



## “The Sifting” – Luke 22:31-38

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wisc

**Luke 22:31-38** *And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your*

*brethren." 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." 34 Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me." 35 And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing." 36 Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. 37 "For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end." 38 So they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough."*

There is a story about a shipwrecked man who managed to reach an uninhabited island alive. There, to protect himself against the elements and to safeguard the few possessions he had salvaged, he painstakingly built a little hut from which he constantly and prayerfully scanned the horizon for the approach of a ship...for the appearance of his salvation. Returning one evening after a search for food, he was shocked to find his hut completely engulfed in flames. The man of course, was horrified. Yet by a divine hand this terrible pain was miraculously turned into his redemption. For early the next morning he awoke to find a ship anchored off the island. When the captain stepped ashore, he remarked that he had, "seen the man's smoke signal and came." It seemed that everything the marooned man owned had to be destroyed...everything had to be lost, before he could be saved.

One does not have to walk long as a redeemed child of God, to notice a strange phenomenon that exists in our walk of faith. Inevitably after the moments of spiritual highs or periods of even prolonged safety and consistency, comes the prompt and sure answer of a spiritual low. The journey from the proverbial mountain top to the valley, can often be a very quick trip! The apostles had experienced such before...from the high of the mountain transfiguration of Christ, to the valley with the boy that was possessed by demons for which the apostles could not cast out.

Many of us have walked now with Christ for many years. It has been a growing relationship and a blessed life. But most assuredly there will come that day, *if you have not already experienced it*, where Christ will, as he did for Peter herein, step aside and allow Satan to “sift you like wheat.”

These boys had literally just had one of the greatest days of their lives. They were just coming off the sharing of that Passover feast with their Lord...that “last supper” in which Jesus said some pretty awesome things. He even washed their feet! He had told them that He was giving them the privilege to eat and drink at His table and that they would “sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Wow. What an epic dinner party! But suddenly...just as unexpected as the day was an emotional high, the day crashed to the cellar. For Jesus abruptly throws cold water on the celebration by announcing to Peter... “*Hey Peter....Satan wants to sift you like wheat.*”

It is an interesting caveat herein to note that Satan has to ask permission to do this. We saw the same thing in his interaction with Job. Satan had to go and ask God if he could mess Job up a bit, and ironically he was indeed given permission to do so *within limits*. For he was not allowed to kill Job. This concept for many of us can be deeply troubling. I mean, why in the world would God...a God who says He loves us, give Satan permission to do such a thing? It was an amazing experience to research this passage and read the ridiculous interpretations that are out there today. It is a sad thing to watch people come to scripture with entrenched and unmovable ideas whether they are scripturally based or not. *Satan is going to seriously shake you up Peter*. And we all... most importantly you yourself, are going to find out what you're made of.

While Peter no doubt stood in shock of Judas' betrayal, Jesus was ready to show the potential of such in us all. Despite the clear warnings from Christ himself, Peter would still fall. And despite His clear warnings to us also today, as well as the warnings of those around us who love us, we still tend to blast ahead, sure of ourselves, our standing, and our abilities. Yet so many of us carry the scars today that remind us of what happens because of such a heart!

Such times of testing in life of course are never pleasant, but it is a fact that in them we learn the secrets of dependence, of grace, of hope and of His presence. It is in those time we truly find out who and what we are. It is in them that we discover the truth of ourselves. This event would strip Peter of his pride and his self-dependence. His trust in himself would be violently shaken, and all that was not Christ would either fall away, or *he* would. None of us wishes for trials or adversity, but it is a fact that through them God refines the metal of our lives, removes the impurities, tests our "tensile strength" for future use and kingdom construction and molds us into His image. Just as metal is placed in a furnace and heated to a white hot state so the dross can be removed, God allows us to enter the furnace of affliction so that He might refine and purify our lives. We must realize that this whole Christian journey is ultimately riddled with various testing's and trials. All of which God *could* prevent from coming to pass, but He does not do so. All of such is mystically designed to "make us or break us." And we each will indeed find clarity as to just what and who we really are.

