

What Christ Said about Faith to Peter

sermonaudio.com

Passion Sunday

By Pastor Pieter Van Ruitenburg

Bible Text: Luke 22:1-32
Preached on: Sunday, March 21, 2021

Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation

8920 Broadway Street
Chilliwack, BC V2P 5W1

Website: www.nrcchilliwack.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/bnrcchilliwack

Congregation, sometimes we are surprised, didn't expect that to happen. We just wonder. We are not prepared for that. We didn't think about it. Not only in general, you know, like you have cancer, or something is wrong with your child, so it's a surprise, so unprepared, so suddenly, so out of the blue, we say, but that's not always right. We should have been prepared, right? Why are things, many things such a surprise to us? And that's also true in spiritual things. God's children are sometimes surprised because they had times that it was so good, there was such a peace, such an overwhelming joy, such a surety, they could say, "Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." It was good with their soul and then it's gone, the peace, and there is an attack of Satan and there is darkness, there are doubts, there are storms, and they did not expect that to happen so they wonder, "Am I child of the Lord?" Has it ever been true? We can't believe it anymore and there can be atheism in your heart. What is truth? You may come to a place that you doubt everything. It is possible that there is thick darkness and you can fall into sins and so many things can happen, such surprises, and that's why God's children need to be prepared, and that's why we also encourage God's children when there is sudden darkness and we say this is not unheard of, this happens more often. This happens in the Bible also to them that are God's people as if nothing ever happened, they become so unconverted again, they need to be converted again, and that was also true for the Apostle Peter, right? He did not think he would ever do that, that he would ever deny his Master, that he would fall into such a sin, that he would end up in such a darkness. He was not prepared for that. He didn't think that it would happen and it came. Devastating.

So two years ago, I preached about that and I'm doing it again. I just want to. I just feel drawn to that. So the text is from Luke 22:31 and 32. Luke 22:31 and 32.

31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

So far.

"What Christ Said about Faith to Peter." What Christ said about faith to Peter. Three thoughts: faith challenged, challenged, "Satan has desired to have you that he may sift

you as the wheat." Faith challenged. Secondly, faith prayed for. And the Lord said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." And in the third place, faith strengthened, "and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." What Christ said about faith to Peter: faith challenged; faith prayed for; and faith strengthened.

So congregation, young people, we are still in that house in Jerusalem. Remember the Lord Jesus sent out John and Peter and said, "Go to the city and a man will meet you with a pitcher on his head, and follow him and tell him that the Master wants the Passover to be prepared." And they did and they followed him. He sent forth two of his disciples, "Go to the city and wherever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared to make ready for us." So they were sitting there, remember? We talked about that not too long ago and the Lord Jesus knew that house, right? It might be the same house as in Acts 12. In Acts 12, the Apostle Peter is in prison, then released, freed and came to that house. I think it's the same house, and when Peter was come to himself, he said, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord has sent his angel and has delivered me out of the hands of Herod and from all expectation of the Jews. When he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." So he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark. So the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. I think it's the same house.

So there the Lord Jesus spoke to them and he said unto them, for example, "with desire, I have desired." That's double, right? That's a Hebraism. That's a way to emphasize things. "With desire, I have desired to eat of this Passover with you before I suffer." So a longing, a desire, a warm, loving desire because he desired the communion with his disciples. He desired that special fellowship. He desired to teach them. He desired to comfort them. He loved them and he loved the work on earth. He did. He loved his Father. He loved his church. And there the Lord Jesus spoke about, "This is my body broken for you." And he shared the cup. And that's such a wonder because Christ was about to suffer terrible agony and he knew that he would not receive much support of his disciples because they would be fighting who is more important, and they will fall asleep in the garden, and they will all flee as well, and the Apostle Peter will deny him. It's quite an amount of things against him and the Lord Jesus yet desired, with desire to eat with them in spite of all that.

Now they're still human, you know, and there's such weakness in the corruption of the heart, and yet the Lord is holding onto them. And the after the Lord had instituted the Lord's Supper, before they were leaving or they already had left on that Thursday evening, the Lord said, "Simon, Simon." Do you know more Bible stories with the name of someone mentioned twice? "Martha, Martha," right? Because she was so busy with so many things and the Lord said, "Oh, Martha, Martha." That's quite an emphasis on her. Do you know that as well, young people? "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" So direct and personal and so the Lord is also very personal today to you and to me. He is kind of mentioning your name. "Simon, Simon, I know you. I know who you are. I know

where I found you. I know your unconverted state. I know you." So the Lord Jesus speaks very personally. "Simon, Simon."

