

# Standing and Suffering

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to read now in Luke chapter 22, page 882, and we're going to read from verse 31 down to verse 38.

! Luke chapter 22 from verse 31. Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat.

But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. Peter said to him, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

Jesus said, I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you deny me three times that you know me. And he said to them, when I sent you out with no money or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything? They said nothing. He said to them, but now let the one who has a money bag take it and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.

For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me. And he was numbered with the transgressors. For what is written about me has its fulfillment. And they said, look, Lord, here are two swords.

[ 1 : 37 ] And he said to them, it is enough. It is enough. Heavenly Father, bring your ancient and powerful word into the presence so that it can be heard and delivered with all the freshness of a new day, with all the immediacy of a friend's embrace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

They say that the darkest night comes before the brightest dawn. In these verses, Luke 22, 31 through 38, the night is drawing dark. The next day we'll witness the suffering and crucifixion of our Lord.

There's tension in the air. As in the upper room, Jesus instructs his unbelieving disciples as to what's going to happen in the next few days. There was, as it would seem, a cloak of deep darkness hanging over them all.

The immediate future holds denials and persecutions. But even in that night of deep darkness, there are shafts of sunlight breaking through.

What Jesus will endure the next day is not the end. It is a new beginning. And what his disciples, Simon Peter in particular, will go through will not be an end for them, but again a new beginning.

[ 3 : 09 ] We must remember this. The world we live in has always, to one extent or another, been dark. But into the darkness the light of Christ shines, promising the brightest of all dawns.

And through the death of Jesus on the cross, the dawn of glory is assured and promised. We're not to look down, because all we'll see is mud.

We're to look up, because all we'll see then is majesty. Our passage here covers two themes.

Standing for Christ and suffering for Christ.

Now, we could choose, if we so choose, view these as dark episodes. But the reality is actually very different. Through all the various twists and turns of the Christian life, God is always leading us upwards towards the light of his majesty.

Without Jesus, you see, there is only darkness. But with Jesus, we can rise above the darkness, and we can live in hope. Let's look first of all then at standing for Christ.

[ 4 : 26 ] Standing for Christ in verses 31 through 34. Standing for Christ. Put yourself in the situation the disciples went in. Jesus has told them that he's going away.

Now, to what extent they knew and understood what he was talking about is debatable. But soon after, there's talk of one of them betraying Jesus. Then, rather than announcing that he's going to become an earthly king, Jesus doubles down on his being a servant.

And that glory is something that doesn't belong to the present age, but to the future age. Then, in verse 28 onwards, Jesus promises his disciples the reward of his kingdom, where they're going to feast at his heavenly table and rule over the tribes of Israel.

Immediately after, whether on a one-to-one basis or with the other disciples publicly, Jesus says to Peter, Simon, Simon.

He doesn't call Peter Simon very often, but he does here. Simon, Simon. There's so much here in Jesus' words.

[ 5 : 48 ] So much that seems dark. But in reality, it's the brightest of lights. Now, we all know that Simon was the spokesman of the disciples.

He was their leader. He was impetuous. He was full of bravado. And it was Simon Peter Satan demanded to attack.

Isn't that so interesting? Should we be surprised at the defection and downfall of so many prominent Christian leaders today, when 2,000 years ago, Satan targeted the most prominent disciple?

That's what Satan does. He goes for the leader, thinking that if he can destroy the leader, he can derail the mission of the church and the worship of God.

Rather, like what it was in the Old Testament with Job, Satan demanded to have Peter. But Satan cannot demand anything of God unless the sovereign God allows it to happen.

[ 6 : 56 ] Satan demands to sift Peter like wheat, battering him with temptation and persecution until Simon falls in failure. Things, it would appear, couldn't get any worse.

Jesus is going away. Simon Peter is going to be sifted like wheat. We know from what he then says that Peter is so confident in his ability to stand for Christ that he says, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

He's so cockshout of himself, it wouldn't be until the cock crowed three times that Peter would realize the emptiness of his own strength and the failure of his promise.

That's where we get the English expression, cock sure. And so, cock sure means your strength is just like Peter, the cock crowed three times.

When we trust in ourselves and confidently make promises to God about how strong we are as Christians, we're headed for a fall. No, none of us heads out to fail, but failure is always a possibility, especially if we choose not to rely upon Christ, but to rely upon ourselves.

