

His Adversary and his Advocate

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[0 : 00] I'm going to look this evening at the section there from verse 31 down to verse 34. We'll just read through these verses again. That's Luke 22, reading at verse 31.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthened your brothers.

Peter said to him, Lord, I am 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 three times that you know me.

Now the four Gospels actually tell us about Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny him. The threefold denial of Peter is mentioned in each of these four Gospels.

But only in Luke do we find something that lay behind it that we need to take account of from this passage that the other writers don't mention. Only Peter mentions the satanic element that led to his downfall.

[1 : 15] Only Luke mentions how the Lord spoke to Peter and predicted this downfall in a way that showed him that part of what was happening, although unseen by him, was that Satan had desired to have them, as we'll see, it's a plural, yet that the Lord had prayed for Peter so that he would be the means of strengthening his brothers, his fellow disciples, once he had come through this crisis in his life.

In other words, we're reminded that the Christian life is much more than just our own inner struggles, and there are many of those struggles for every one of us.

And the Christian life is more than our struggle just against the elements that we see that are opposed to us as we seek to live a life pleasing to God.

We obviously know of certain challenges from those who do not want that sort of lifestyle and are especially opposed to Christ's church and to Christ's name and to Christ's people.

The Christian life is more than that too. It's not just that we are engaged in a fight ourselves with our own sin, with the world around us, with the evil that you see in the world around you.

[2 : 45] There is, in fact, also, in addition to that, a fight over us. There is in the unseen world of spirits that we have just a little glimpse into here in the words of the Lord.

There is a constant engagement between the intercession of Jesus Christ for his people and the aims and the purposes of Satan who seeks to destroy them.

We're coming to see here in the Lord's prediction of what's going to happen in Peter's life a short time from now. We're coming to see into what we can call that heavenly courtroom where the Lord's intercession counteracts the aspirations and the requests of Satan as he seeks to get at God's people.

It's Peter's adversary and Peter's advocate that we find in these verses. His adversary, Satan, and his advocate, Jesus.

And how the advocacy of Jesus, thanks be to God, always, always, is set above the adversary, Satan.

[4 : 10] Always outdoes the adversary's plans. So we're taken into this courtroom, if you like. We're getting a glimpse into what happens in that unseen world where Satan enters his requests and where God permits, overrules, controls, everything even to that extent.

Hugh Martin, one of the great theologians of the past, said this about this heavenly courtroom, this place where in heaven all of these transactions take place.

In this court, every sinner appears when he returns as a prodigal penitent to his father. Here, every act of confession is transacted, every deed of forgiveness given forth.

Here, every sorrow and agony of the spiritual heart is detailed, and every application made of divine healing. Here, all the threads of salvation's history meet.

Here, every life that is hid with Christ in God has all his movements undergoing continual revelation. It is here, therefore, that the angels look on and study church history.

[5 : 27] Here, where no mists can conceal and no mistakes occur. Here, in this court of grace, where the manifold wisdom of God in bringing many sons to glory under the captain of their salvation is glorified continually.

It's a fairly long quote, and rather Victorian in its language, but what it's saying is hugely important. Nothing happens that does not appear in this courtroom of God for him to administer the lives of his people, the history of the world, the course of his church.

So let's look at these two points. Peter's adversary, looking at Satan's intention. And secondly, Peter's advocate, looking at Christ's intercession.

Here is Jesus coming to him and saying, Simon, Simon. He's been talking to, speaking to all of them up to now in regard to answering this dispute that was amongst them, which of them was to be the greatest.

But now, as Luke puts it here, he turns immediately to Simon as an individual and says, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you a sweet.

[6 : 46] Now you see, first of all, Satan is asking permission. That's really what is meant by the word demanded. It doesn't mean that Satan can have his way as he comes to speak to God.

He does do this. He does, as the book of Job shows us. He is able to make certain requests of God, to ask God for leave to do certain things.

And God in his sovereignty sometimes allows for that, sometimes gives him the kind of request that he sets in or demands as it's put here.

But it's Satan seeking his own aims, cannot carry out his own aims, except as these are, first of all, placed before the Lord, before God the King.

And he cannot carry anything out, except by the express will of God.

[7 : 44] He has his own aims, his own actions. He has his own purpose in what he's seeking in regard to these disciples and in regard to Peter. That is Satan's strategy.

