

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

Yves I-Bing Cheng, M.D., M.A.

Based on sermons of Pastor Eric Chang

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SATAN DEMANDED TO HAVE YOU (1)

Luke 22:31-34

When a person makes the decision to follow Jesus in baptism, something totally new happens at the spiritual level. He becomes united with Christ. This spiritual and somewhat mystical union brings that person into the realities of the spiritual world. And part of the spiritual realities that a disciple will have to face is the destructive power of Satan, the devil's desire to destroy whoever he can get. The apostle Peter gives us this warning in 1Peter 5:8: *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* Any believer can be the object of Satan's attacks.

We will turn our attention today to a passage that speaks about this very thing. Luke 22:31-34. This is what Jesus says to Peter.

Luke 22:31. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."

33 And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

34 He said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me."

Your faith might fail

This passage contains some extremely important spiritual principles that we need to learn if we are to grow spiritually.

Notice how Jesus speaks to Peter. *Simon, Simon.* A double Simon. Right there, we have the intuitive feeling that we are dealing with a very serious situation. A double Simon stresses the gravity of what the Lord Jesus is about to say to Simon and concerning Simon. We can compare that to Luke 13:34 where Jesus said, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...* There He repeats 'Jerusalem' twice as He was about to tell His disciples that Jerusalem will be destroyed. *Your house is left to you desolate* (Luke 13:35). When Jesus repeats something, it means that He is going to say something very serious. And here we discover that Peter's faith is at stake. That is why it is so serious. *I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.*

The situation is very serious because Peter's faith is in danger of failing. 'That your faith may not fail.' Fail? To what extent? This word 'fail' (*ekleipo*) is a very strong word. It means 'to cease, to stop, to come to an end.' It is a word that Jesus used in the Parable of the Shrewd Steward. He said in Luke 16:9, *Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails*

(*ekleipo*) they may receive you into the eternal habitations. Make friends by means of mammon, so that when it fails, i.e., when money comes to an end, when money runs out, when it ceases to exist.

‘I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, that it may not come to an end, that it may not cease to exist.’ Jesus prayed for Peter because he was very concerned that Peter’s faith might collapse completely. In fact, all the apostles were in danger of collapsing.

Now notice this. Having said, ‘that your faith may not fail,’ Jesus immediately goes on to say, when you **have turned again**, strengthen your brethren. This verb ‘turn again (*epistrepho*)’ is used elsewhere to speak of conversion. We see that in Acts 3:19: *Repent therefore and be converted (epistrepho), that your sins may be blotted out...* So ‘when you have turned again’ means ‘when you have repented and turned around again.’ It implies a falling that is so bad that it needed a turning back, virtually a conversion.

The Lord foresaw the enormous danger and He said, ‘When you turn around again, strengthen your brethren because they too are in great danger.’ ‘Strengthen (*sterizo*)’ is a word that is used in Revelation 3:1-3 and applied to something that is on the verge of dying. Jesus says to the church in Sardis, *You have the name of being alive, and you are dead. Awake, and strengthen (sterizo) what remains and is on the point of death.* Your spiritual life is basically dead. You must take action to strengthen it.

That is how bad the situation could be with Peter’s faith. It was a critical moment and Peter understands it. Immediately, he goes on to say in v. 33, *Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.* Peter understands that under the pressure which will soon arise, his commitment to Jesus might not stand. And he wants to give Jesus the assurance of his faithfulness. ‘I’m totally committed to you, Lord. I’m ready to go with you to prison. And if that’s not enough, I’m ready to die for you.’

But Jesus knows the severity of the situation and He knows Peter. He knows that Peter’s commitment is not quite as strong as he thinks. Jesus is not denying his sincerity, but he is concerned that his commitment might not be strong enough to face the coming pressure. ‘Peter, I know that you are sincerely willing to follow me to prison and to death. But you know, before the rooster crows today, you would have said three times that you don’t know me.’ Peter did not face death. He did not even go near a prison. He only met a servant woman and his whole commitment collapsed right there. ‘Hey, didn’t I see you with Jesus?’ the woman said. And Peter said, ‘Jesus? Who is Jesus? I have never heard of him.’ Suddenly, the words ‘I will follow you to prison and to death’ seemed to have disappeared!