[ 8 : 12 ] In the Old Testament, it was said of one of Judah's kings, Uzziah, that when he became strong, he became proud. In the same way, it's often when a man is thrust into a position of leadership, he stops relying upon the grace of Christ and starts becoming reliant upon his own abilities.

He becomes proud. And we all know what the proverb says, pride comes before a fall. We see it only too often in today's church. And though we are to expect it, it still hurts.

But then, in this seeming deepest darkness, Jesus says four things which fill us with hope. Four things. First of all, God is in ultimate control of everything.

God is in ultimate control of everything. Satan is not in control. Satan may demand, and he may ask, but it's God who's in ultimate control.

It's God who determines what shall and shall not happen. Temptations and persecutions, whilst not coming from him, are permitted by him.

[ 9 : 28 ] Our failures, though not determined by him, are permitted by him for his greater glory and our greater good.

Month by month, we hear of prominent leaders in the church failing. And every time, we are deeply shocked and surprised. But God's not surprised. He's not surprised because, first of all, he knows how sinful our hearts are.

And secondly, because in his mysterious will, it has been allowed by him. Now, that doesn't take away from the guilt of that leader, but it does fill us with confidence, knowing that even though our leaders, like Simon Peter, fail, God is still building his church, as he did through our repentant and restored Peter.

That's the first thing. God is in sovereign control. Second, Jesus is praying for us that our faith may not fail. Jesus is praying for us that our faith may not fail.

Can you believe this? The thought that Jesus, the mighty Son of God, prays for us, it's a privilege beyond our understanding.

[ 10 : 49 ] In your darkest time, Jesus is praying for you. In all the sordid temptations you face, while Peter was denying his Lord, and while we in secret are engaging in sinful behaviors, Jesus is praying for you.

When we do not pray for ourselves, when we put our faith to the side to get on with indulging our sinful pleasures, Jesus prays for us.

And what he prays is that our faith may not fail. Notice he does not pray that we may not fail, but that our faith may not fail. And we'll see what that means in just a moment.

Our faith may triumph though we fail, just as Peter's faith triumphed even though he failed and denied his Lord. In our times of darkness and failure, when we feel as though we are completely done in, let's remember, our Lord prays for us and his prayers are always heard, effective, and powerful.

Third, this is important. Personal failure is not final. Personal failure is not final.

[12:11] See the words of Jesus. when you have turned again, verse 32. When you have turned again. Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny him three times, but Jesus also knew Peter's failure was not final.

The word for turned again is literally the strepsō Greek. Repented. Repented. We know from later events how profoundly Peter repented of his failure.

But isn't this the most amazing thing? With God, our failures are not final. Think of King David. He failed because he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed.

But David's failure was not final. Think of Jonah. He failed because when he was commissioned to go to Nineveh, he took a ship in the opposite direction. But Jonah's failure was not final.

Think of the prodigal son, David preached about this a couple of Sunday nights ago in Jesus' parable. He ran away from his father and squandered his inheritance, but the prodigal son's failure was not final.

[13:23] And Peter, Peter denied his Lord three times, but Peter's failure was not final. With God, personal failure is never final. Don't you think this is the most marvelous thing?

With God, there's always a second chance and a third chance and a thousandth chance. If there wasn't, what hope would there be for any of us?

Perhaps that's one reason why so many prominent leaders having failed God don't come back.

They feel they failed them so badly that God wouldn't have them back. But they're wrong.

Our failure is never ultimate. Forgiveness is ultimate, not failure. There is no sin a Christian can commit that is unforgivable.

Perhaps you failed, and that's the reason you hold off from being more committed. Your failure is not final. It's not ultimate.

[14:28] As the hymn says, there's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's always a way back. Always. God is more ready for you to return to Him than you are to return.

He waits for you to return and when you have turned back. And then the fourth thing is what Jesus says. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

Strengthen your brothers. If failure is not final, neither is uselessness. Neither is uselessness.

Peter, having repented and been restored, has a job to do to strengthen his brothers, his fellow disciples.

He's to be their backbone, the rock upon which Christ will build His church. Peter is to take the leading role in preaching the gospel as he did on the day of Pentecost in the temple, as he did in writing his letters recorded in the New Testament, as he did in guiding Mark to write his gospel. God has a job for repentant failures. In fact, it may be that in the sovereignty of God, your usefulness after your failure may be greater than your usefulness if you'd never failed in the first place.

[15:59] Your usefulness to God after your failure may be greater than your usefulness to God if you'd never failed in the first place. because now at least you can testify to your own weakness and the grace of Christ in forgiving you when you didn't deserve it.

