

From Simon to Peter #15 - Sifting Times

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores Peter's character and the spiritual battle against Satan, emphasizing God's sovereignty and Christ's intercession for believers during trials.

Duration: 41:07

Scripture: Luke 22:31

Topics: "Simon to Peter", "Intercession of Christ", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

J. Glyn Owen discusses the immaturity and impetuosity of Peter, highlighting his tendency to speak without thinking and make bold promises without understanding the implications. Owen emphasizes that while Peter's intentions were good, he was still a babe in Christ, unaware of his own weaknesses and the spiritual battle against Satan. The sermon also addresses the reality of spiritual warfare, explaining that Satan seeks to sift believers like wheat, but Jesus intercedes for them, ensuring their faith will not fail. Ultimately, Owen reassures that even in trials, God has a purpose and will use our experiences for good, transforming our weaknesses into strengths for His glory.

Transcript

Very, very immature. You see, for example, his impetuosity coming through. You know, Peter was a strange man, and yet perhaps not so strange.

Peter felt that he had to comment about everything. Now, we sometimes meet people like that still. They simply have to say something.

They can't be quiet. And Peter was a man like that. Whatever happens, he's got to say something about it.

He's got to respond in words. He doesn't think so much, but he talks. And his lips seem to move before his mind has had any opportunity to consider what he's going to say.

Now, you find that in so very many places. You find it here in this text. Our Lord has warned him of certain things.

And then Peter blurts out and says, I don't mind. What about the others? But I am prepared. I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.

It doesn't matter what's coming to the rest of them. But as for me, you may count on me. You know, he'll have to pay very dearly for that.

One day, not all that distant from this period, this occasion, Jesus will say to him, Simon Peter, do you really love me more than these? In which he will be referring back to this very statement of his. It doesn't matter what's going to happen to all of us. I'm ready to come.

I'm ready to follow. Do you really? You see, he spoke unadvisedly with his lips. He made promises that he'd never considered.

You have the same thing on many, many occasions just around this time. We saw it just after Caesarea Philippi. When he tried to dissuade his Lord from going to the cross.

We see it in the episode of the feet washing. He has acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Now Jesus comes to wash his feet.

Simon said, man alive, he says, you're not going to wash my feet. You, my feet, not on your life. And then you notice the change.

You see, he doesn't think. Jesus said, except I wash thee, thou hast no part of me. All right, says Peter, going right to the other extreme.

Not only my feet, but my hands and my head wash me all over. You see, it's just talk, blab, blab, blab. Do you say that in Canada? Talk, impetuosity.

He's got to have his say. Impetuous. But one thing, his intentions were good.

Now, nothing I have said must be allowed to cast the least cloud over Simon Peter's intentions. I think if we could only read Simon's heart, Simon always meant the best. At this stage, I mean.

He always aimed, in his heart, at the highest. Even when he's acting most incoherently and unwisely, he wants the best for his Lord. The fact of the matter is this.

He neither knew himself well enough, nor did he know his Lord's plan well enough. For he didn't ponder the things that were told him. Did not weigh them as he might.

One other thing I want to say. And it sums it all up. Simon Peter was still but a babe in Christ.

Imperfect. Imperfect. Impetuous, ignorant of himself, imperfect.

He has almost come to the point where our Lord is going to say farewell. And he is but a babe, and he's destined to ascend so highly in the scale of service for his Lord. Now that's the man we're talking about.

Now I want to turn from Simon, the young believer. And I want us to look for a moment at Satan the tempter. We shall not go very far on our mission in life.

Ere we encounter the arch enemy of Christ and his church astride our way. And Jesus here very graciously forewarns his followers of Satan's pending move. And he thereby discloses something of the inevitable struggle.

Albeit invisible at this particular point in time. The invisible struggle that is going on between Satan and God. And all related to the souls and the well-being of this little band of people.

The invisible struggle. The inevitable struggle. Between evil on the one hand, championed by Satan.