That is Satan's plan. That is Satan's purpose. Satan has demanded, he's put in his request to have you all that he might sift you like wheat. But his request and his aims and his purpose are firmly within God's plan and God's greater purpose.

And you know, tonight you and I can take huge comfort from that. Because we know from Scripture that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

And that may tonight be, as indeed in a sense it should be, something that would cause us alarm, something that would certainly cause us to take note and to be on our guard.

But nothing of that happens out with God's overall control. Nothing of that happens without God's express permission or will.

[8 : 52] evil. And if Satan asks for something that God does not wish to give, he will not have it.

He cannot do it. We are not tonight under the control of evil. The world tonight, difficult though it may be at times to believe it, is not under the control of evil.

Evil exists there. Evil to a certain extent has its way, even as its own purpose there. Satan is very busy in the world that we belong to. But the control belongs to the throne, to the one to whom his requests are made.

And there's our comfort in that. Because that's the control that governs our lives in this world.

And he has this purpose in the request. Simon, Simon, behold, Satan requested or demanded ask permission to have you that he might sift you like wheat.

[10 : 01] Now you need to understand that the word you there is plural. Satan demanded to have you plural that he might sift you plural like wheat.

In other words, what he has in mind is this group of disciples, this little church of Jesus that is presently there gathered together and following the Lord.

He has demanded to have you. He wants access to you. He wants permission to come in amongst you and sift you like wheat. Well, you know what that's like. When you see grain being thrown up in the air, especially if it's to separate the chaff from it in the old-fashioned style of things, there's a sifting going on.

There's a carrying out of a movement that shakes and scatters and that is Satan's purpose and that is Satan's plan constantly.

He's looking into this gathering here tonight, just as he is into the gatherings of God's people on a daily basis with this intention, with this purpose, because that is what his aim is.

[11:08] The power that Satan exercises, that he's given leave to exercise, the purpose that he has himself is a purpose diametrically opposed to the purpose of grace.

Grace mends, grace heals, grace brings together what was broken. The grace and the love of God gathers, it unites, it mends, it puts together broken lives.

And Satan's intention and Satan's purpose is the opposite of that. It's to destroy, it's to break up, it's to overturn, it's to weaken, it's to disrupt. You can see how totally opposed the adversary and the advocate are in their purpose.

His purpose is to undo, to overturn, to break up. And it's always so. It's always so.

And that's why so many times in the Bible we're taught to pray that God will keep us and that God will guard our feet, our tongues, our thoughts, our conversations, our relationships.

[12:27] Because it's certainly the case that this evil power is seeking to make inroads into the church of God and his purpose is to disrupt, to weaken, to overthrow.

And it seems that we're very much aware of that in the world of our day when there is so much abroad of these powers of darkness. When we see so much happening as you probably saw this week itself, just to pick out that one terrible activity of human trafficking.

When that itself has so much evil built into it in all that takes place and these poor people, when they're caught up in this sometimes, through no fault of their own, they're desperate people very often in poverty somewhere in Eastern Europe mostly it seems.

And they're caught up in this terrible network of evil, promised great things, promised a much better life and they end up with prostitution, drug addiction, sex slaves.

And so little of that is known to us. We've shielded from it. But it's the purpose of the evil one to actually get at people to break their lives further.

[13:52] And that's his purpose with the church as well. Why does Jesus focus on Peter as an individual? Here he is saying, Simon, Satan has desired you all that he might sift you all.

That's his purpose to get at you all. But I have prayed for you. And that's you singular. Why is Peter being singled out by Jesus when it's the case, as he said, that Satan's desire to have them all?

He wants to sift them all. So why is Peter being singled out by Jesus to say, but I have prayed for you that your faith doesn't fail? Well, it seems, and we'll see in a minute, that's much more clearly specified later on.

But we'll see that it's actually Satan's intention to use Peter as a door into the flock of Jesus. He's seeking to use Peter if he can get at him and get him to fall.

That will give him access into the rest of the flock or the rest of the church at the time to actually sift and to scatter and to disrupt.

[15:00] That's his intention. That's his purpose. So the Lord, knowing that, as we'll see in a minute, is actually well ahead of Satan. And so he's saying, I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

Now, of course, that is a warning sign, isn't it, to ourselves? Because Satan is constantly looking for doors into the church of God.

He's constantly looking for ways by which he can gain access to disrupt the fellowship of God's people. Not just for ourselves individually to have our own lives in turmoil, to have our own hearts turned upside down, but to have the cause of Christ weakened and to have, in the ways that he can do, use certain events, certain people, ourselves, yourselves, as a means of access into the church of God.