Of course, the most difficult of the adversities we face is that which comes from sin and the attack of the devil. When we are forced to enter that furnace, the potential for pain is greatest. In our text, Simon Peter is made to understand that he is about to be so tested. Jesus encourages Peter in this revelation by telling him that He Himself would take an active part in his testing. He would travel with Peter "*through* the valley of the shadow of death." As a child of God, such testing and trials, despite how we might feel, are never traveled alone!

In ancient times, as well as yet in many developing countries, there was and is the common practice of "winnowing the wheat." The practice of such...the separation of the wheat...*the good stuff*, from the chaff, *the junk*, is often a violent process. At times in India we have seen the village farmers put their wheat out on the roads so the cars that came by would run over it. Such an act would rip the good stuff from the bad. This phrase "sifting" in the original text speaks also of this drastic and even violent action. It is an "inward agitation to try one's faith to the verge of overthrow." One thing was for sure. Peter was now going to personally experience such an action within himself.

Inevitably, all that count themselves Christians will be so shaken. How the event plays out...how that passing will occur, will be different for each individual. The descriptive vernacular varies: some call it a "crisis of faith." A "critical point"...a "meltdown." Whatever you want to call it, the attributes tend to be same. Emotions are running high, we feel alone, rebellious, depressed, confused, desperate even. It is our own personal crisis.

And further, there seems to be no way out short of some sort of drastic action...some “burning of the village” on our part. Perhaps we have been doing so well for so long and then....? Questions flood our minds. How did this happen? How did I get here? Has my faith life up until this point been merely a charade? Should I not be serving here? Should I not be going to this church? *Am I even a Christian?* A tidal wave of emotions roll in on us, as we slip into isolation.

Peter had walked with Jesus for 3 years at this point. He had seen so much and had experienced things we can only dream about. He no doubt thought himself to be unbreakable...to be unmovable. But there remained aspects of himself and elements of the world that still waged war with his love of Christ. After all, he had just been arguing with the other apostles as to which of them was the greatest apostle! But in his blindness, he told Jesus he was actually ready to be imprisoned for the kingdom. He was even ready to go to his death for Jesus! And yet, we know the rest of the story and that’s not how it played out was it?

Peter was heading into the greatest testing of his life, and into an epic and historical fall. He would soon find out what he was really made of. He would soon find out just what following Jesus really meant and what Jesus really could do and *would* do in His love for us and His investment in us. It’s amazing that even though Christ always knew Peter was going to fail, He chose him anyway. Our downfall comes when we start to think we are stronger than we are. When we think ourselves spiritually buff, we are primed for the “crowing of the rooster.”

Despite allowing this daunting test, Jesus was still there with him, telling him that he was praying to the Father on his behalf. Just as we now have the Holy Spirit intervening for us in such scenarios. And thankfully, this would not be the end of Peter. It would one day lead to that lakeshore where in a meeting with Jesus he would be asked in light of all of it... “*Peter, do you love me?*” Later in his life, in a testimony of clarity and understanding, Peter would write “*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*” (1Pe 5:8) Yes, Peter... you would know, wouldn’t you?

Let us not play this event down or attempt to soften its impact. Satan *does* do this, and has done it from the beginning of time! We all have had a friend, and acquaintance, or a brother/sister in the church who has famously “went down in flames” after an extended period of walking amongst us. Satan had just successfully done this to Judas, and he aimed to do it to Peter and the rest of the boys too for that matter.

We battle a determined enemy today. He wants nothing more than to cut the heart of God by sifting your life and mine. He wants to prove that we are phonies. He wants to show God and the world that there is nothing to our professions of faith. He wants to destroy everything of value in your life. He wants to ruin your testimony. He wants to destroy your home. He wants to wreck your influence. He wants to take away everything of value in your life and leave you with nothing but a devastated shell of what you had! (**Note:** If he can get you to believe a false profession, he will. If he can get your eyes off Jesus, he will. If he can drive a wedge between you and the members of your family, he will. If he can drive a wedge between you and the members of your church, he will. He will do everything he can to cut the heart of God and ruin your life! He will use whatever tactic he deems necessary to get you to fall. He will never stop until you fall, or you die!)