Now some state he said, "Simon" and not "Peter." That's right. So why is that? I'm not so sure. Some say Simon is his old name, his natural name, and Peter is more his new name. So did the Lord address him not as a disciple, not as a child of God, but as a human, kind of the old Peter? You know, it might be true but there's one problem, a few verses further in 34 it says, "And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny me." So you would expect that the word Simon there as well, then. Whatever it is, it is very personal. "Simon, Simon," and whatever it is, the Lord knows his old man, the old nature of him as well.

So sitting at the table, the Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold," So he's not only supposed to hear this but he has to really understand it and behold it, and be aware of it and watch it and do something about it.

"Behold, Satan has desired to have you." Christ had such a desire, right, a warm loving desire. He has also desired but that's a different word, that's the word we could translate as "demand," a very negative, dark way. Demand. "Satan has demanded to have you. He has expressed a strong desire to have you. He is asking permission." That's what it says.

So Satan is asking permission of who? Of God. Satan is asking, "O God, I really want him. I really need permission to betray him and to slay him so that he would not just have a bad day, I'd like to kill him. I'd like to sift him as the wheat." So that reminds us of Job. You know there is a visible world and an invisible world, and there is much going on in the invisible world. There is Satan and angels and devils and we don't see it but it's reality. And that reminds us of Job 1, right? Job. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?" No wonder. No wonder everything goes okay in his life. He's so blessed. Does Job fear God for nought? "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and protected him about his house, about all that he has on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD." So Satan is God's Satan. The devil is God's devil. Satan cannot move a finger without God's permission and will and what Satan is doing is under God's control and he can't do anything if God doesn't want him to, and what he is doing has a place in God's providence. So Satan is demanding God to sift this Peter in such a way that his faith will fail, right? That's the purpose.

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Now some say this is a sieve, and some say this is more kind of a fan. I cannot decide. It maybe it's the one or the other or both. A fan is that it's kind of a scoop, and the chaff and the wheat is still together and needs to be separated. So with that

scoop they throw it in the air, all those kernels and the chaff, and the chaff is blown away, goes to the side, and the kernels are heavier so they fall right on the ground. And others say, no, this is a sieve with holes in there, and the kernels stay on there but the fine dust goes through.

Anyway, Satan wants to shake them. I said "them." It says "you." Satan has desired to have you. When it says "you" in the Bible, it means plural. When it is singular, it says "the" or "thou." Do you see that in this text? "Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you," plural, all the disciples and the church, "But I have prayed for thee." That's personal. That's singular. So Satan has desired to have the whole church, to have all those disciples. He wants them to fall through the sieve. He wants them to fall through the holes.

"That he may sift you as wheat." So in what way? Well, as I indicated, you have to read verse 31 and 32 together. To sift you as the wheat, "But I have prayed for thee that thy faith will fail not." So he is doing his best to sift them as the wheat, "But I have prayed that thy faith will fail not." So I conclude that in verse 31, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you," means that he wants to take that faith away. He wants that faith to fail. That's his desire to take that away, faith.

So he's asking God for permission. What did the Lord say? "Absolutely not, Satan. You don't do that. I don't give you permission to sift him as the wheat. No!" Did the Lord say that? The Lord didn't say that. Kinda the Lord said, "Go ahead, sift him as the wheat, but I prayed for him that his faith will not fail. You go ahead. It's in a way beneficial. It's in a way helpful. It's in my providence. Do it." Do you see that? Surprise for God's children when those attacks, that their faith will fail not. Say, "Oh, what's happening? I just don't know it anymore." Do you know that is God giving Satan permission to buffet you?

Why is the Lord doing that? What's the purpose of that? Well, you know what God's purpose is, right? It's always the same: his glory. So somehow God is glorified when his children are attacked and his children don't know it anymore and then their faith comes back, and when we experience those hardships, I give glory to God. It's to God's glory and in a way sometimes even to their own welfare, that their faith would even increase through all those horrible experiences.

Satan tries to disturb, how? How does he attack God's people? Well, he tempts to sin, right? "And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him." The devil putting in the heart of Judas to betray him. You see, that is Satan. By reminding you of the past, by the sins of youth, he likes it when God's children cringe and say things like, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Or when they say, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood."

So the Lord knows certain ways to attack his people by diseases, even, and Satan can be involved in diseases, "So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown." You know, Satan is involved in things but God is higher. So Satan likes people to doubt. He's buffeting. He's

questioning the Bible. He comes as an angel of light. And his biggest trick is letting you believe that he does not exist. But he likes to ruin the church. He likes to ruin marriages. He likes to ruin people's mental health, physical health. He wants to discourage. He makes discontent. He comes with false doctrine. He likes Pharisees. He likes worldly philosophy that people don't believe in creation but in evolution. He likes modern thinking. He attacks young people. He uses modern media. He uses Netflix to absorb lots of your time with one movie after the other and you know they're wrong, and you know it's not good, and you waste your time. And Satan is laughing about that. He loves it. Oh, he has such a desire to have you and to sift everyone.

