

He's Prayed for You – Luke 22:31-34

I. INTRODUCTION

A. RR – The Text

B. Eric Liddell

1. Every so often Hollywood surprises us with a genuinely good film.
2. One of the best was *Chariots of Fire* which tells the true story of the Scottish runner turned missionary, Eric Liddell.
3. Though favored to win the 1924 Olympic Gold medal, Liddell refused to run his race in because it fell on a Sunday; a day he'd committed to the Lord to keep holy by not competing.
4. There was an *earlier scene* in that movie that may have seemed like a piece of dramatic fiction, but it was *also true*.
5. A year before the Olympics, Liddell ran in a meet between England, Ireland & Scotland.
 - a. He ran the 100, 220, and ¼ mile events.
 - b. At the start of the ¼ mile, there was a lot of jostling & Liddell tangled feet with J. J. Gillies of England, sending Liddell tumbling to the track.
 - c. He laid there for a moment, hurt; not even knowing if he could get up.
 - d. When a track official yelled at him, he stood up and took a couple steps.
 - e. Though in pain, he began to run, trying to catch up to the last runner who was now a good 20 yards ahead.
 - f. In a race that's only once around the track, that's a phenomenal distance to try to make up.
 - g. Nevertheless, Liddell took off & quickly pull to just 10 yards behind the leader.
 - h. With just 40 yards to go, he pulled into 3rd place, then 2nd & right at the tape he passed the leader, stuck out his chest, won the race, & collapsed in exhaustion.
 - i. He had to be assisted off the track because he'd burned every ounce of energy in finishing the race.
6. Sportswriters, journalists, & track aficionados who were there that day claimed it was the most amazing thing they'd ever seen & it's

gone down in the annals of sports history as one of the most amazing events.

7. What made it all the more remarkable is that the race *began* with what seemed like a career ending fall.
 8. It's end was all the more *glorious because* of Liddell's tumble.
-

C. Today

1. Our study today is about *failure*, about spiritual tumbles & how to overcome them.
2. Someone once asked Winston Churchill, "What most prepared you to lead Great Britain through World War II?"
 - a. For a period of time, England stood *virtually alone* against Nazi Germany.
 - b. Churchill's response was: "It was the time I *repeated* a class in grade school."
 - c. The questioner was shocked and asked, "You *flunked* a grade?"
 - d. Churchill replied, "I never flunked in my life. I was given a *second opportunity* to get it right."
3. Quite right! And Churchill's perspective on failure is one we all need.
4. It's what this passage teaches us.

II. TEXT

A. Set The Scene • V. 31

1. Our setting is the Last Supper.
 - a. The meal is now over; Jesus has established the practice of Communion.
 - b. He's told them one of them would betray Him that very night.
 - c. And He's shared with them that they are called to a radically different lifestyle; where greatness resides in simple, humble service of others.
2. These were the last moments Jesus would spend with these men and He had much to say that was crucial for them to know about what they were to do after His departure.
3. John gives us a much fuller account of what Jesus said in chs. 13-17.
4. But Luke tells us that it was as Jesus was wrapping things up that He dropped a bomb on them.
5. We find it here. He turns to Peter—

31 And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

6. It's interesting that Jesus reverts to Simon's *earlier name*, rather than calling him by the new name He'd given Him – “Peter.”
 7. Bestowing a name on someone or something showed a special kind of authority.
 - a. Simon's father had selected his name at his birth, showing that he was the authority in his home, and demonstrating his acceptance of Simon as a son.
 - b. When Jesus *renamed* Simon, calling him “Peter” He was laying claim to being Simon's *Master*, and that He accepted Simon as His disciple.
 8. But the conference of a new name meant a change of *condition* as well.
 - a. As we follow the story of Simon Peter we see a man who was sometimes courageous & insightful, while at other times cowardly & dull.
 - b. He was a strange mixture of both strength & weakness.
 9. It was the relationship with Jesus that turned him from an unstable Simon into the Rock, Peter.
-
10. But here, Jesus uses the older name “Simon” because it was the *older identity* the devil wanted to get at.
 - a. Satan can lay no claim on who we are as new creatures in Christ.
 - b. The only opening he has is what's *left* of the old life we've not died to & put away.
 11. When Jesus said, “*Simon*” it ought to have been a clue to Peter that he wasn't trusting in Jesus as fully as he ought to have been.
 12. The *repetition* of the name, “Simon, Simon!” was a figure of speech showing great tenderness & concern.
 - a. As serious as this was, with Jesus knowing *exactly* how Peter would blow it,
 - b. He wasn't angry or frustrated with his weakness.
 - c. Jesus was filled with *concern* for Peter. He was about to face a heavy trial and would fall.
 - d. But Jesus wanted Peter to know He *wasn't upset* with him.
 13. But then, He drops the bomb & says,
Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as

wheat.

