

# SIFTING

Luke 22:31-32

Have you ever experienced a situation that seemed impossible to endure? Years later, as you looked back, did you realize how that trial prepared you for things to come?

The Scriptures tell us that the Lord will sometimes allow us to be “sifted” for greater service. In other words, He may give Satan permission to affect an area of our lives. God does this to strengthen our faith and transform us into stronger witnesses for Him.

In today’s passage from the gospel of Luke, Jesus explains this process to Peter:

“<sup>31</sup>¶ And the Lord said, *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:* <sup>32</sup>*But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*” (Luke 22:31-32).

Christ knew what was about to happen over the next few days—He would die on the cross, return to life, and then ascend to heaven. He expected Peter to be the leader of His disciples and to accomplish great things for the kingdom. But Peter wasn’t ready.

So the Lord allowed Satan to “sift” Peter. In so doing, God separated the “wheat” from the “chaff” – the righteous areas of the disciple’s life from the ungodly areas. Ultimately, Peter grew stronger from the experience, went on to play a key role in spreading the gospel following Christ’s death, and in the end died because of His bold faith.

Had God not allowed this time of sifting, Peter would not have been ready for the events to come. As you look back on your life, how has God prepared you for difficult times?

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Jesus is telling Simon Peter that Satan has demanded to have all the disciples. To whom has Satan made this demand? Probably to God the Father. In the book of Job Satan is pictured as having access to God and making demands of him. Listen to this interchange, which may be typical of how Satan opposes us:

Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his

substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:9-12)

Then when Job's faith does not fail at the loss of his family and possessions, Satan returns to God and says,

And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. (Job 2:4-6)

Two implications from this are important for our lives.

**One is that Satan has a lot of power in this world.**

- Jesus calls him the "prince" or "ruler of this world" (John 16:11),
- Paul calls him the "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the "ruler of the authority of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).

He blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4) and holds them in his snare until God releases them through the gospel (2 Timothy 2:25, 26).

He can take life, as with Job's children;

- ruin health, as with Job's body (cf. also Luke 13:16);
- torment with demons (Luke 11:18);
- provoke evil deeds (Luke 22:3);
- and cause natural disasters (Job 1:19).

The fact that Satan has such power in the world should give a kind of seriousness to our lives which unbelievers don't have. *not paranoid or fearful*, but *sober and earnest in our prayers* and persistently conscious of needing God's power.

When the enemy is supernatural, so must the weapons be. We are aliens and exiles in the world not merely because our values differ from those who don't know God, but also because our struggles are different than those who don't know Satan.

That's one implication of Jesus' words: Satan is real, has great power, and must be reckoned with seriously and soberly in this age.

But a second implication is that Satan's power is by permission from God.

There are **not** *two ultimate powers* in the universe. There is only one: God. When Satan wants to have the disciples, he must go to God first.

Hard questions:

- *Why* would God grant to his archenemy any of his demands?
- Why does God tolerate the activity of Satan at all?

Revelation 20:2, 3 tells us that at the end of this age, when Christ returns, God is going to bind Satan and confine him for 1,000 years, "that he should deceive the nations no more."

Then after the 1,000 years and the final victory of God he will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10) forever.

God has the right and the power to put Satan out of commission, *and the question that we ask in our finitude and ignorance is: Why doesn't he do it now? Why go on century after century permitting Satan to wreak havoc in the world?*

It may be that this is *none of our business* and that we should trust the wisdom and goodness of God without an answer. But I think the Scriptures indirectly suggest a possible answer, which may encourage and strengthen our faith.

God permits Satan to persist in his "sifting" work is that in the end it will be good for the church and will bring more glory to God.

It's clear from the whole NT that God intends to bring the bride of Christ to perfection through affliction and temptation

- 1 Peter 1:6; *Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ....*
- 3:17 *For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.*

We must suffer with Christ if we would be glorified with him.

- Romans 8:17 **And if children, then heirs? heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ? if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.**

Through suffering and trial our faith is refined.

We are drawn to rely ever more heavily on God,  
and we are moved to cherish his grace more strongly.

Satan has his role to play in fanning the flames of our refining furnace, and so God awaits the appointed day of judgment.

**Physical Suffering - priorities come to the top**

**Financial Sifting - what is your security**

**Temptation Sifting - are you dependent on God?**

**Vocational Sifting - is your job your identity? - or - whose will do you want (God's or yours)?**