

**Luke 22:31-34**  
***Spiritual Cockiness***

31 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."

Way back when I was in final year of university, the St. Andrew's University Rifle team of which I was co-captain that year had perhaps its best year. We had a terrific team and we made it into the Scottish University Championships. The team to beat was Edinburgh. Edinburgh had a massive athletics endowment, whereas we could just barely scrape-by. Usually their winning the small-bore rifle cup was a foregone conclusion, but this year we did very well. In the first round of shooting, we were way out ahead. And as the second round progressed our lead increased. When it came time for me to shoot my second and final card, the match was all but over. I'd figured out that if I shot anything above 82 we'd have no problems, and since my average was around 94 that wouldn't be a problem. I remember the other Captain meeting me before I went in to shoot and saying with a grin (and here I'll edit) "Don't mess it up now" to which I answered "No worries" and went in.

Now the range rules specified that when you had finished shooting your first card, you left the rifle bolt open and put a small red plastic flag in the breech to indicate that there was no live round in the chamber. But when I finished shooting my first card I had not only failed to put in the flag, I left the bolt closed. Laying down to shoot again, I remember putting my finger in the trigger guard and that I was reaching over to grab a bullet, when the rifle went \*BANG\* - my heart stopped and I instantly looked through the spotting scope to see where the round had gone. I had fears that I had just stupidly put a bullet somewhere completely outside the rings on the card and thus was starting out with a -10 on the card, but I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that I hadn't even hit the card. Well I settled down and shot a comfortable 96 and handed in the card.

However, outside I was tapped on the shoulder by the girl from Strathclyde University who had been shooting next to me, "look," she said, "they are going to disqualify me for shooting 11 rounds on my card. I'm sure I only shot 10, you didn't shoot an extra round did you? There's an extra hole here in the right hand corner." My heart sank - this was long before I became a Christian and for a second there I debated my answer - I mean Strathclyde didn't stand a chance anyway... Whereas if I said "yes" I no longer had a 96 card, I had a 0 card. Finally I said, "yeah, that's probably mine" - at which she raced off to get a judge and seconds later most of my team was trying to get me to reverse what I'd just said - "how can you be sure" "what if she shot another round as well?" and so on. And so that night at the awards dinner, the Edinburgh team captain received the gold for the umpteenth time, and we all got little silver medals. And all because of what? Because if you'd been looking the dictionary in 1989 for a definition of "cocky" you would have seen a picture of me.

I was so darn sure I couldn't mess it up, and I was the guy who gave the gun safety and range procedure lectures to the new shooters. No not me. I never saw it coming. I should have, but that's the problem with pride, it only sees what it wants to. The proud do not really know themselves, nor their true danger, they don't listen to advice, and so they aren't ready when their time of testing comes.

**Prov. 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.*** What a pity I didn't know that at the time.

Peter should have been prepared for what lay ahead of him on the evening we read about, Jesus had warned the disciples that he was going to be betrayed, and that he was going to be put to death. Peter was even granted an awesome insight in which the veil was lifted on what was going on in the heavenlies. Jesus first addresses him twice by his proper name Simon – there he's doing something like *<Snap><Snap> Simon pay attention* --- and then he tells him, that the Devil has asked permission of God to "sift" you. The "you" there in verse 31 is plural "you all" – Jesus means that the Devil had asked permission to put all of the apostles to the test and God had granted that permission.

Here you have a similar situation to what happened to Job, the Devil asked permission of God to put Job's faith to the test as well. But Peter has an advantage Job never had, he has been told that is what is going on. That he is going to be sifted along with the rest.

What is sifting anyway? Well that was the process by which one would take the wheat grains that had been harvested and then beaten with a flail and put them in a basket and throw them up into the air, what happened then was that the wind would catch the husk – the chaff – and blow it away, while the heavier kernel itself would fall back into the basket. Eventually all the chaff would be blown away and you would have just the good kernels you could then mill to make flour. This evening, Satan is going to use adversity and persecution and danger to sift the apostles, to try to prove their faith in Jesus is bogus and drive them away.

So Peter has been warned, and worse he has been told that he is going to run away from Jesus. *When you have "returned"* says Jesus. Well that obviously stung, because Peter immediately fires back with a totally over the top, cocky answer. ***Not only will I not leave you, I'll go to prison, I'll face death.*** Jesus there is no way, I am going to fall pray to temptation. And Peter is so sure about that, that when a short time later, Jesus commands the Apostles to ***"Pray that you may not enter into temptation."*** Peter is going to take the opportunity to grab a nap instead. I wonder how many times that scenario has been repeated, ***Christians in danger of falling prey to temptation make napping a priority over praying.***

Jesus answers his declaration with a matter of fact declaration that before the rooster crowed three times to announce the new day, that Peter would not only fail to die with him, or even be imprisoned with him, he would deny he even knew Jesus. Peter, you are going to fall about as profoundly as it is possible to fall. I find it ironic that a cock crowing would signal the downfall of this cocky Apostle. But still at this point Peter doesn't really believe it's possible that this could happen.