14. Wow – now that’s heavy!
15. Let’s say you’re at a special meeting where there’s a great servant of God, someone who’s recognized as being a prophet.
 - a. And towards the end of the meeting, this prophet turns to you, speaks your name, & says, “The devil has made it his aim to take you down!”
 - b. What would **your** reaction be?
 - c. Now you have something of an idea of how **Peter** felt.
16. To “sift like wheat” means to **shake** with the intent of **separating**.
 - a. First they would take the harvested wheat and chop it up, cutting the stocks from the heads.
 - b. Then they would beat & rub the heads to loosen the seeds.
 - c. After that they would take winnowing forks and toss the mixture into the air, letting the wind blow away the lighter chaff while the heavier seed dropped back to earth.
 - d. But there was still bits & pieces of husk that had to be stripped away, so they would again rub the seed again.
 - e. Next, they would place this mixture into a sieve and shake it.
 - f. The seed would fall through the sieve; the husks would be tossed aside.
 - g. The whole purpose of sifting was **to separate**.
17. This is a perfect picture of what Satan wanted to do to Peter.
 - a. He wanted to **shake** Peter, to loosen his attachment to Jesus.
 - b. He wanted to go after the stuff that hearkened back to his old habits & life before he met the Lord,
 - c. And **discourage** him with it so he’d give up following Him.

18. But notice something: Jesus said Satan had “**asked**” for Simon.
 - a. Asked who? God! The devil had to get **permission** before he could attack.
 - b. Peter belonged to Jesus! The devil had no right or access to him.
 - c. We see this same thing played out in the OT where the devil had to get permission to shake Job.
 - 1) The devil’s complaint was that God had set a protective screen around Job he couldn’t get through.
 - 2) He had to get permission before he could test him.

- d. The same thing is revealed here. Peter enjoyed the protection of God and the devil had to ask permission to trouble him.
- 19. Christian, understand something, as long as *you're abiding in Christ*, you enjoy the protection of God and the devil can't just get at you any ole' time he wants.
- 20. If you *are beset* by the enemy, it means God has *permitted* it, BUT ONLY TO BRING ABOUT SOME GREATER BLESSING.
- 21. Why would God allow the enemy to have at us?
 - a. To develop our faith!
 - b. An untested, unproven faith is *no faith* at all.
 - c. God allows adversity into our lives to *grow us up*, to deepen our experience of His faithfulness.
 - d. In Romans 5:3-4 we read this

We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

e. James says - [1:3]

The testing of your faith produces patience.

- f. Without a challenge, we could never learn endurance and how to overcome.
- g. There is no victory without a struggle.
- h. In 1 Pet. 1 we read, [6-7]

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

-
- 22. I want to share a discovery I've made. It's the greatest truth I know.
 - a. The most important thing in all of life is to know & love God.
 - b. But I've found an amazing thing – knowing a lot *about* religion, theology, the Bible, and church history isn't the same as *knowing God*.
→ San Jose
 - c. There are many people who know lots *about* God, but they don't know *Him*, not personally, not *experientially*.

- d. There are also lots of people who know little about theology but who *know God* and are deeply in love with Him.
 - e. Their theology isn't book learning gained in a classroom; it's personal experience learned in life.
 - f. For them, Jesus isn't just the Soteriological Expediter of Divine Redemption.
 - g. He's *their* Savior Who's given *them* eternal hope.
23. The Bible tells us God is faithful.
- a. I believe that – but I want to experience it!
How can I unless I'm pressed to look to God to be faithful?
 - b. The Bible says God is a Healer & I believe it – but I want to *experience* it.
How can I unless I'm ill?
 - c. The Word says God is a Deliverer & I believe it – but I want to *experience* it.
How can I unless I'm smitten with some affliction?
 - d. The Scriptures tell me God is a refuge & hope & I absolutely believe it, but I want to *experience* Him as a strong tower.
How can I without being beset by trouble?
24. Christian – listen: God hasn't called you to an idea!
25. He wants you to know & love *Him!*
26. God doesn't want your faith to be just a set of doctrinal bullet-points.
27. He wants it to be an *experience* of Him as Savior, Healer, Deliverer, Refuge, Hope, Friend.
28. But the only way we can learn these things is by going through the challenge of seeing them proven.
30. Yes, the devil would like nothing more than to separate you from Christ.
31. While you abide in Christ, He has no access to you apart from God's permission.
32. So know that when trouble comes, when it seems like your world is rocking, while the enemy is trying to *shake* your faith, God is using it to *deepen* it.
33. We can have every confidence that God's will will prevail because of what we read next.

B. Vs. 32

32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail;

...