God. And so that's why Jesus is praying specifically for Peter, because as Satan has him in his sights, as his adversary, all the more so Jesus has him in his sights, as his advocate.

The one thing that is certain to counteract the adversary's purpose is the prayer of the intercession of Jesus. That's what Peter is being told.

[16:33] This, he says, is what Satan's aim is. That's his request. But I have prayed for you. And that brings us to Peter's advocate, Christ's intercession.

As we said, Peter is being told this, but also now seeing that actually the Lord is a step ahead of Satan all the time. Notice what he's saying. Satan has desire to have you all, but I have prayed for

you.

And the language that's used there in the original text of the New Testament there in Greek is actually what people who know the grammar tell us is actually a complete tense.

I prayed for you. It's not I am praying for you. It's not I will pray for you, but I prayed for you in the sense in which that prayer is now complete.

I have done it. It's complete. And because it's complete, it gives us the sense that Christ's prayer is absolutely and perfectly adequate to counteract the aims and the purpose of Satan.

[17 : 45] And you're thankful for that tonight. It's not an intercessor that partially remembers you and partially prays for you that you have in heaven, but one whose prayer before God is utterly complete on your behalf and for your protection.

I prayed for you. And it's going on all the time. This completeness of Jesus' prayer is something that is always the case for every single Christian in all their concerns, in all the attacks made upon them. Whatever you have tonight as you see yourself at times being tempted, being drawn aside to depart from the Lord, to follow other means than what God has actually set out for you, to stop coming to church, to whatever it is that will bring you away from the Lord, that is already countered by the complete prayer of Jesus.

you don't find your confidence in your own ability to keep going. You don't find your confidence in your own prayers. You don't find your confidence in the support even of other Christians, great though that is.

Your confidence is in the intercession of Christ, in the completeness, in the perfectness of that intercession. And we understand elsewhere from Scripture, from 1 John especially, chapter 2, where he says, My dear brothers, my dear children, I have written to you these things so that you may not sin.

[19 : 22] It's a guidance document, if you like, that he was writing in that first epistle so that those who received it would say, well, we have to be determined to turn our backs to sin and no longer to sin.

But he said, if anyone does sin, knowing full well that we would sin, that they would sin, it's impossible to walk perfectly even though you desire with all your heart not to sin, you still sin.

But if anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one, and he is the propitiation for our sins.

A big theological word, propitiation, meaning the means by which, the one by which God's wrath has been turned away from his people and taken by Jesus to himself.

In other words, you advocate tonight as a Christian, as the Lord is your interceding, as your intercessor in heaven, interceding for you. What is his case?

[20 : 22] What is his argument in your support? What is it you're depending upon when you depend on the intercession of Christ? You're depending on his complete work of atonement that has God's pleasure written all over it, and God's acceptance written all over it.

Tonight the devil will come and say, you're not a Christian. look at the things that are wrong in your life. How can you be a Christian? The Lord will point out other people and will point you, other people to you and say, well, look at what's in their life.

That's terrible. How can they be Christians when certain flaws like that obviously appear in their lives? Where is our hope? Where is our confidence situated? It's in this.

It's in Christ's intercession. salvation because he takes flawed people like you and I and he brings them into his salvation, which includes his ongoing intercession for them.

I prayed for you. I have a complete intercession for you, Peter, that your faith does not fail.

[21 : 39] You see, that's what he's focusing on just now. I prayed for you that your faith may not fail. Now you go ahead a little bit and you see where Peter came to deny Jesus from verse 54 onwards.

God willing, we'll look at that passage as we go on further into the life of Peter. And you might look at that passage and say, well, how could Jesus have said that he prayed that Peter's faith would not fail?

Surely his faith failed there. Does that mean that Christ's intercession isn't successful after all? Well, the word failed here really means that your faith may not utterly run out, that it may not come to be emptied completely.

Peter would fail. His weak faith would give way, but it wouldn't be destroyed. run out altogether, not even when he denied the Lord three times, because the Lord prayed for him, that his faith would not fail, would not run out, would not empty itself completely and be no more.

God would you and I need our faith strengthened, don't we? You're going to meet with many things in your life for which you need faith, and not only that, but for which you need your faith to be strengthened, and for you to be made strong through that faith by which you trust in Jesus Christ.