Sometimes, in fact, always, failures make the best workers for Christ. Failures make the best workers for Christ because the reality is we're all failures.

But God in His mercy uses us to grow His kingdom and His gospel. Is this not the message of the gospel in a nutshell? God's forgiveness for failures?

Jesus never died for successes. He died for failures. Didn't come for the healthy but for the sick.

You know, we might have spent many years away from God building up our own list of personal failures and personal messes but it's never too late to turn back to Him and experience for ourselves His forgiving and loving heart.

who knows what God's got in store for you and how many lives your story of forgiveness and restoration from failure might impact.

[17:18] Peter didn't stand for Christ when he was called upon to do so. He failed miserably and we shouldn't imitate Him in this. We should do all we can when put under pressure to stand up for Christ and not fail but we can imitate Peter in this.

He turned back. He was forgiven. He was restored. I think I see more of Peter in myself than any other disciple if for no other reason than this.

His failure was not ultimate. His fall was not ultimate. Forgiveness was ultimate.

God's mercy is greater than my weakness and God's grace is greater than my sin. Can you identify with this? And are you ready to turn back to Christ after your own personal failures?

Standing for Christ. Secondly, and more briefly, in verse 35 through 38, suffering for Christ. Now, Jesus has been with His disciples for three years.

[18:32] They travel the length and breadth of the land ministering, preaching. Overall, despite a few awkward moments and a little bit of opposition, it's been a time of relative peace.

There's been little or no violence directed against them, although, of course, John the Baptist was executed. But now that's all going to change. For three years, there's been peace.

But now the religious leaders are going to make their move. They're going to arrest Jesus, torture Jesus, crucify Jesus. Having completely failed to outmaneuver Jesus in argument, they're going to resort to violence.

Isn't this so contemporary? In our world today, Christians are the most persecuted group. They can't outmaneuver us in argument, so they just resort to violence.

Jesus is going to be torn apart. His body is going to be broken. His blood is going to be shed in the cruelest form of execution known to man. He will be, as he says, numbered with the transgressors, verse 37.

[19:44] In other words, he's going to be treated like a criminal. We're going to discover after the summer when we return to Luke's gospel, Jesus was crucified between two transgressors, between two criminals, numbered with them.

From that moment onwards, the religious leaders will turn their attention to Jesus' followers. With Jesus gone, Jesus' followers will become the targets for violence, persecution, and intimidation. They're going to suffer greatly for their faith in Jesus. They will be numbered among the transgressors. They will be treated as criminals. The religious leaders will hunt them down like dogs. Later on, we learn that Saul of Tarsus, one of the most religious of Pharisees, his entire job was to hunt down Christians, wherever he could find them, traveling as far away as Damascus in modern-day Syria, because he hated them so much.

And when he catches them, he throws them in prison, or even worse. Never mind Damascus. We learn from the book of Acts that Christians were exiled from their homes in Jerusalem, Judea, had to flee for safety to other countries in the Roman world.

[21:01] The apostle Peter will write his epistles, 1 and 2 Peter, to who he calls the elect exiles. Christians scattered over modern-day Turkey, exiled from Jerusalem, Judea, because of their faith in Jesus, in Acts itself, James, the brother of John, was the first apostle to be martyred.

And Annette read us this morning from Acts chapter 7, Stephen the deacon, stoned to death. That's going to be only the tip of the iceberg. Anyone associated with Jesus is going to be the target of persecution, hunted down, killed.

From now on, it's going to be a dangerous thing to be a follower of Jesus. It carries a health warning. Being a Christian is extremely bad for your health. When Jesus had sent them out on mission before, remember, they had taken nothing with them because they'd been richly provided for, largely because the local population were sympathetic to the message of the good news. But now, the local population, stirred up by religious leaders, will be against them. They will be welcomed to nowhere. They will find no safe refuge.

They will be offered no free meals. That's why Jesus says to them, now let the one who has a money bag take it, and likewise a knapsack. Followers of Jesus are going to be on their own, hated, rejected wherever they go, treated as criminals and traitors, hunted down, arrested.

[22:41] it. They're going to need to provide for themselves from now on, because they aren't going to be able to rely on the charity of the people. And then Jesus says something the disciples clearly misunderstood.

