

THE SIFTING

TEXT: LUKE 22:31—34

Introduction:

1. To sift means to separate the chaff from the wheat. Usually this sifting is done with a sieve.
2. In Matthew 3:12 we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ does His sifting with a “fan.” This fan was like a small shovel.
3. The wheat was thrown into the air and separated from the chaff.
4. But here in Luke 22 it is not the Lord who is doing the sifting; it is the devil (Luke 22:31).
5. All four Gospels tell us that our Lord predicted Peter’s threefold denial (Luke 22:34), and all four Gospels all relate how it happened.
6. However, only Luke refers to Satan’s role in Peter’s denial (22:31).
7. It has been pointed out that the word “you” (22:31) in the original Greek is in the plural. Satan desired to have them all so that he could sift them as wheat (and hinder God’s program).
8. Then our Lord switches to the singular “thee” (22:32), suggesting that while they all needed intercessory prayer, Peter was in special need. The devil had his eyes on Peter. Peter was in serious danger, but our Lord was praying for him.
9. By this time, the devil had already captured Judas Iscariot (22:3). He tried to do the same thing to Peter but he was unable to capture Peter.
10. An old Puritan preacher named Trapp said that Jesus uses His winnowing fan to get rid of the chaff (Matt. 3:12), but the devil uses his fan to get rid of the wheat.

- I. THE SIFTER
- II. THE SIFTED
- III. THE ADVOCATE

I. THE SIFTER (LUKE 22:31)

1. Satan is referred to as “the tempter” in Matthew 4:3 and I Thessalonians 3:5. Here Satan is not only the tempter, he is also the sifter.
2. Satan is “the tempter” and “the sifter,” and a deceiver. Ephesians 6:11 says, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles (deceit, craftiness, trickery) of the devil.”
3. Genesis chapter 3, and I Timothy 2:14 tell us how Satan deceived Eve.
4. Revelation 12:9 says Satan is the great dragon, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan (“Adversary”) who deceives the whole world.
5. Our Lord said the devil “is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).
6. Satan is also a perverter. That is, he perverts or distorts that which has been given by God to man for his blessing and benefit (e.g. marriage).
7. Every time you hear about so-called “gay marriage” and “transgender,” keep in mind people are being blinded by the devil.

8. The other day, the Justice Department, under new Attorney General Jeff Sessions, stated that they will not defend President Obama's order that public schools allow boys who say they're girls into girls' restrooms and showers.
9. The Bible says man was created in the image of God, but Satan has tried to pervert this.
10. Consider how the devil perverts God's program in the spiritual realm. Think of all the millions of people who are very religious, but lost and on their way to hell.
11. Satan has been very effective in blinding their eyes to the true Gospel (cf. II Cor. 4:3, 4).
12. The devil has his "ministers" preach "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6—9; II Cor. 11:3, 4, 13--15).
13. The devil's specialty is "religion" (Rev. 13, 17).
14. The most dangerous of all of Satan's deceptions and perversions is in the matter of salvation. Jesus said He is the only way to heaven (John 14:6), but the devil has substituted good works, church membership, baptism, speaking in "tongues," etc.
15. It is sad that so many people are trusting in their false religion instead of in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are deluded by Satan.

II. THE SIFTED (LUKE 22:31, 32)

1. As I said earlier, our Lord used the plural "you" in Luke 22:31. But then He told Peter, "But I have prayed for thee (Peter)" (22:31b). Our Lord addressed Peter because:
 - He was in the most danger.
 - He was the leader of the apostles (but he was not a "pope" or a priest).
2. Satan desired to have the disciples (22:31). The devil has power and authority (cf. Luke 4:5, 6). In John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11, our Lord referred to Satan as "the prince of this world."
3. He is the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). First John 5:19 says, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." Literally, under the sway "of the wicked one."
4. Even though the unregenerate may not realize it, Satan is guiding them and directing their affairs.
5. But though Satan has great power, his power is limited. For example, we know from the book of Job that Satan cannot touch a believer without God's permission.
6. Therefore, if you are sifted, it is only by divine permission. The Lord allowed Peter to be sifted. Peter was impulsive; he was too self-confident.
7. Peter did not really know himself. Peter blustered and blundered and talked when he should have kept quiet.
8. The Lord knew Peter's heart, and said to him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee..." (22:31, 32b).
9. *One look of that pale, suffering face
Will make us feel the deep disgrace
Of weakness;
We shall be sifted till the strength*

*Of self-conceit be changed at length
To meekness.*

"The Sifting of Peter" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

10. Satan was successful in "sifting" Judas. There are many interesting parallels between Judas and Peter.

- Both were part of the original twelve apostles.
- Satan was after them both.
- Our Lord prayed for Peter but there is no record of our Lord ever praying for Judas (cf. John 17:9, 12).
- Satan entered into Judas. Judas betrayed our Lord and then went out and hung himself.
- Judas went "to his own place" (Acts 1:25), i.e. hell.
- On the other hand, Peter repented and became a great preacher of the Gospel. He wrote two epistles. He died a martyr's death and went to heaven to be with the Lord.

III. THE ADVOCATE (LUKE 22:32)

1. Jesus was praying for Peter, and Jesus is praying for you and me (cf. Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).
2. The Lord is our Advocate (I John 2:1). He is our Intercessor.
3. We may fail Him but He will never fail us.
4. The word "converted" in Luke 22:32 does not mean "saved." Peter was already saved. What our Lord meant was, "Peter, you are going in the wrong direction. The devil is after you. But I am praying for you, and when you get turned around ("converted"), strengthen thy brethren."
5. Peter would be able to "strengthen" his brethren because the man who has been tested and tried is the man who can help others.
6. The man who has failed the Lord, like Peter did, is more likely to be patient with others. The man who has failed the Lord is more likely to be humble and understanding. It is unlikely that Peter would ever forget this lesson on "sifting."
7. Peter failed the Lord, but Peter wept afterwards. And he repented. Therefore, the word "conversion" means "repentance."
8. Peter was over-confident. He did not see himself the way God saw him. And since Satan is invisible, Peter could not see what the devil was doing.
9. Peter boldly and sincerely declared his allegiance to the Lord (Luke 22:33).
10. So, the Lord had to make a startling prediction (Luke 22:34).

CONCLUSION:

1. Sometimes the Lord has to allow some of His disciples to fail terribly in order to show them their weaknesses. Sometimes He even allows some of His best disciples (like Peter) to be sifted.
2. Peter lied; Peter cursed; but Peter repented (Matt. 26:69—75).

3. Luke mentions, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter” (Luke 22:61). That “look” must have felt worse than any whipping.
4. God was preparing Peter. The Peter who preached on the day of Pentecost was a much stronger disciple than the Peter who denied our Lord thrice the night before His crucifixion.
5. Maybe there is some sifting going on now in your life. You ought to get things right with God right now.