And the good and the perfect will of God. Now three things I want to say about Satan the tempter. Satan's intention concerning Christ's followers generally needs to be noted here.

He has a plan for the whole band. And of course he has a plan for the whole church. With evident solemnity.

He who was personally so cunningly tempted by the same insidious foe. As he was about to begin his public ministry. Now announces that his followers and prospective servants.

Can expect nothing less than what he had to undergo. As he met the enemy so must they. Addressing Peter, Jesus said, Simon, Simon.

Notice, addressing him by his native name, his original name. And repeating it for solemnity. Simon, Simon.

The whole Satan demanded to have you. That he might sift you like wheat. Verse twenty, thirty one, the RSV.

Now that word addressed to Peter, to Simon. Speaks however of Satan's purpose for the whole group. Now we can easily gloss over this or miss it.

Because you see Jesus is speaking, he's telling Simon about it. But actually the language is in the plural. Now we need to notice this.

Can I give you another translation, it goes like this. It's not a common one but here it is and I think it's quite good. Simon, Simon, Satan has claimed the right to put the loyalty of all of you through the mill.

He's telling Simon about it, perhaps in the hearing of the others. But it's a truth about all of them. Addressing him then in this solemn way, speaking to him as Simon.

Jesus says that the followers of the Messiah are going to meet Satan with his teeth shown. Snarling at them. Satan the accuser, the opposer of the enemy, the opposer of the people of Christ.

Satan is there waiting with his evil intentions. And he's got something afoot which relates to the whole group of the twelve especially. Now this persistent dedication of Satan to evil.

Which marks his character and his conduct as it is revealed in the Bible. Is something which we need to take seriously. When the Bible speaks of Satan, it isn't because the Bible has some strange interest in such characters.

Everything that the Bible tells us about the evil one, about Satan, about the devil, is with a view to our prophet. This is not the theme of the Bible. The theme of the Bible is God in Christ.

But the moment you come on the side of God and his Christ, you're going to meet an enemy. And blessed be the name of God. He has told us something about the enemy.

Now here he is, the adversary, Satan. Now one is here reminded very much of the first chapter in the book of Job. I don't know whether you are familiar with it.

I hope you are or you will make yourself familiar with this great chapter and this great book of Job. But you remember Job was a righteous man. If you're a righteous man or a righteous woman, the devil will not belong before he has a knife in your back.

And so Satan comes to God and says, Ha ha, doth Job fear God for naught? Does Job serve and honor and respect his God for nothing? Not on your life, says Satan to the Almighty. It's for what he gets out of it. You've built hedges around him, he says to God.

And you've been good to him. And look at the number of his camels as well as of his children. He's got a large family.

He's got large possessions. He's got a marvelous estate. Strike him.

Let me take his possessions away. Let me deal with him. Now I can't go into all the details.

But the point of the matter is this. What he's saying is this. He says, Job is more chaff than wheat.

Let me put him through my sieve and you'll see what kind of a follower you've got. God who knows the heart of a man better than Satan does. He said, all right.

Within certain limits you can put even my servant Job the righteous one through your sieve. And you and I know the consequences of that event. We have something quite similar here.

You see the devil never really changes. In principle he always does the same things. He's got nothing new, no new card in his pack.

And when once you've read the Bible you'll never discover a strategy of Satan that is not disclosed in Scripture. It may appear to be different. The only thing that makes it different is your circumstances and mine.

His basic approach is always the same. He's got nothing new. Here he comes again.

It's the same business. Ha, ha, ha. You've got twelve disciples around you.

Have you? Have you? Let me tell you they're more chaff than wheat. You let me put them into my sieve and we'll see what happens. You know there is so much common sense in that, isn't there? What's the use of having disciples who are not, who have not proved themselves to be loyal? And this is where the devil is terribly dangerous.

When there appears to be so much sense in what he says. It's a good thing that we should be tested and tried. Ah yes, but you see.