[23 : 16] How is your faith strengthened? How do you strengthen your faith? What do you look to as the primary means of strengthening your faith?

Well, there are many means that Christ gives us, including being here this evening and being under his word, and prayer as we have the facility and the privilege of praying to him. But the one thing we must never leave out because it's absolutely underlying everything else is Christ's intercession.

I have prayed for you that your faith does not fail, and it's to that intercession that we look tonight.

We come to Jesus with our failures, with the knowledge that we have not been what we should have been today and every day of our lives.

We come to Jesus with a sense of our own inadequacy, with our sin to confess to him, with our imperfections, and we say, Lord, Lord, I'm thankful I have more than my own ability to strengthen my faith.

I'm thankful that I can rely on your intercession for me, on your prayer for me, on your remembrance of me. So, Lord, please strengthen my faith.

[24 : 38] Give me stronger faith. Give me deeper faith. give me more of that sense of being grounded in yourself and in your intercession.

I have prayed, and isn't this amazing too, he's saying Satan's desire to have you all, he's saying that this was his intention, but I have prayed for you, because as Satan had meant to use Peter as the door into the rest of the disciples, this is counteracted by Jesus, specifically praying for Peter, having prayed for Peter.

Doesn't that really humble you? Doesn't that really humble you, that you think of yourself tonight as a Christian, and you have every right to think of yourself as a Christian, as you've come to trust in the Lord, as the Lord has given you to know himself?

But here you are, and here I am, poor, stammering, struggling souls, and tonight it's humbling to realize that he remembers me, that in all that he has to do in his intercession tonight, in his ministry from heaven, he focuses upon me, and upon you, and upon the individual Christians that seek his help, that come to him with their confessions and their struggles, and oh, what a relief and what a comfort it is that Christ in his voice through the scripture is saying, assuringly to you and to me as Christians, I pray it for you.

I pray it for you because I know your circumstances. I pray it for you because I know what's coming for you, because I know the future as well as the past. I pray it for you because I have been where you have been, and I know what it is you're facing, and I pray it for you especially as you face temptation, and as you know the power of Satan, and the attempts of evil to bring you aside from following me, Jesus is saying, I pray it for you, I pray it for you specifically.

[26 : 58] You know, when you go out that door tonight, don't forget that you're leaving with this confirmation of scripture in your ears and in your mind, as a Christian, I rejoice tonight that Jesus remembers me, and that he'll never forget me, and that I'll never be outside his intercession, not for a single moment of my life.

I prayed for you. and you see something remarkable happening here.

As Jesus says to Peter, I have prayed for you that your faith does not fail, and when you have recovered again, when you've turned again, strengthen your brothers.

You see, you put that against the intention and the purpose and the aim of Satan. What was it? to scatter these brethren of Peter, to actually undo what had happened in their lives if he could, to just smash up their confidence and to disrupt them as a church of Jesus.

What's happening now with the intercession, through the intercession, because of the intercession? I've prayed for you that your faith may not fail, Peter, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

[28 : 17] You see, there is Satan, he's got his eyes on Peter, this is my door in amongst these believers, I'm really going to have my way with them, I'm going to sift them like wheat, I'm going to tear them apart, I'm going to disrupt them, I'm going to actually just get in amongst them and do my utmost.

And here is Jesus saying, no you're not. Because I have prayed for this one person that you were seeking to be a door into the flock. And instead of being a door to their disruption, he's going to be an instrument of their strengthening.

I prayed for you, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. You see, it's being reversed as he takes Peter into that.

He's all the more equipped to strengthen his fellow believers, having come through this lapse that's described in his denial, and it's not something that's in any way to be seen lightly.

Jesus didn't treat it like that. But you see, under the overall control of God and of Christ himself, what Satan had intended to be a smashing up of the church, actually ends up in its strengthening.

[29 : 44] When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. See, friends, what we learn from our failures as we must, my failure, your failure individually, when you bring that to God, one of your concerns is, Lord, show me how I can use this.

Show me how I can help other people from what I have learned from my own failure. Strengthen, he says, your brethren, your sisters in the Lord. We have to put what we learn from our failures to success in the gospel, to success in the church of God.

And not only so, but very importantly, connected to that, God, you must never write off any type of person like Peter who's fallen, who's denied the Lord, the lapsed, the failed, the fallen.

We don't write them off. We don't say in judgment over them. Isn't that terrible? What a waste of a life.

what a terrible thing for a Christian to do. His fellow disciples didn't do that with Peter.