Do you see how serious life is? Much more is going on than you can see. There is an invisible world. There is a power of darkness and unbelievers don't see it but God's children also need that persistent consciousness that they are under constant attack.

So God is glorified in what he's doing also by the timing. You know, the Lord could have annihilated Satan right away and sin, but the Lord is going through a process with his church with advances and retreats like a General in the war, forward, afterward backwards, to the left, to the right, but he is doing his best and the thing is that faith, right, 1 John 5:4, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Oh, that faith is crucial here.

Faith challenged. We come to the second thought: faith prayed for. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat," that you won't have faith, if you have no faith you fall through that sieve, you fit in that hole, but if you have faith you don't fit in there. You stay on there. "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith will not fail." What's the sense of saying, "Behold. Watch it. Be careful. Keep your eyes open because Satan wants to have you." What's the sense in saying that when the Lord Jesus says, "I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail." Well, if that's true, then I can just sit back and I don't have to watch, I don't have to be careful because he has said anyway that faith will not fail. But you know, that's one of those things we will never be able to truly understand, our responsibility, right, and God's sovereignty. It's the same for, "Repent ye, repent ye, why would ye die?" And the Lord gives repentance to them he wants to. But he yet says, "Repent ye, repent ye."

And so the Lord says to his church, unto Simon Peter, "Behold. But I prayed for you." And now it is in singular, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith will not fail." He's warning but he's also praying for them because perseverance is a miracle. It's a miracle to be stopped by the Lord but it's also a miracle when God's children continue on that narrow pathway. It's such a wonder that they don't get off the road because the enemies are mighty and our strength is small, and this world is full of snares, and the heart is weak so that it sometimes seems at first sight impossible to reach heaven. Knowing all those things seems at first sight impossible to ever go to heaven unless we have a mighty friend, the Lord Jesus. Unless we have a watchful advocate at the right hand of the Father. Unless we have someone who will always intercede and says, "I don't want that faith to fail." Someone at the right hand of the Father presenting it to the Father, "I have

received him. This was a chosen one. He was chosen from eternity. I came for this person. I obeyed for him. I suffered for him. I died for him."

Do you know what is more important, Christ's death or Christ's life after he died? His death is very important. He paid the price but what about him at the right hand of the Father praying, constantly making intercession? Because the Lord Jesus prays and there are places in the Bible where we can see what he exactly prayed. For example in John 17, the high priestly prayer, so let me quote you verse 24. "Father," the Lord Jesus talking, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Do you see the Lord Jesus pleading? "Father, I will." He demanded it. He had the right to say this. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory."

He promised to save his church. He paid the price. And the Lord would not only hold onto them, yes, he will, the Lord is holding onto his people, not only that, the Lord doesn't only forgive them time and again, that as well, the Lord wouldn't only restore them again, that's right, but he does not want their faith to fail. He strengthens their faith. Their faith will not fail. In the Greek it says for "fail, eclipse." Their faith will not just disappear and be gone.

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin," in that sinful sin, sinful way, in that unconverted way, "because he is born of God." So Christ loves them. He cannot lie. He is strong enough to keep them. Nobody can possibly pluck them out of his hand. And he rekindles their faith. How? Remember that, children, remember that deepest deepest point of Peter, fell so deep? What happened? How did the Lord hold onto him? How did the Lord rekindle his faith? Well, he had three times denied the Master, "I don't know him. I don't know who you're talking about. It's not true." And the rooster crew and he left the courtyard and cried bitterly, right? The deepest point we know of the Apostle Peter, "What did I do? What did I do? I denied my Master." What happened? Why did he walk out crying? Because the Lord Jesus looked at him. He just looked at him with that kind, loving way of looking, and that broke his heart again.

So also this morning hour, the Lord is kind of looking at his own people and saying, "Have you forgotten me? I have not forgotten you. You are in the palms of my hand. Nobody can pluck them away. I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail." So let me show you through gems in the Bible about that intercession. We saw something of it in John 17. What about Isaiah 53? Yes, that important chapter also speaks of intercession. "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." He made intercession. He's still doing that. He's still doing that now, right now.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Romans 8:34.

Or John 17 again, back to John 17, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." So the Lord Jesus asking the Father, "Keep through thine own name. Keep them. Keep them."