Here is a lesson for us. We may have the sincere and deep conviction, when we reflect on our commitment, that we can stand prison and if necessary, even stand death for the sake of Christ. But when the test comes, we may not be as strong as we think that we are. However, all is not lost. There is hope. We are not alone. Jesus will take into account the sincerity of our commitment, and He will pray for us so that in the hour of trial, we may be knocked down, but we will not be knocked out, just like in Peter’s case.

Satan demanded to have you

Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat. The first ‘you’ and the second ‘you’ are in the plural. Satan did not just ask for Peter. He wanted all the disciples. He wanted all of them so that he could sift them like wheat. And he was persistently demanding to have them.

The verb ‘demand’ is in the middle. As you know in Greek, there is the active, the passive and the middle. The middle generally means to ask something for oneself. It has a sort of reflective meaning. Satan has demanded to have the disciples for himself. He wants them in his power. He wants them in his possession so that he can sift them.

The action of sifting the wheat from the chaff is used here as an imagery that describes Satan's intention to challenge the integrity of the disciples. Satan was asking God, 'You say that these men are faithful to you? Really? Please, allow me to put them in my little sifter. And when I'm finished with them, you see if they are still committed to you.'

The precedent for this is of course the whole account of Job. Job was a very good man. He was an example of piety. One day, Satan decided to challenge God, 'This guy worships you, of course! You pat him on the back all the time. You feed him with a silver spoon. You keep increasing his flock. You give him many sons and daughters. You do so much for him. I mean, who wouldn't follow you after receiving all that? If you give me the possibility to test him, I will show you that Job does not love you as much as he seems to show.'

Even though it was unpleasant to hear, Satan had a point, and God could not deny that. God said, 'OK, you may take him. Do whatever you want. Just don't take his life.'

So Satan goes to work on Job. And he does a very thorough job. No stone is left unturned. Everything that Job holds dear starts failing: his wealth, his children, his health, even his marriage. His wife said, 'What is the use of worshipping a God like this? Our house is destroyed. Our cattle is gone. Our sons and daughters are dead. And look at yourself! Your health is gone. What a disgrace! And you still want to worship God? Curse Him and die!' Satan continued to sift Job, but as we know, Job refused to give up.

It is the same approach that Satan has in our passage. 'This bunch of fishermen, they say they are your disciples? They say they are going to follow you to prison and to death? Really? Let me put my finger on these guys, and you will see if they are that committed after all.' *Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat.*

The word 'Satan' comes from a Hebrew word which means 'adversary.' He is our adversary in the spiritual life in general. There is also an aspect of the biblical teaching where Satan is our adversary in the court of law. As you know, in the court of law, there are basically three players. There is a judge who will hear and decide a case. Then there is the defense lawyer. He will plead your case. His role is to defend you. And there is the prosecutor, or the accuser. He is the one who is representing your enemy. He will bring his accusation against you, and your lawyer, your advocate as it is called in the Bible, will try to defend you, to win your case. If he fails, then the case goes against you. You may be fined or imprisoned. In this analogy, Satan is the prosecutor, the accuser, the attacker. He comes to God and says, 'This person has transgressed the law. He has committed this particular sin. And here is the evidence.'

As we just mentioned, the word 'Satan' is from the Hebrew. The word 'devil' is from the Greek. 'Satan' is a transliteration of the Hebrew word and 'devil' is a transliteration of the Greek word. The two words have basically the same meaning. 'Devil', *diabolos*, means 'accuser' or 'slanderer.' The devil is there to accuse you. Often when a person is accusing someone, there is a natural tendency to distort the reality. The accuser may exaggerate or minimize the importance of certain facts. He wants to convince the judge that you are guilty and therefore he will try to make you look worse than you really are. In doing so, he may use a language that is very close to slandering.

What does all that have to do with us? Here I would like to take some time to point out something very important in the spiritual life. God is a God of love. We know that. But He is also a God of justice, a God of holiness. And we cannot separate God's love from his justice. We like to emphasize love. But we should also emphasize justice. Because justice is the foundation of life. You take away justice, and life becomes impossible. This is true in the spiritual world as it is true in the physical world.