[31 : 10] If there's one place in the whole universe where the fallen and the lapsed and the failed can find recovery and reintegration and re-contribution, it should be within the church of Christ.

that's the whole purpose of our having to care for one another, to tend to one another's needs, to look out for one another, to help people who have fallen back onto their feet.

That's what was true with Peter. When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. In other words, they were not to write him off. They were not to turn their back on him.

They were not to refuse fellowship with him. They were not to say about Peter, look what he's done. He can't be part of our group anymore.

In fact, it was to be the opposite. It was to be this Peter who turned out to be one of the great teachers and leaders of the church, as you see in the book of Acts.

[32 : 21] And that's how we must be. that's what the church ought always to be like. It's not sadly always like that. And where it's not, we have to attend to that.

We have to correct that. We have to put it right. Because there should be no better support network in existence than Christ's people are to one another and to others.

I prayed for you that your faith does not fail and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. But we're ending on an ominous note. Peter said to him, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

Jesus said to him, I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you deny three times that you know me. You go back to Matthew's gospel, to a similar passage, chapter 26, verse 33.

You can read it for yourselves afterwards. But there you see Jesus again predicting or telling the disciples that they were all going to forsake him. And here's Peter turning to him and saying, Lord, though all of these should forsake you, though all they should forsake you, yet I will never forsake you.

[33 : 40] What's he doing? He's putting himself above the rest, isn't he? He's saying, yes, I understand, Lord, they might forsake you. I understand how they might forsake you indeed, like you've said, but I will never do that.

And his self-confidence is a warning to us as well, because here it is combined with his self-confidence a failure to listen to the word of Jesus.

That's a fatal combination. confidence in himself, sense of superiority, and he's not really listening to what Jesus is saying.

And so Jesus reinforces it. I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day till you deny three times that you know me. let me just ask this question of myself, first of all.

As I have preached the gospel tonight to you, have I been listening to Jesus? Have I really been listening to the voice of Christ speaking to myself?

[34 : 55] Because if not, then I've not acted rightly. have you been listening to the voice of Jesus? You've been listening to me, a mere human being.

But there's a much more important question than whether you've been listening to the preacher. Have you really been listening to Jesus himself?

That's such a vital question. Because if we're not listening to him, we're on dangerous ground, as Peter would find out.

But let's leave the study on a positive note. Christ, in his intercession, far outweighs Satan as your adversary.

And tonight, be confident in Jesus. Rejoice in Jesus. live out the rest of your life, knowing that Jesus' intercession, Jesus' complete work of atonement, is all you need to put you right with God, and to keep you right with God, for all eternity.

[36 : 18] Let's pray. gracious God, we give thanks that we come from your word to learn so much about yourself and about ourselves.

And we thank you that you give us especially to learn of our need to be confident and trusting in you. We thank you when all our own resources are seen so obviously to be inadequate for looking after our own lives.

we thank you Lord that we can turn to you and at every step of our way through life come and seek that you would reassure us that without trust in you we are indeed safe and have you as our refuge. Bless us here we pray this evening. Bless us we pray when Satan comes to seek to entice us away from you and away from following you and being true to you.

Protect us Lord our God. grant that you would shield us around with your power and help us to be thankful for your wisdom and for your superior control of all the things of our lives.

[37 : 27] Grant that in all of these things we may be further encouraged to serve you to glorify your great name in all the opportunities you give us to be followers of Christ.

Hear us we pray for his name's sake. Amen. Let's conclude our worship tonight. We're singing tonight finally in Psalm 25.

Psalm number 25 that's the first version on page 232. And we're singing the last four verses of that Psalm.

Psalm 25 version 1 page 232 from verse 17. My heart's griefs are increased me from distress relieve. See mine affliction and my pain and all my sins forgive.

To the end of the Psalm let uprightness and truth keep me who thee attend. Redemption Lord to Israel from all his troubles send.

[38 : 29] Verses 17 to 22 to God's praise. My heart's great, silent peace, May from distress relief See my affliction and my pain And all my sins forgive Consider thou my foes Becomes in many hour And did thou prove the weight that it is

Which they against me bear O do thou keep my soul Do thou deliver me And let me ever be ashamed Because I trust in thee Let a brightness untrue Keep me through thee attend Redemption, Lord, to Israel

From all his troubles If you please let me get to the main door after the benediction Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more Amen Hmm