If the devil gets his way in your life and you succumb to his attacks, remember this: No one sins in a vacuum! Your sin doesn't just affect you, it affects everyone around you! It is the fool who believes that he or she can live just to please yourself, while having no regard to what your sin is doing to your family, your church, your friends and to others in your sphere of influence! Adam's fall touched us all. David's sin with Bathsheba, affected him, Bathsheba, their baby, Bathsheba's husband, and the house of David for years to come! You never walk away clean when you choose to walk away in sin!

Back in Luke 9 and 10, Jesus had sent out each of the apostles with only the “shirt on his back.” The Father took care of them, and their initial work was prosperous. Luke 9:2-5 says *“Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ‘Take nothing for your journey,’ he instructed them. ‘Don’t take a walking stick, a traveler’s bag, food, money, or even a change of clothes. Wherever you go, stay in the same house until you leave town. And if a town refuses to welcome you, shake its dust from your feet as you leave to show that you have abandoned those people to their fate.’”* The apostles obeyed and lit out with the understanding that God and the people they met would take care of them. And the kingdom was vastly furthered! But now the mission had changed. The battle was getting brutal. Jesus would be going to the cross and then shortly after He would return to His Father, and they would minister on in a very different paradigm.

*“And He said to them, ‘When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?’ So they said, ‘Nothing.’ Then He said to them, ‘But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.’”*

Now they had to be ready. Now they had to be strong, plant their feet, and not be moved. Now, if they really loved Him, they would have to fight. According to the rest of scripture, we know that Jesus was not encouraging the boys to go to war for Him. He later scolded Peter for his violent offensive action against those who would arrest Jesus in the garden. But now He would be physically leaving them and things were going to get rough. They would be tested like never before. Yet they would not be alone. He promised to *“never leave them, never forsake them”* in Matthew 28:20. Yet all of this does not negate the fact that for each of us there will be that moment that we will be asked to lean in and “stand our ground” for Christ and our faith. We will be asked to choose. To decide just how far we will go for Christ. How much will we be willing to loose in order to remain? Just how much do we really love Him today?

*A woman by the name of Angela Cavallo, living in Lawrenceville, Georgia, found out just what love can do on April 9, 1982. Her then-teenage son Tony had a 1964 Chevy Impala jacked up in the driveway — he’d removed a rear tire and was working on the suspension. A neighbor kid came to the kitchen door to tell Angela there’d been an accident. She rushed out to find Tony pinned under the car — something had been stuck and in trying to loosen it he’d rocked the car off the jack. Now he was caught in one of the rear wheel wells; all she could see of him was from the waist down. Ancient Chevies being big ol’ cars with a lot of room around the wheels, Tony wasn’t immediately crushed. But he was out cold. Hollering to the neighbor kid to get help, Angela grabbed the side of the car with both hands and pulled up with all her strength. The AP’s account of the event said she raised the car four inches; she doubts it was that much but believes it was enough to take the pressure off. She recalls nothing about the rescue, but the AP said two neighbors reinserted the jack and dragged the boy out. (Tony recovered OK.) Angela, then in her late 50s, guesses she kept the car propped up for five minutes. She describes herself as 5-foot-8, large-framed and strong, but figures she couldn’t have picked the car up under normal circumstances, attributing her feat to the moment of crisis.*

After his epic failure, Jesus would ask *“Peter, do you love me?”* Do you love Jesus today? How much? How far are you willing to go? In Luke chapter 9, He said, “If you want to follow Me, you better be ready to take up your cross,” which means it could cost you your life. In chapter 12, He said, “You’re going to be dragged into courts, and you’re going to be dragged into synagogues” – chapter 12, verses 11 and 12. In chapter 14 of Luke, He told them, “Look, you better count the cost; you better count the cost. The cost is high to follow Me.” So, there had been plenty of indications that this was coming; that there was going to be a change in the way they were received. The day of testing was coming....will they endure? Will you?

Job knew. For in Job chapter 13:15 he said *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him...”*