

Get Ready to be Shaken! **Insights from a Conversation with Peter**

Intro: It was the last night of Jesus' life. He and the disciples had gathered to observe the Passover. Here in the very shadow of the cross, He could see that the disciples were unprepared for what was about to happen. Sure, they had confessed Him as the Christ; but they knew so little of what His kingdom was all about. Again and again He had corrected them for quarreling with each other about who would be greatest in the kingdom. Their faith was too weak; and their self-confidence too strong.

And again, that very night, the quarrel was renewed over who would be greatest in the kingdom. Was it Peter's voice that dominated the conversation? Had he come to believe that he led the group in courage and closeness to the Master? Matthew says he vocalized these ideas in a sweeping claim of superiority:

"Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away" (Mt. 26:33).

What do you say to a guy like that? Jesus knew just what to say. Let's study his words to Peter together:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. (Luke 22:31–32)

In Jesus' conversation with Peter we can get insight into the battle that goes on between the Lord and Satan for souls. In the first half of the verse we see:

Satan's Malevolent Purpose

Simon, Simon

These name repetitions occur frequently in Scripture. Stuart calls them "repetitions of endearment." Jesus really cared about Peter; but one can only imagine that his words were also an expression of pity, of exasperation, of disappointment in how Peter was conducting himself. Peter did not realize the spirit he was manifesting. Pride is much easier seen in the others than in ourselves. We too need to beware!

Satan has demanded permission to sift you as wheat

What Peter needed to know is that if there was any validity to his claims of superior spirituality, it made the devil all the more eager to bring him down! Note three things about Satan's malevolent purpose Satan had to ask!

The word here is an intensive form of the word meaning "to ask for" something or someone.

Jesus' words may evoke memories of the first chapters of the book of Job, where Satan approaches God with accusations that

Job serves Him for all the material benefits he has received from God. God grants his request to afflict Job in order to test whether his accusations are correct. So apparently Satan wanted to do to Peter.

It is encouraging to know that Satan is not more powerful than God nor can he act without God's permission. He can only do what God allows. We need not fear being tested beyond our strength (1 Cor. 10:13); but expect to be tested!

He wanted shake Peter's faith.

He wanted to "sift" Peter as wheat.

The picture here is derived from an ancient procedure to separating chaff from wheat. The farmer would place the pulverized wheat and shake it vigorously in a sieve. As a result the chaff would rise to the top and the heavier wheat would fall to the bottom of the sieve (See Amos 9:9). It is then blown away as the shaking continues.

What the devil was about to do to Peter and what he wants to do to all of us is to violently shake us to the point that we surrender our commitment to God and dishonor Him. He wants to separate every ounce of good from us he can.

He wanted to destroy Peter and those around him.

Satan wanted Peter for the same reason he wants all men.

We are creatures made to serve and obey God; and he fights against that with all his might. He will not rest until every one of us is in league with his evil purposes in rebellion against God.

Satan wanted Peter because of who he could take with him.

If Peter had the influence he claimed, then indeed he could be the means by which others were made to stumble.

Satan is smart; he knows that if he can persuade parents to be worldly he can get the children effortlessly! If he can capture the church's leaders, it will provide the occasion for many a church member to become discouraged and quit.

Satan wanted Peter because of what it would do to Jesus.

Think of the effect Peter's denial had on Jesus (Lk. 22:60). The effect on Peter is clear; but how it must have broken the heart of the Savior to hear a man who had confessed Him as the Christ now deny that he even knew Him!

Satan wants us for all the same reasons.

Peter like us might have been terrified at the prospects of being turned over to Satan for testing; but there is another side to the story. We see not only Satan's malevolent purpose; we also see:

Jesus' Benevolent Provision

I have prayed for you...

Jesus wanted Peter to know that Satan was not the only one asking God for something. He was asking for something too; the "I" is emphatic in Greek.

It is assuring to know that the Lord is for us; and that what He did on earth, He still does in heaven, interceding for His people.

He is asking the Father to supply all that we need overcome whatever trial we face.

...that your faith may not fail.

The critical issue in our trials is faith. Will we keep believing what God has said to us? Will we keep honoring the guidelines he has given for our good? Will we be content to trust His promises rather than yield to temptation to avoid the immediate pain of resisting?

"Fail" is from a word meaning here to "fail or die out." It's the Greek word from which we get our English word "eclipse." In our times of darkness, our faith must still shine; we must not let it die out.

By the way, this is the reason why we need to be attending the services, and studying from day to day. Our faith is proportionate to our knowledge and application of God's word. All too often our faith is eclipsed by trial because we neglect to prepare by developing our faith.

And you, when once you have turned again...

Interestingly, Jesus knew that Peter would fail. He did not say this to encourage him to do so; but to perhaps to shock Peter back to reality. And in the event of Peter's failure it would reveal the Lord's gracious spirit toward the fallen.

When you are "converted." (KJV) Hendrikson offers this suggestive definition "when you retrace your steps." Peter would have to repent of his grievous error and make things right with the Lord to be forgiven; and the Lord anticipated that he would.

God knows that at times our faith will fail us. He tells us this not to give us permission to sin; but rather to affirm his grace toward us as sinning people. He wants us to get up when we fall.

I can't think of but one thing worse than being warned of a mud hole and falling into it anyway; that is, having fallen in, to wallow there in the mire rather than get cleaned up and go on doing what we ought!

Or once having been cleaned up, go jump back in the mud hole!

...Strengthen your brethren.

Peter would find in the painful embarrassment of denying the Lord, the humility to recognize that he needed the Lord's strength, the help of others, and that others needed him. The fallen person can often help people who are discouraged or are fallen to get up and do better.

A part of our own recovery from sin is learning to care about and help others. Rather than wallowing in self-pity, acting as if God can't or won't forgive us, we need to get busy helping other people avoid the mistakes we have made.

The Outcome of the Struggle

We know that Peter did indeed have his time to be shaken. Satan rocked his world! And you know that Peter didn't take to heart the warning the Lord had given him. He persisted in his self-confidence; and found himself unprepared for the shaking that soon came.

Satan applied the pressure from people of power coupled with the fear of the consequences of confessing Christ; and Peter buckled under the load. The man who boasted of his superior loyalty and courage to die with the Lord could not find enough of them to say, "I know Jesus; and I'm His disciple." It was a very painful time.

Yet the Lord graciously forgave him; and Peter got up from his failure, retraced his steps, and did indeed strengthen his brethren.

An Application to Us

There's a lot we can learn from Peter's experience:

Expect to be shaken in Satan's seive!

Everywhere you look you can see sieves shaking! Problems, prosperity, pressure from outside sources. You too with be in Satan's cross hairs. Get ready to be shaken!

Take comfort in knowing that he has to ask; and that God has placed limitations on him.

Know that the Lord is interceding for you! That He is providing the help you need to overcome. And add your own prayer along with His for grace and strength to overcome.

Stand firm; but if like Peter you make a mistake, repent and retrace your steps, and learn from your mistakes.

Start doing what you can to help others.

Conclusion: Maybe you have already relived Peter's story. There is hope, if you will repent and make things right with the Lord.