Jesus does give him good news though doesn't he? First and this is vitally important, that Jesus has been praying for him, and that as a result, he will not becoming an apostate, but that his faith though it is about to become that small smoking flax will be preserved. Also, he is told that while he is going to flee he will return and then he gives him some very important instructions. *Strengthen your brethren.*

Peter is about to fail utterly to be Peter, literally a rock, and I believe that is probably one of the reasons Peter calls him by his old name – Simon. But when he is recovered, he must become firm in the faith once again so that he might strengthen and lead the other Apostles to continue the work that Jesus has appointed for them.

Now I want to give you 3 applications from these verses:

I. The first is the most obvious, but also the most difficult: *Avoid spiritual cockiness*. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen exactly this Peter scenario unfolding in the church. *Wise Spiritual warnings falling on cocky ears, utterly disregarded, and then what was warned of comes to pass*. I'll give you just two examples of this.

1) Way back in seminary, a pastor teaching us pastoral theology tried to warn us of the dangers of not setting strict boundaries between ourselves and the women of our congregations, especially in regards to never meeting with them entirely in private. He told us the story of how he had been speaking with a fellow pastor friend, and he had been driving him along, and he had asked him how he was doing because he knew he was having trouble in his relationship with his wife. The other pastor had said "Terrific! There is a woman in the congregation who's marriage is going through the same kind of difficulties our has been, and so we've been meeting and encouraging one another and praying for one another and its been a tremendous time of encouragement." So the pastor said at that point I just turned to him and said straight up "have you kissed her yet?" And the other pastor was so outraged he started saying "*how could you even suggest that*" and "*I would never betray my wife*" and "*its not like that*" and he was so angry he demanded he stop the car and he stormed off. Several weeks later he heard that his friend and the other woman had both left their spouses.

We all have a tendency to think that we would never fall prey to temptation, and so when the flesh and the devil whisper to us, "you don't need those silly archaic safeguards, this is the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we've outgrown all that haven't we?" we listen. But oh, if we knew ourselves and remembered that verse 1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*. We would admit to ourselves, no I need those safeguards, and I need to watch and pray.

2) Which brings to me to a second way we can become spiritually cocky. That is to forget how much we need the means of grace. I was speaking with a man a while back who was outlining his career plan, it involved moving with his family to an area without a strong church, followed by another move to an area without a strong church. When I pointed out how spiritually dangerous that was, his response was that they were strong and would endure. I believe at that point I said, "Maybe so, but I wouldn't" Brothers and Sisters that's a gamble I wouldn't be willing to take.

Brothers and Sisters don't believe for a moment the lie that you can be a lone ranger Christian out on your own without getting into serious trouble. Many logs together burn brightly, but when one rolls away from the others it begins to burn out. Why do saints need the Lord's Supper and the Preaching of the Word? Well, why does your car need gas? To keep going! Without the oil of grace, you will begin to sputter just as quickly.

II. Which brings me to the good news: *Know why you will be enabled to Persevere in the Faith!* It is not by your own strength. Jesus tells Peter, that the reason the tempting of the devil will ultimately fail is that he has prayed for Him

The saints endure to the end and keep running the race because Jesus lives to intercede for us. He is constantly petitioning the father on your behalf, strengthening you when you don't have strength, and making sure that while you may be tested, and might even backslide, that you will never fall away forever. Don't believe that? Well look with me at two texts:

Romans 8:34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Heb. 7:25 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.

III. ***Strengthen your brethren:*** You who have gone through this testing, who have run away from the Lord, and yet by his grace have returned. Tell people about it! Don't keep that experience secret! Strengthen others by it. Strengthen your children by it. You had the privilege of making all of those mistakes so that by God's grace they won't have to. But how can they benefit from your experiences if they don't know about them. I've told you today how my sinful cockiness caused me to snatch defeat from the very jaws of victory. Hopefully some of the kids today heard and understood and won't do something like that.

You'll probably hear a lot more stories like that, godwilling I'll always be pointing out that ***Jesus*** came into the world to save ***sinners***, of whom I am ***chief***.

I'm quoting Paul there but it's just as true of me. You know what Paul says after that don't you? 1 Tim. 1:16 ***However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.***

That's true of me also. What about you? Are you sinners? Has God been longsuffering with you as well? Well then show yourselves to be a pattern! Tell your coworkers, your relatives, "I am a sinner, but even that is good because that's the only qualification necessary to be a candidate for salvation."