Let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. Now, this seems to go against everything Jesus stands for. Later on, when Jesus is arrested, he prohibits the use of violence by his disciples. What Jesus is doing here is warning his disciples, you are going to be the target of violence, be prepared for it. Again, in verse 38, when the disciple says, look, Lord, here are two swords, as if two swords are enough to start a rebellion, Jesus shuts them down and says, it is enough. Or in other words, stop it. swords are not what I am talking about. When Jesus talks about swords, he is referring to the kind of courage a sword brings, without having the sword itself. These disciples are going to suffer for their faith, they are going to need courage to suffer for their faith. They will receive this courage when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, but they will still need to be strong to defy the authorities of both Jerusalem and Rome.

[ 24 : 09 ] Jesus is telling his disciples, you are going to suffer for being a Christian. If I have suffered, so will you. According to church tradition, every single one of these disciples died a violent death as a martyr for Jesus.

Peter was probably the highest profile of them all. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. He refused to be crucified the right way up like his master Jesus had been.

He was martyred during the reign of the mad emperor Nero, near the present-day St. Peter's Basilica on Vatican Hill. Some of us have been there, I'm sure.

But before we conclude it's all darkness, let's remember what Jesus says in verse 37. For the scripture must be fulfilled in me, and he was numbered among the transgressors.

The death of Jesus the next day was redemptive because Jesus was taking the place of sinners like Peter, like James, like John, like us.

[ 25 : 28 ] Because of what Jesus did for us by taking our place upon the cross, being numbered with the transgressors, our salvation is assured. He died for us that our sins might be forgiven, and we might live forever with him in the glory of his presence.

For other religions, devotees suffer for their God in order to gain their salvation. For the Christian, our God suffered for us to gain our salvation.

Let me say that again, I want everyone to listen to this very, very carefully and seed it into your brain, especially when you hear of a terrorist attack against Jewish people where the perpetrator will say, I did this so I could gain salvation from my God.

For other religions, devotees suffer for their God. They martyr themselves for their God in order to gain their salvation.

If I martyr myself by killing these heathen, I will be given paradise. For the Christian, our God suffers for us to gain our salvation.

[ 26 : 43 ] Even in the darkest of sufferings to which the disciples will be exposed, there is a greater light which will give them courage, bravery, and a backbone. As Christians, we should not be surprised at what we have to suffer.

Of course, some of these sufferings are natural to us as human beings after all. Why should we be exempt from the sufferings common to everyone else? But some of these sufferings will come upon us because we are disciples of Christ.

When we do remember this, it is a privilege to suffer for Jesus. Because as we suffer for Jesus, we also suffer with Jesus.

We share in the fellowship of his sufferings. Are you being laughed at for being a Christian? Are you being discriminated against, belittled, the target of jokes?

You are where these disciples were all those years ago, and you share fellowship with them just as you share fellowship with our Lord. Take courage, because just as Jesus was with them, he is with you.

[ 27 : 50 ] Christ, our Savior, who suffered for us to bring us to God and promise us his salvation. If we choose in our suffering to look down, all we will see is mud.

But if we choose in our suffering to look up, we will see Christ in all his majesty, and we will experience new levels of fellowship with him. There will be times of failure for us when the suffering becomes too much, the pressure becomes too much, the temptation becomes too much, and we will buckle, as it was for Peter.

But as we've seen, there is forgiveness for failures and opportunities for failures. When we cannot suffer with Christ or even stand for Christ, there is forgiveness, there is restoration for us.

And yet, surely this is our hope and our vision, that given what Jesus has done by dying for us on the cross, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in full awareness that our Savior prays for us, we will stand for him and we will suffer with him.

Do you have faith in Jesus? Are you willing to give up the life you now have in order to live in the grace of the gospel?

[ 29 : 15 ] Have you noticed that we live in a cancel culture? Failure is ultimate, but with Jesus forgiveness is ultimate.

There ain't no such thing as a cancel culture with him. Do you not want this, Jesus? The Jesus who willingly gave his life for sinful people like us.

He stood for us. He suffered for us. And by faith in him today, we shall resolve to stand for him and to suffer with him.

let us pray. Lord, how we thank you for the uniqueness of the message of Christianity in the gospel. For in every other religion, we see it in our newspapers on a daily basis. Devotees suffer and martyr themselves in order to gain their salvation.

[ 30 : 14 ] For as the gospel tells us, that you suffered and martyred yourself for us, to gain our salvation. And Lord, we want to pray and ask that you would stiffen our backbones, that we may stand for you and suffer with you, but also remind us, O God, that by your grace and your mercy, there is forgiveness for failures.

In Jesus' name, Amen.