Satan's intention was not to try the disciples so that they could get rid of the chaff. Satan's intention was to get rid of the wheat and leave only the chaff for Christ. It is right that we should be tested.

God tests us. But God only tests us to get rid of the chaff in us. Satan would test us to get rid of the wheat and leave nothing for God but chaff.

Do you remember the words of that hymn? Oh not for thee my baser part. Do you remember how the writer of that hymn speaks about walking and serving God with a feeble body and a feeble mind so that we have to go so slow when we've spent all our energies on the swift errands of the world and have given everything we have to serve the world but only a kind of a puffed out soul for God. You know that's what the devil wants.

Spend your energies on other things. Use your time, use your talents, use everything you've got. Put your all into other things so that you've only got a little bit of a damn squib of a life to give to your God.

And my friends that's what he wants with you and with me today. Satan's intended view for all of them but now look. Satan's intended concentration upon Simon Peter particularly.

Note well the devil didn't declare his case completely. He never does. He never does.

He didn't say everything that he had in mind. He made an appeal to the Almighty that he should test all of them and according to what we have before us he didn't say that he had a special plan for Simon Peter. But our Lord knew.

Our Lord knew. Oh it's wonderful to have a Savior like this. He knows the secrets of the devil.

This is why you and I can feel safe if Jesus Christ is our Savior. He knows the devil's untold secrets. He asked for them all but his eye was on Peter particularly.

Now the question you will automatically ask I'm sure is the I'm taking it that I'm a normal person is the kind of question that I was asking when I was meditating on this the earlier part of the week. Why should the devil have a special purpose for Peter? Or why should Satan have a special purpose in attacking anybody for that matter? There may be someone here this morning and you're especially on his mind. He's concentrating on you.

He's got a special plan for you. He thinks more about you than about a multitude of others. He's got something in for you.

Why? Can I mention two or three possibilities? Sometimes it's because of a man's past glory. Let me put it to you very simply like this. Do you remember that with all Simon Peter's faults Simon was the confessor of Caesarea Philippi.

Simon was the first to receive from God the Father the revelation he gave that Jesus was Messiah, his only Son the Deliverer, the Savior of men. And Simon received it and Simon believed it and Simon confessed it. Now you see what's happened.

He's received this and he's confessed it and he's become the first, the foundation member of the new church. Now you see wouldn't it be a marvelous thing if the devil could cast a shadow or a cloud over that man. If only he can make Peter look a little bit stupid and crazy a kind of man that you can't trust, a kind of man that you can't believe.

Wouldn't it be wonderful? You see the number of people that he'll be able to keep away from himself. If only he can bring us, I mean away from Christ. If only, if only he can cast a cloud over Simon's past glories.

There may be people here this morning in that very situation. God has used you. Many years gone by now.

You stood as the teacher of a Bible class. You stood in the Christian pulpit. You were the leader of men and God used you and men listened to you and men were blessed to you.

Oh my friend, wouldn't it be wonderful this morning if he could get you down into the dust and the ashes and the greater your past glory, the greater his present victory if only he can cast a shadow over your word, your testimony, your preaching, your singing, whatever it is. He has a special purpose for this kind of person. Because of one's past glory.

It may be because of your present position or usefulness. Satan does not normally waste time on those who do not threaten his kingdom. Well of course this is common sense, isn't it? Why should he waste time on a multitude of men and women in the church that really do no harm as far as he's concerned? They don't attack his kingdom.

They don't really win any, any, any of his prisoners and liberate them. They're not really doing very much to worry him at all. He can let them go by.

He doesn't need to concentrate upon them. So really they are not conscious of the existence of a devil. And they will not be and many will die in that tragic condition.

They've never been alerted to the spiritual warfare. For they've not menaced the situation and the position of Satan sufficiently to arouse his ire. But wait a moment.

Here is a man in a key position. I won't try to describe it. The only thing I want to say about it is that it's a key position.

You influence man. You influence people. There are people watching you, looking at you.

