same.”

➤ What Peter, and the other apostles, were not prepared for (although they should have been because Jesus forewarned them) is life without the physical presence of Jesus Christ. Their faith was not strong enough to withstand Satan’s attack alone. When Jesus was not physically present with them, they all quickly saw that their faith was terribly fickle and fragile. They overestimated the strength of their faith/faithfulness, and underestimated the power of Satan’s attacks.

5. Jesus’ revelation (vs.34)

➤ Jesus’ response must have stunned Peter: *“Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me’”* (vs.34). How devastating! Peter had just boldly professed his unwavering devotion, his willingness to go to prison or to death for Jesus, and Jesus told him that his resolve would not even last the night. “Before the rooster crows at dawn, you will have already denied me three times.”

More specifically, however, we learn that the rooster would typically crow many times, beginning hours before dawn. Scholars indicate that, according to the ancient Jewish method of timekeeping (which divided the night, 6:00pm-6:00am, into four three-hour sections, or “watches”). The rooster began to crow during the third watch of the night (midnight-3am; see Mk.13:35).

The Gospel of Mark specified that Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him “*before the rooster crows twice*” (Mk.14:30, 72), which would indicate that Peter denied Christ three times before 3:00am – just hours after adamantly declaring he would never deny Christ.

➤ Of course, Jesus was right. When Jesus was arrested, Peter and the rest of the apostles all fled to avoid being imprisoned and/or killed.

Luke 22:54-62 ~ “Then they seized [Jesus] and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, ‘This man also was with him.’ ⁵⁷But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ ⁵⁸And a little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’ ⁵⁹And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’ ⁶⁰But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And 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.’ ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Matt 26:69-75 ~ “Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, ‘You also were with Jesus the Galilean.’ ⁷⁰But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you mean.’ ⁷¹And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, ‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ ⁷²And again he denied it with an oath: ‘I do not know the man.’ ⁷³After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ ⁷⁴Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know the man.’ And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

➤ The apostles had been with Jesus for three years, and during that time they had witnessed numerous miracles from Christ and heard countless hours of Christ’s teaching. In many ways, although their faith was often small and weak, they had often proven to be courageous and loyal. The truth is, the apostles did not know how frail their faith really was, nor did they understand the true strength of fear and temptation. In their own ways, each one would “fall away” from Christ when He was arrested.

Conclusion

➤ This passage ought to serve as a humbling and sobering lesson for us, that we not too quickly or lightly think that we are resolute in our faith. We must be vigilant in our pursuit of Christ, resolutely abiding in Him and depending on the Holy Spirit, in order to stand against the attacks of the devil. Satan loves to prey on sheep that wander away from the fold, away from the Shepherd.

➤ As Christians, may we never think we can live the Christian life apart from Christ. May we never think our faith is impervious to temptation and trials. May we never become lax in our devotion to Him, or complacent in our need for Him. May we never think of ourselves too highly, or think of God’s power as too small. May we never think that we are alone; never think that there is no hope; never think that God is unable or unwilling to help, never think that He has forgotten or forsaken us.

May we never forget that Christ is praying for us, and enabling us to persevere in Him!