A God of order

What I mean is this. In the physical world, there are laws that make the world function properly. Take for example the laws of physics. Without these laws, we would have chaos. Things cannot just happen randomly, otherwise we would have destruction and death. Life is impossible without the laws of physics. Life is impossible without the laws of chemistry. Life is impossible without the laws of medicine. There are laws in every area, and that is what makes life possible.

If you try to break these laws, you will inevitably suffer the consequences of it. Try to break the law of gravity. Try to jump off the window from the fifth floor and see what happens. Nobody can just walk on air. If you try it, the force of gravity will pull you down – to your death. The point is that there are laws that govern every aspect of our world, and any attempt to violate those laws can lead to very serious consequences.

The same is true of the spiritual world. Just like in the physical world, the spiritual world is governed by laws, spiritual laws. And these laws cannot be violated without impunity.

For God is not a God of disorder, Paul writes in 1Corinthians 14:33. In other words, God is not a God whose ways are without order. The word ‘order’ is simply another way of saying that there is a law. Law and order always go together. You do not have one without the other. Without law, there is no order. Law brings order.

The OT speaks extensively about the law. The NT speaks about the law too. We have to remember that in the NT era, the law did not disappear. The Lord Jesus made that clear in the Sermon on the Mount. He said in Matthew 5:17, ‘I did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.’ When Paul says that *Christ is the end of the law* (Romans 10:4), it does not mean that the law is finished, that it does not have relevance anymore. The word ‘end’ means ‘fulfillment.’ Christ is the fulfillment, the very embodiment of the law. The law is completed in Him. It cannot be abolished. The ceremonial law can be removed because it governs only the religious practice of the temple worship – which is no longer relevant. But the moral law cannot be abolished. It remains at the heart of the spiritual life. That is why Paul says that by loving, we fulfill the law. *He who loves another has fulfilled the law* (Romans 13:8). It is love that is the fulfillment of the law. Without the law, how would love be possible?

So God is not just a God of love. He is also a God of justice. When we understand this, we will also be able to understand why Satan can make his demand. Satan, like any good lawyer, will use the law against his adversary. When a person pleads a case before the judge, he has to do it solely on the basis of the law. And Satan can play that game very well. We know that Satan tells lies, but he is also able to use the truth for his destructive purpose. Remember the account of the temptation. He quoted the Bible to tempt Jesus. He used the truth against the Lord and He used it very shrewdly.

Satan’s legal right

Now listen to this carefully. Every time you commit a sin, you expose yourself to Satan’s power. Because when you sin, you are giving Satan the possibility to have a case against you. And you can be sure that he will not miss this chance to accuse you before the Judge. If only we could understand this, no one would not dare to be careless with sin.

We must also understand that if Satan’s accusation is valid, God cannot deny him. Let’s take a simple example. Let’s say you stole some money. Satan hears about it and he is able to verify that the facts are true. He will come before God and say, ‘God, here is a case that I want to present before you. This person who calls himself a disciple of yours, who is bound under the terms of your holy law, he has stolen money. Here is the proof of his sin. You tell me, what will be his penalty for stealing? What

is the condemnation that he must incur for stealing, by your law?' If the accusation is true, God has to act. He cannot deny Himself. He is bound by the truth. He is bound by His justice.

This is the reason why God had to send His Son to die on the cross. Have you ever wondered why Jesus had to die? Why could not God say to a repentant person, 'Because you repented, I forgive you,' without the whole thing about the cross? But Jesus was crucified. Why? If God could forgive without Jesus' death, do you think that God would have let men kill his own Son just for the fun of it? That would be too foolish to comprehend. Understand this well. Jesus had to die because there was no other way that God could be just. There was no other way that he could be just. That is the point that Paul was making when he wrote in Romans 3:25, *He did it* (i.e. God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins) *to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.* To be just and the justifier at the same time. To be just concerns the law. To be the justifier concerns love. Only in this way could justice and love be compatible. God cannot forgive a person with a wave of His hand. Because for every sin, there is a penalty which Satan is going to demand. He demands because he knows that he has a legal right. And you can be sure that he is going to use his right every time it is possible.

We will talk more about this in our next lesson.