So the Lord does not only give a shield to his people but also a hand to hold it up so their faith will not fail. He is keeping them. 1 Peter 1, I like that verse too, 1 Peter 1:3 and 5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed." Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

You say, "But I don't know if he prays for me." You know, it's true the Lord Jesus prays for the elect, right? So you say, "I don't know, am I elect? I wonder now. I thought I was but I can't see it anymore. I lost it all so this text does not help me at all because it's about Peter and about the church and I don't belong to the church. I seriously doubt it." Well, it's true it is a blessing that you may know, and if it has ever been true it will remain true, but if you say, "I don't know if he's praying for me," what do I say? Well, I can say he prayed for you, he prayed for the whole world. That's not what it is, right? The Bible says, "I prayed for them and not for the world." So I don't know if he prays for you in particular. I don't know but what I know is this, that he calls you, that he invites you, that he warns you, that he says "behold," that he says "repent ye," that he says "believe in me," right? That's what he says, so don't go there. If you are an elect one, don't go there. You don't have to find out first if you are one. You may without knowing that flee to the Savior as a sinner, as an ungodly one, as an unrighteous one, as an undeserving one having nothing in his hands, completely empty, stripped from all self-righteousness. Don't come as a converted one, don't come as an elect, come as someone who has nothing.

"But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," and it won't. "And there are still sheep not of this fold and I will bring them in and I have prayed for them," and more people will be saved because he's praying. And then the last thought: faith strengthened. So why did Satan receive permission to sift Peter as the wheat? What was the purpose of that? Not only that God would be glorified and that his faith would be strengthened for himself, but also that he may reach out to others better, that he would be more fit to preach the word to sinners. "And when thou art converted, it will make a difference, Peter. When thou art converted, you will be more able to strengthen the faith of your brethren." Do you see that? God can bring good things out of evil. He can cause the weakness of some members of his church to work together for the benefit of the whole body of his people. He can make those sins a means to prepare Peter to uphold others.

2 Corinthians 4:1 and 13 we also see it, that the Lord is helping his people and that he's holding onto them. Remember also the time after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, remember the Apostle Paul, remember also David? You know, David in Psalm 51, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation," that's persona, "and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

So does he need to be converted again because that's what it says, right? Converted again. When he shall be converted. Well, not in a sense, in a sense not, of course. He was converted, once converted is always converted, once alive is always alive, but he will have to come to his senses again and that will make a real difference for him. Think of what the Lord Jesus said to Peter. So many are dying, Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs." He said later, "Feed my sheep." And again, "Feed my sheep."

So the Apostle Peter learned a huge lesson that would be beneficial for others and that's how the Lord works. He strengthens the faith of his brethren. He strengthens. The dictionary says "to make stable; to place it firmly; to set it fast; to fix it; to strengthen it; to make it firm; to render it constant; to confirm." So in this way he is able to strengthen the faith of his brethren so he can say, "If you would know what happened to me, you would not be so discouraged. I have been in those dark places. Well, child of God," he says, "I know about it. I'm not surprised that you are in such darkness. I've been there as well and I despaired and I cried bitterly and I did not know that I was able to do that. I was so high-minded. I was so strong in myself. I was so proud. But I've learned my lesson."

So now he can stand next to a little one and he can encourage them, and he is not that firm Christian that knows it all and looks down on others. No, he is in the low place like the Apostle Paul, right? 1 Corinthians 15:9, "For I am the least of the apostles," he says, "that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." So maybe that's why you, child of God, are in that dark place right now, so that your faith will get stronger and that you will be more beneficial to the church. Strengthen your brethren. Your brethren. Your sisters in the faith. Them that are one family. He can speak from experience that the Lord is good, that he's faithful, that he does not forsake the works of his own hands.

You know, he writes in 1 Timothy 1, "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." And was that not the same also with Job? Job, right, we talked about Job. He was in a dark place as well. He cursed the day he was born and through the whole book of Job he is struggling and struggling and struggling. What's the sense of doing that? Well, at the end of Job you see a different Job. He has learned much. He eschewed and is a righteous man and he was perfect in all his ways, in a sense, and he was yet so much room for improvement. So that's why I read in Job 42, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." That's the end of the book that he adores God's majesty and has a lower place than before.

And that's the purpose. Don't be surprised, dear child of God, don't be so surprised. It's normal to have those dark days. It's under the Lord's permission. The Lord allowed Satan to sift him as the wheat. The Lord could have done it in a different way but he has chosen this way for his glory, for his honor.

That faith will not fail. So in your experience, yes, but he has prayed and he continues to pray and when thou art converted, you know, God's children have to be converted, and converted again. Actually it says instead of converted, it says turned back. When you have come back. When you have turned back because they have strayed and they return. And when you have returned, strengthen your brethren. Glory to God for his faithfulness, for his wisdom, for his Son, and for that faith that he gives himself, and for praying at the right hand of the Father that their faith will not fail and that new ones will be added.
Amen.