

Continuing in our journey through Lent, we are following a 5-step process of our text. Step One: Now that we have prayed and read our passage, we want to discern what questions are being asked of Jesus. In Luke 22, we do not read a direct question, but hear Jesus' comments about a previous demand. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat" implies that we get a glimpse of what is happening in the spiritual realm. Ephesians 6 tells us that there are cosmic powers of spiritual forces of evil that are in a battle with God in the heavenly places, and the book of Job chapter 1 tells us that Satan has had discussions with the Lord Almighty like this before. We don't read the exact words, but the demand was declared, "I want 'em. I want to sift 'em like wheat!"

For many of us, the production of agriculture is a distant experience, something told to us by our grandparent's generation. But for Jesus' contemporaries, the process of harvesting a crop was deeply personal every day. Life revolved and depended upon those precious kernels of grain, and to harvest wheat was grueling work. The wheat was cut by hand with a sickle and bundled into sheaves until the field was cleared. The sheaves would be brought to the threshing floor, where a large flat circle made of stone would have a pole erected in the center. The farmer would harness 4-5 donkeys or mules tied shoulder to shoulder in succession to the pole. The sheaves would be thrown onto the threshing floor and the farmer would drive the mules around and around in a circle. Around the pole again and again, the wheat was trampled so that the grip of the chaff would break loose from the grain. This threshing happens first and then the chaff can be further sifted. When Satan uses the pleasant word "sift," he is summarizing this trampling, pummeling, thrashing, beat down, sifting of the precious kernels of wheat.

The second step in our Lenten process is to consider who is asking. In our text, it appears Satan is demanding more than asking. Let consider more what this demanding looks like. The ESV reads, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat." When Satan demanded, did God have to comply? Demand is a thunderous earth-shaking sort of word, but is it a heaven-shaking word? How forceful is Satan's demand? It brings us to one of the greatest questions man has grappled with since the fall: why is there evil in this world?

Let me begin answering this question by helping us understand the nuance of the verb that the translators rendered "demand." The Greek word has a range of meaning: from a simple ask, to petitioning, to asking in a begging manor, all the way to what we find here in Luke 22 - it is a forceful asking that results in success. The NASB translates it as, "Satan has demanded permission." The NIV translates it simply as, "Satan has asked to sift you." The difference

translations overlap, but the ESV shows the intensity of Satan's question. Satan is demanding permission.

What we need to know this morning of these translations is this: "Satan might be asking in a demanding way, but he still has to ask!" In my house, this type of asking can look like a pre-teen or teenager demanding to have more screen time right before bedtime. Their demand might be forcefully levied with, "I did my chores for the day, I've earned the extra screen time, it's mine, and I want it now!" Yet no matter how forcefully they huff, puff and demand, they must inevitably come to realize that their mother and I are sovereign over the house. We are sovereign over the ipads and the video games. We sovereignly determine the allotments of screen time and the times of screen times; they are all ultimately sanctioned by us. In the same way, Satan might be demanding of the Lord, "I want 'em. I want to sift 'em like wheat!" But, he still has to ask for permission from the Lord Almighty.

Today, if you are in a season where it feels like you are being thrashed on the threshing floor, being pummeled by the hooves of tribulation, you might not care how Satan stomped his foot to get permission to break you a part. Nothing in you might care what is going on in the heavenly realms, you just want to pain to stop. You don't want to grow from the pain you're in, you don't want to wait for delivery that you might praise God, you don't want the benefit of long-suffering or the blessing of patience - you just want the thrashing to stop. Do not loose faith my dear friends, God is not the author of evil. Satan is the one doing the demanding, thus bringing your pain. God remains perfectly loving. Even though evil is allowed to devour, again and again the Scriptures tell us, God is not detached. He isn't caught unaware. He can never be coerced. If you are being thrashed right now, it is because God has sovereignly granted permission to a subordinate adversary.

Now some might say, "If God allows evil, isn't *he still the author* of evil since he is ultimately in charge?" Friends, our society tends to think of God as a doting benevolent grandfather in the sky who is always seeking to appease the desires of his pre-adolescent children; and ultimately, this soft grandfather just wants our happiness. Our view of God has to be much bigger than that. The God of the Bible sovereignly grants permission for the threshing; He grants permission for the pain. He allowed even his own son to be thrashed on the cross. Our view of God needs to know He is loving and good, even when he allows his children to go through incalculable pain.

The third question we are asking every week of the text is, "What is the question within the question?" Satan wanted permission to thresh and sift Simon like wheat, but he didn't have just Simon in mind. When we read in the ESV text, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like

wheat,” we have to realize that the “you” in this verse is not the singular “you.” It is the plural form of you. Satan’s demanding request wasn’t for Simon only. Jesus is informing him, “Simon, Satan is wanting to sift all of you like wheat.” You can imagine Jesus’ eyes staring deep into Simon’s, looking at him and past him to all of the disciples in the upper room that night before his betrayal. The question within the question is Satan demanding: “I want *all of them!*”

Satan wanted to thresh and thrash the disciples to death. He wanted to cause them to turn from Christ, to take them out of the running to the point that Jesus would be so disillusioned that He himself might turn from doing his Father’s will. But now we get to see Jesus’ response.