You've got the ear of this person and that person, this kind of person, this kind of person. And you stand day by day in a strategic situation. Oh, let me tell you, he's got something afoot for you.

Or it may be, of course, because of a man's potential use and value as a future leader of the Christian church. I don't know how far it is given to Satan to see into the future. I don't know.

I think he can see further than we humans see, but how far I'm not sure. He's not omniscient. But my, he can see very far ahead.

And I'm not so sure that he couldn't see what this man Peter could become. If you let a man like this get on, he's a potential, he's a natural leader. He's got all the energies of a mighty man, a mighty soul.

And when he's in his right mind, he's going to put everything he has on the altar for his Lord. His intentions are always good. And I've no doubt but that Satan could see something of the menace that a man like Peter would be to his cause, to the cause of hell.

Therefore, he must concentrate on him. Oh, my dear people, have you got gifts by nature and by the Spirit of God, spiritual gifts and natural gifts? Have you seen them? Are you aware this morning of your capacity to lead men, to feed men, to direct men? Then don't be surprised if the devil is concentrating upon you. But the third thing I have to say on this level is concerning the limitation of Satan's power over saints

universally.

He is interested in the saints generally, in Simon particularly. But I must note the limitation of his power over saints universally. Notice what Jesus discloses here.

Satan has, as the verb implies, obtained you, he says, obtained you by asking. He had to ask. He had to ask.

Satan has to ask before he can put you or me in his city. He's got to ask. But says someone, do I hear it rightly? I can almost hear someone say, but look here, what's the point of saying that even if the only thing he's got to do is to ask and then God allows it to happen? Oh, much every way.

If God allows it to happen, then God is not only aware of it. And that's one thing that every tempest-tossed Christian needs to know, that God is aware of it. No man is in Satan's sieve by accident.

Any man in Satan's sieve is there by divine permission. Now, something follows onto that. If God allows a man to be placed in Satan's sieve, then it must have the capacity to do us the good he plans, God plans, rather than the evil that Satan purposes.

Oh, brethren and sisters in Christ, would that we had the faith to believe this more ardently this morning. That when God permits a saint to be put into the sieve of Satan, it is not to give Satan what he pleases, but to prove that he's wrong. He makes the wrath of man and the anger of Satan to praise him and to bless him and to serve his purpose.

That's why he lets the saints go into the sieve. He'll bring good out of it. Now, this is why the Apostle Paul, for example, can go on record as saying something like this.

Writing to the Corinthians, he says, No temptation has overcome you that is not common to man. God is faithful. And he will not let you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it.

Hallelujah. Isn't that wonderful? God will not allow you to be tempted above that you're able to bear. With the temptation he will provide a way of escape so that you may be able to endure it.

In other words, when he puts you into the sieve, he puts you in for a purpose of his own, which outmatches the strategy of Satan. Hallelujah. So that he guards and guides and watches and cares.

And he only turns the flame off when he chooses, but when he sees that the furnace is too hot, he'll turn the switch off. Let's turn for a moment this morning away even from the feeble disciple. And the enemy of our souls, the tempter, let's turn to the last Jesus Christ our Savior.

If the struggle here was confined to Simon and Peter or the twelve disciples, on the one hand and Satan on the other, Simon Peter and the devil or the twelve disciples and the devil, well, things would have been pretty bad. But let us mark a third party in the battle, lest we become depressed and defeated before we know what's happened to us. You see, if we simply concentrate upon the human dimension in relation to temptation, our human dimension over against the evil one, we're lost before we start it.

When we consider our temptations and our trials as Christian people, we must see this other dimension if we are to have any hope at all. And that is the presence and the promise and the purpose of our blessed Savior. Now, very briefly, the first thing I want you to notice is that our Savior's awareness of the spiritual

battle that goes on behind the scenes is made explicit.

Let me stress the basic fact that Jesus Christ is familiar with a dimension of reality unknown to us. He is able to tell the disciples of what's going on. Simon, Simon, he says, Satan has desired to have all of you to sift you as wheat, but I've prayed for you.

