

The sermon for today is from Luke chapter 22 verses 31-46...

This segment of scriptures comes on the heels of our Lord's Supper...and the loud debate that had ensued between His disciples as to who was the greatest...Now, Simon, also called Peter, who had grown up on the western side of the Sea of Galilee...was perhaps one of the *loudest* of the group, because he was most likely considered one of the leaders of the twelve...as he and John were often referred to as the two pillars of the church...

But listen to what Jesus says to him in verse 31...

V. 31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;"

Jesus is telling Simon-Peter...Satan will **soon** test him and his brother disciples...Satan will test the strength of *their* faith...the word "*you*" here is meant in the plural form...meaning all of them not just Simon-Peter...

"To sift you like wheat" is a phrase indicative of the **kind** of suffering Simon-Peter and the rest of the disciples would ultimately endure...the kind that would be brutally extreme and overwhelming, even unto death...almost reminiscent of Job, when Satan was given permission by God, to cause Job *immeasurable* suffering in order to test his faith...

The use of the term "sifting wheat" was a reference to sifting the chaff from the grain of wheat...of the nine steps in ancient grain production, it was the eighth...just before the final step of milling...But Jesus uses this reference for something else, specifically...

He is referring to **strength** of faith...and that once faith is tested, as if grain sifted to remove the chaff...will there be a good, well-formed, grain inside, or will there be a small un-edible grain...surrounded by nothing but chaff...

But in the very next verse, Jesus tells Simon-Peter that He has prayed for him...now, to have someone pray for you is a *gracious* gift...but to have *Jesus* pray for you, is a gift *beyond* measure...a gift that will surely raise you up...one that will strengthen you and see you through the most severe of sufferings, even death...

Listen to what Jesus says in verse 32...

V. 32 "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Jesus, because He is **of** God and **is** God, knew that Simon-Peter would, indeed, endure temptation and suffering...and that when he had been sifted thoroughly by Satan, he would turn again...he would overcome...and then, it would be his responsibility to strengthen others...to help them through their trials...

Peter, in both Greek and Aramaic, refers to the word "Rock"...and remember, Jesus told Peter in **Matthew 16:18**...

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it!"

But Peter would be greatly tested **first**...and this would also be the case for all of our Lord's disciples...each would suffer for Christ's namesake...and because of their suffering, their strength of faith grew...and they, then, taught others how to strengthen their faith...

And this should remind us all, of what it says in Proverbs 56:11 about trusting in God and not ourselves in times of hardship...

In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Still yet, like the rest of his brother disciples, Simon-Peter had no idea that he would soon be tested so deeply...he felt that he was strong in his faith...unwavering...so here is what he says to Jesus in verse 33...

V. 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"

But at that particular time, Peter was unaware that **because** of his devotion to Jesus...his imprisonment and death would one day become certain...for instance, scripture tells us of **one** specific occasion...when Peter was imprisoned by Herod...in Acts 12...and that amid guards and being chained...in the middle of the night while everyone is asleep, an angel of God releases him from his chains and leads him out of the prison without the guards even waking up...

Now, although Peter is persistent in stating his good and honorable intentions...to stand with our Lord no matter what...Jesus simply replies to him with stark words, that we all have heard or read from the bible...words, that on the surface, may seem somewhat baffling to Peter...for he has yet to understand their **real** meaning...but soon, they will become utterly and painfully clear...listen, to what our Lord says in verse 34...

V. 34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me."

What this tells us is that Peter will deny even **knowing** Jesus...three times before *dawn*, when the rooster crows...of course, Peter still thought he would be stronger in his conviction and devotion to Jesus...as do we all!

But we know that Peter was just a man, with human weaknesses, that his faith was being **sifted** by Satan...and that by dawn, his loyalty had waned...and he had, indeed, denied our Lord three times...for which Peter wept bitterly.

My Friends...we too, like Peter, are filled with human weaknesses...and although we may **think** we are strong in our faith...Satan tests us and **sifts** us like wheat, also...So we need to grow **strong** in our faith, with little or no chaff...in other words, we must be **steadfast** Christians and not just dress the part...our strength of faith lies within us...and as we are challenged by **greater and greater** tests...we must remember and take heart...that strength of faith comes from the very act of our being tested...

Listen to what scripture tells us about this, in James 1:2-4

Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you encounter various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

Now, as we continue in Luke chapter 22, we take a look at verses 35-38...where our Lord Jesus is beginning to **prepare** His disciples for His arrest, and what will soon follow...

V. 35 And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing."

V. 36 And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one.

V. 37 “For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, `AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS’; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment.”

V. 38 They said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” And He said to them, “It is enough”.

Here, Jesus is getting the disciples ready for the changes to come...that He Himself is counted amongst the lawless, and that in Him, scripture will be fulfilled...and He is instructing them on the needs they will soon have, in order complete their new mission...to go and preach the gospel throughout the ancient biblical lands of their time...

He is also telling them that their new mission will be completely different from their earlier one...that last time they lacked for nothing...but this time they will *not* have Him, and they will face serious rejection and backlash...

In verse 38, where our Lord tells them that the two swords are enough, Peter and the other disciples were probably thinking more of a *physical* type of defense with *real* swords...But Jesus, although He could've wanted the disciples to protect themselves amidst the chaotic hate of unbelievers...He was more than likely speaking of “*spiritual*” defense...directing them to prepare for “*spiritual warfare*”...

And **we**, my Friends, must *also* prepare ourselves for “*spiritual warfare*”...everyday, we must be ready...Because Satan doesn't take a break...in fact, he likes to catch us off-balance...he likes it when we are lax in our faith...