Though Satan demands to take out the disciples, Jesus tells Simon, “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” If Jesus had been looking into my eyes, I would want him to tell me, “Darin, Satan has demanded to have you, but I have put an end to him. He became too big for his britches, and I banished him to hell for forever. He has no more power granted on this earth; the threshing will stop, your pain will stop.” If I was in charge, that’s what I think would be good. But Jesus tells Simon that he has prayed that his faith may not fail.

When sheaves of grain are gathered during the harvest, the kernel of wheat is present, yet it’s still trapped within the chaff. The breaking and death of the chaff brings forth the life of the kernel. The suffering of pain brings forth life!

By coming to the end of yourself and finding that your faith has held, you discover the beauty of knowing that Christ is your greatest treasure. In the last few weeks, a recently widowed saint in our church told me, “Darin, it’s so hard. I miss my husband so much.” Another dear mother in our church told me, “I have no idea where my son is. His addictions have taken him to the street and I have no way of knowing if he’s dead or alive.” Another member of our church told me, “I have left my spouse and have taken the kids. I thought the problems of our marriage were all my spouse’s fault, but now I realize it was me as well. I want the marriage restored, but my spouse says it’s too late.”

When you told me the pain you were going through, I gave council. I sought to give you encouragement. I prayed for you. James chapter 5 tells us that the prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective. I trust my prayers were at least somewhat effective, but I want you to know that Jesus himself prays for you. He is interceding right now for you before His heavenly Father and he is a perfectly righteous man. No matter if your pain has been inflicted upon you by another, or you have brought the pain upon yourself; Jesus prays for you. You might feel like you have given up hope, that you have lost your faith, but it is not your burden to persevere. Christ has persevered on your behalf; He has been faithful to the end. If you have ever had saving faith in Him, He will keep your faith firm until you are resurrected in glory. It is most often through the crucible of pain that the preciousness of our faith is sifted and purified.

Jesus kept Peter’s faith from failing all the way to the end. Listen to these words Peter wrote in his first epistle, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those

who are elect exiles of the Dispersion...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.... 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.” Brothers and sisters, as God allows the breaking of chaff from your life, He will keep your faith from failing that kernels of life might come forth. So as you pray for each other, pray that wayward children will return home, pray that hard hearts in marriage will soften, but pray along with Jesus that our faith will be purified. Precious life comes from kernels of faith.

Not only does Jesus’ response give Simon hope that his faith will ultimately persevere, Jesus’ response also lives in the reality of today. He tells Simon, “*When you have turned again.*” He’s telling Simon: you are going to turn away from me. Simon, still full of himself, full of his own bravado and self-sufficiency, tells him, “No way Jesus! I’m ready to die for you.” But Jesus gives him hope, while still living in reality. He looks him straight in the eye, “I tell you, [Peter],.....you will turn...but when you have turned [*back to me*] again, strengthen your brothers.”

Simon Bar Jonah was his name from birth. For most of his life, he was known as Simon-Son of Jonah. But Jesus reminds him of the nickname he has given him. Simon, you will be called Peter - you will be called Rock. Embracing the reality of Peter’s forthcoming failure, Jesus is already calling forth the life of the kernel from Peter’s broken chaff. The threshing of the rooster crowing will do it’s work in Peter’s life. Peter, the impetuous and rash leader that he was, sinking outside of the boat after walking, suggesting three tabernacles to honor Moses, Elijah, and Jesus....and even more intense than the “slap heard around the world,” from whacking off the ear of the servant of the high-priest, Peter goes on to become the leader of the 1st century church.

- On the day of Pentecost, Peter was the main speaker to the crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14ff), and the Church began with an influx of about 3,000 new believers (verse 41).
- Later, Peter healed a lame beggar (Acts 3) and preached boldly before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4).
- Even arrest, beatings, and threats could not dampen Peter’s resolve to preach the risen Christ (Acts 5).
- Peter was present when the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8).
- Finally, he was summoned to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, who also believed and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10).
- Through all of these things, Peter “unlocked” three different worlds, opening the door of the Church to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles.

If right now you’re so mired in pain that you’re not even able to notice your

brothers, know that Jesus' command to turn and strengthen your brothers is not performance based. He is tender and will give you time to heal. You will see that the "turning" and "strengthening" will not have to be mustered by your pulling up your own bootstraps. When the chaff is sifted away, the kernel will naturally bring forth life. You will be an encouragement and strength to your brothers simply by Christ abiding in you. Last week in church I sat in the middle of the sanctuary. I watched a couple in their 70's snuggle up to each other while Gerrit preached, and they held hands while standing and singing the hymns. Do you know that couple used to be so strapped with the demands of a successful practice that they barely had time for each other? Their marriage was strained during so many of those previous years.

I saw another couple with grey hair smile so tenderly to each other; do you know their marriage was in shambles not too many years ago because of addiction to alcohol. Do you know what you did for my heart, for my marriage, as I stood there watching you? You had no idea I was looking at you; but you strengthened me as your brother. You strengthened my resolve to love my wife as Christ loves the church.

My sweet sister-in- Christ that shared about how your faith is now on fire for the Lord because your children's faith spurred you during their health crises. Do you know my brother-in-law has been in the hospital for the last 4 days? You are strengthening me that my faith may not fail!

In Closing:

Let me wrap up with the words of one who was strengthened first hand by Peter.

The

Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Cor 4:13-15

"Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence..... so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God."

God has given you the church. You are not meant to go through this threshing world alone. Strengthen your brothers that kernels of faith might bring forth life!