That means this. He is aware of a dimension of reality unknown to us men. Now, I know that the moment you say that, there is a kind of mentality who says, that's pitiful.

There can be nothing unknown to me. This is part of our human pride. And many, many people in the world this morning are subject to this.

They can't conceive of anything in the whole realm of human experience, here or there, present or future, but that they must know it or know about it. Humanly speaking, you and I don't know anything about this realm. He did.

He did. Now, this is involved in your acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Messiah. He knows of a realm of dimension that your scientists don't know about as scientists.

Your philosophers don't know about as philosophers, nor your psychiatrists or psychologists as such. No man knows but the Son of God. And that's what we have here.

He knows of a dimension of reality and of struggle that you and I are ignorant about. He knows it. Now, I'm only stating it.

But let me add this. If he knew of this dimension of existence and of being in the days of his humiliation, when he was here among men, living as a man in the flesh, how much more now that he is raised above principalities and powers and sits in the heavenly places, Lord of lords and King of kings, high over all, as Peter puts it, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also that which is to come. He who is above all surely knows now.

If he knew in the days of his humiliation what was going on behind him. Secondly, in this connection, the Savior's announcement to his followers of Satan's feral purpose. That Jesus Christ is aware of what's going on is in itself most comforting since he is our Savior and he's pledged to serve us.

And it's good for me to know that he knows, even if I don't know. Put yourself in the place of the sheep and the shepherd. There are many things the sheep can't know.

But if they had the capacity to think, I suppose they would say something like this. Well, what we don't understand and what we can't see, if he sees it's all right. And I must say that about my Lord.

As one of his sheep. If only I am sure that he knows. And I can appeal.

But there is something more here. His willingness and ability to announce some things that he knows to his people. Now our Lord does not tell us everything that he knows.

He's omniscient. And there's no need for him to tell us everything that he knows. We should never want to be omniscient.

Satan wanted that kind of thing and was cast down into hell. Even I must take our positions as creatures. It is enough for us to know that he knows.

Blessed be the name of God. He has disclosed to us everything that he deems wise so to disclose. Everything that is necessary for our good.

Everything that is necessary for our safety. And our ultimate glory. He discloses and he's done it here.

Will you forgive me? I have a picture here again from the Old Testament. And I see it reenacted here. Do you remember that story? Well it's a prolonged one really.

The stripling David coming to maturity. Coming to the throne that has been promised him. But as yet Saul is on the throne.

I hope you remember this story and this narrative. It's so graphic and so meaningful. And there is Saul still on the throne of Israel.

And David has been chosen by God to take his place. And do you remember from time to time Saul would get so terribly angry with David. Because David was stealing the hearts of the people away from him.

And at one time he would stab him with a spear or a javelin. At another time he would try to kill him outright. Not simply to hurt but kill.

And yet the precious thing is this. David had a friend at court. In Saul's court.

Who used to tell him what Saul was planning. And so it was most annoying. There were times when dear old Saul wanted to kill him but David knew about it.

How did he know? Through Jonathan. Jonathan his bosom friend. Jonathan used to listen to his evil father.

And go out and tell his bosom friend David. My father Saul has a bad thing up his sleeve today. Keep your distance.

And David wasn't there. Oh my friend it's wonderful to have a friend. Not in Satan's court.

Not in Satan's palace. But one who nevertheless sees all that goes on. And knows everything that takes place.

And is able by his word and by his spirit to communicate to his people. And this is exactly what he does. This is what the Bible is about.

This is what the spirit does for us. If we walk in the light of the word. He gives us to understand the kind of thing that Satan may be doing for us.

And even make us aware in our spirits of things that are in the air at a given moment. And lastly this morning. Our Savior's awareness of the power struggle behind the scenes.

And his announcement of a pending attack is no more precious than. His accompanying assurances of safety. As they were given to Simon Peter.

Just let's pause for a moment with this verse. Looking now directly into the face of Simon Peter Jesus says. But I have prayed for you.