Now, as there are many scriptures that speak to us of spiritual strength and being prepared for Satan's tests...listen, for example, to what is **simply** said in Ephesians 6:10 & 11
Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil,

Brothers and Sisters...it is of **utmost** importance that you be on your guard...put on the **full** armor of God and strengthen your faith in the Lord...for Satan wants to turn you away from righteousness...

So, as we continue now in the book of Luke...the next verses we come to are those you may be familiar with...they reach deeply into our hearts...and they bring to life the enormous weight of anxiety, that Jesus begins to experience in preparation for His arrest, torture, and crucifixion...

Starting with verse 39, Luke tells us what occurs in the Garden of Gethsemane, after Jesus and His disciples depart Jerusalem following their Passover meal ...

V. 39 And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him.

Jesus went often with His disciples, to this secluded part of the Olive Garden, located across the Kidron valley, from Jerusalem, on the slopes of mount Olivet...He had prayed there many times, because it was quiet and out-of-the-way...but this time, it would be His *last* visit, to this favored place of solace.

As they arrived there, Jesus tells His disciples, in verse 40, to “Pray that you may not enter into temptation”...this verse seems to echo what He said in the Lord's Prayer about “lead us not into temptation”...He wants them to realize one very important thing at this most distressing time...and that is, that Satan is on the hunt and is looking to tempt them and draw them away from Him...

Simply put, 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 8 says it this way...

Be sober; be on the alert. Your adversary the devil walks around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

So, in verse 41, after Jesus tells his disciples to pray...He withdraws from where they are, to about a "stone's throw" away, and He Himself kneels down to pray...In momentary solitude and with His mounting anxiety, He is now able to quietly converse with the Father...able to confess His feelings...able to speak with the Father, heart to heart...

Listen to what our Lord says in verse 42...as He is on His knees, praying...

V. 42 saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

It was at this very moment that an angel of God appeared and strengthened Him...for the Father felt His anguish...and knew that His Son would have to die for all mankind...to save us from our sins...and to provide believers with redemption and eternal life in heaven...

My Friends, the Father **knew** that His Son would be cruelly tortured and crucified...and Jesus **knew** that the cup of pain and death could not be taken from Him, unless the Father did so...You know, at this point, I think any parent would have felt their heart was being yanked from their chest...

But let's take a moment...right now...and think of just how much love **God** has for us...that He sacrificed His only begotten Son for us...and think, right now...how much love **Jesus** has for us...that He would give His very life for us...All of this was because of the **immeasurable love** they have for us...

Now, in verse 44, amid His growing anguish, and having been visited and strengthened by an angel of God...His torment, yet grows inside Him...as He is fully aware of the extent to which he will soon suffer...

V. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

Listen to how Luke describes our Lord's condition while praying..."being in agony" and "His sweat became like drops of blood"...Folks, this is a very real medical condition, where a person **actually** sweats blood...it's called **Hematidrosis**, from the ancient Greek meaning "blood sweat"...and can range in color from blood-tinged to blood-red...

But make no mistake...this condition can be brought on by severe mental anxiety and extreme stress, the likes of which Jesus was experiencing...because He knew the **degree** to which He would soon suffer...ending in His horrible death upon the cross...

Luke then goes on to tell us in verses 45 and 46, that after Jesus had finished praying and went to His disciples...He found them asleep...and Luke says that it was from **sorrow** that they had fallen asleep...Matthew and Mark both describe this scene somewhat differently...and as happening three (3) times...where Jesus finds His disciples asleep, even though He had asked them to stay awake and pray... "Pray that you may not enter into temptation", he said to them...

Listen to what Mark says in chapter 14 verse 41...

And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Brothers and Sisters, Jesus knew He would face His arrest soon after the Passover meal and after Judas had left the table...Now, the time was at hand...the temple guards had arrived to arrest our Lord, accompanied by Judas and an angry crowd...

Jesus and His disciples could've remained in Jerusalem...but it seems as though, He most likely chose His favorite place of quiet and solitude in Gethsemane...**not only** to pray to the Father and prepare Himself for what was to come...but to take the ensuing danger away from the house where they had been guests and shared His last supper...and also away from the city so others would not get hurt...and perhaps, even to give His disciples a way to escape through the olive groves...for He knew they could also be arrested and tortured along with Him.

My Friends, our Lord loved His disciples, and He loves us...He was a servant to them, as much as He was a servant to many...He healed the afflicted and forgave the sinner...He had come to save the lost, the Jew as well as the Gentile...

He had come to save us all...He sacrificed Himself for **our** redemption...and because we were given this most loving of gifts...believers have the joy in our hearts, of knowing that we will be with Him, eternally, in heaven...

Now, before we close in prayer...I'd like to remind everyone, that **we** should do as Jesus instructed His disciples to do, while they were in the Garden of Gethsemane...and that is to be **diligent** and **remain awake** in our faith...and "pray that we do not enter into temptation"...so that when **we** are sifted like wheat, we will be able to **endure** the test.

Let us pray...

Loving Father in heaven, by your grace we are given the breath of life...we thank you and offer our love and praise to you...we pray for the lost, and ask that you help us to show them the way home to you...Father we ask for your guidance as we walk the righteous path towards the narrow gate...we ask for strength and wisdom, that our faith may reflect the joy and love of your steadfast heart...we pray for those that are suffering and are in need of your mercy...and for the forgiveness of all sinners...and we pray these things in the name of your Son Jesus, our Lord and Savior...AMEN