That your faith should not fail. And when you have turned again. Strengthen your brethren.

Jesus would have Peter know that Satan's asking permission to test him and his friends. Is matched by Jesus' own high priestly intercession. On the disciples behalf.

Satan has got you by asking just as the Lord Jesus. But I have prayed for you. Opposite the pleading of Satan he puts his own intercessions.

I prayed for you Peter. Satan had to plead. The language tells us that our intercessor needed only to ask.

On the basis of such requests Jesus in the full knowledge of Peter's trial. And it's consequences now says to him. Now Peter.

I prayed for you and when you are converted strengthen your brethren. Now we dare not miss what was involved there. I think this is one of the most precious little bits in all the precious truth we've been looking at this morning.

Jesus did not say I prayed for you Peter you're going to have a bad time. And if you get through it then I've got a plan waiting you. He didn't say that.

You know what he said? And when thou art converted. There's a task awaiting you and I'm commanding you now to do it strengthen your brethren. Not if you're converted but when.

Now I've got to look at that in a little more detail. There's a picture here. Says the Lord in effect to Simon Peter if language is what it appears to be.

Satan is going to make a special bid for you and you're going to go a long way along with him. And you're going to turn along the main highway of obedience and you're going to walk up a side road. And you're going to go right away from the path of obedience.

But he said. When you've turned around again that's what the word conversion means. When you've turned around.

No, no that's not what he said. That would be wonderful in itself. When you've been turned around again.

It's not something that you're going to do yourself. You know what the word conversion means? Comes from a Latin which means turning around with. What the Savior is telling Simon is this.

Simon you're going to go up this strange alley of disobedience as the devil tempts you. But I'm coming with you. And when thou art converted.

Passive. When you have turned around again with the person that is influencing you in the way of God. When you turn around again with me.

I've got a job waiting for you. Well what is it? To cry and to weep over my sins and over my trials. Well alright there will be a place for penitence most certainly.

But beyond the penitence and beyond the tears and beyond the fall and the sense of sin and shame. Strengthen your brethren. I'm going to make you strong in the very sin.

That Satan meant for your undoing. Isn't it wonderful to have a Savior like that? And at this season of the year my friends I don't know how you feel. But I know how I feel.

I need to be reminded that there is one of this order and of this dimension. And of this grace and of this power and of this quality of omniscience. And who by the Spirit is able to accompany me into any sieve where Satan may place me.

So that all things may yet work together for good. To them that love him who are called according to his purpose. Where are you this morning my friend? Are you sufficiently menacing to the enemy's position that he should have an interest in you? Am I speaking to someone who is this morning being shaken in the sin? They don't know where you are.

You're going around in circles perhaps. And life is desperately miserable for you as a Christian. You don't know what things are coming to.

I want you to see the promise of the Lord. And the Lord of the promise. Who has pledged and cannot fail.

When thou art converted. There is a limit beyond which he will not allow his called disciple to go. He will turn him back again.

And when he's come out of the sieve and out of the trial. He will be able to be something that he never could be apart from. Ride on, ride on in majesty.

In our lives. Let us pray. O Heavenly Father.

And thou blessed Son. And thou equally blessed Holy Spirit of God. One God we worship thee.

Looking at this ancient scene. It has made us so mindful of things in our own lives. Lord Jesus Christ thou faithful high priest of thy people.

Thou great intercessor of the Father's right hand. And thou who by the Spirit dost walk with thine own. Come near to us just now.

Lest we should be on the path of disobedience. That brings discredit to thee and dishonor to thy cause. And some of us may be there.

Tearing to pieces what we should build up. Bringing dishonor where we should bring nothing but honor. And we are all out of control.

Because we've not seen the unseen hand of Satan over our affairs. Come almighty deliverer. Save us from the meshes that were not meant for us.

Use thine own word and spirit. To take all the chaff out of us nevertheless. That we may be pure grain.

For thee. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

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