1. Jesus knew what was going on behind the scenes in the spiritual realm.
2. Satan had asked permission to sift Peter, but *Jesus had prayed for him* that his faith wouldn't fail.
3. Now, if Jesus had stopped with there, Peter could have heaved a big sign of relief. But there's more.

... and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

4. Returned?? Wait a minute, was Jesus' request going to be denied?
 - a. Was Peter's faith *going to fail* despite Jesus' intercession?
 - b. No! Peter *would return* precisely *because* Jesus **DID** pray for his faith not to fail.
 - c. Satan's attempt to shake him would cause him to stumble.
 - d. But Jesus' prayer *caught him* and put him back on his feet.
5. Jesus lets Peter know that he would trip, but he wouldn't stay down.
6. He'd get back up, and when he did, he needed to know *nothing* about God's plan for him had changed.
7. He was still called to follow the Lord, even to be one of the apostles.
8. His ministry of giving encouragement and direction to others was still in force.

C. Vs. 33-34

33 But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." 34 Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

1. At Jesus' warning about what lay ahead, Peter protested his courage & faithfulness & said he was ready for anything – He would *not* be shaken loose from Jesus.
 2. But Jesus made it even clearer – before the dawn of the next day, Peter will deny even knowing Jesus.
-
3. As events unfolded, it looked at first as though Peter's commitment was solid.
 - a. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when an armed mob came to

- arrest Jesus, Peter grabbed a sword & started swinging.
- b. Following that, Peter was courageous enough to *follow the mob* as it went to the high priest's house.
 - c. He took a seat among the others who tried to get some heat from one of the courtyard fires; that was a dangerous place to be, but Peter was brave.
 - d. In light of such courage, it's surprising that when a young servant girl fingered him, he denied knowing Jesus.
 - e. That denial set him up for another, then a 3rd.
 - f. If it hadn't been for the crowing of the rooster & Peter's flashback to Jesus' prophecy here in v. 34, the denials probably would have continued.
4. But the rooster's voice was a tool of God to *convict* him, & as we read in v. 62, Peter fled the courtyard to find a place to pour out his tears of repentance to God.
 5. As he wept, Jesus words returned to Him –
“Simon – Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”
 6. Return he did. Though Peter *fell*, he did not *fail*.
 7. *Failure* is not *falling down*; it's *remaining* there when you *have* fallen.
 8. Jesus had asked the Father to take Peter's fall & turn it into something that would be a lesson & blessing. Something to be used to comfort & strengthen others.
 9. A failure is a person who has blundered then fails cash-in on the experience and learn from it.
 10. It was Cicero who said, “Any man may make a mistake; only the fool will persist in it.”
-
11. Peter learned an important lesson in the high priest's courtyard.
 - a. He learned that there was still too much *Simon* in him.
 - b. His natural strength was courage – and it had proven itself strong in the Garden against the armed mob.
 - c. But before the night was over, Peter had learned a lesson every follower of Christ must learn; any strength we possess that isn't dependent on Christ becomes a weakness the enemy will use against us.

d. Nothing fails quite so totally as a success without God.

III. CONCLUSION

A. For Us

1. How would you like the stumbles & blunders of your life to be recorded in the best selling book of all time?
2. Peter's was! His denial of Christ has been the subject of endless Bible studies, stories, films.
3. But we needn't worry that Peter blushes every time someone reads his story.
4. You see, God's grace & faithfulness turned his fall into a wonderful lesson about forgiveness & restoration.
5. Peter went on to call others who follow Jesus in a halting & imperfect way to press on & not give in just because they stumble along the way.
6. What Jesus said to Peter, He could just as easily say to us.
 - a. There isn't one of us here today who hasn't or who won't stumble.
 - b. None of us has attained perfection.
 - c. Though we've all been given a new nature & are promised a new name, we know what it means to struggle with the old man; there's much in us that needs to be reckoned dead and put away.
 - d. And just like Peter, the enemy would like nothing more than to shake us loose from Jesus, drowning us in the old.
→ You don't drown by falling into water; you drown by staying there.
 - e. Just as God allowed him to have at Peter, he's allowed to have at us – all so that we can experience the *faithfulness of God*.
 - f. The devil thinks he's God's opponent when in fact He's just a tool to teach us Victory; a sparring partner.
7. But just like with Peter, there will be times when it appears the enemy has managed to defeat us.
8. He hasn't because *Jesus has prayed for us*; that God would turn what looks like defeat into an opportunity to bring us closer to Him.
9. Did you know that Jesus prays for you? Hebrews 7:25 says –
He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to

God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

- a. Right now, Jesus is praying for you.
- b. He knows exactly what's going on in your life – far better than you do.
- c. He knows where you're weak and where you're strong.
- d. He knows where your strength is based on self-confidence rather than dependence on Him.
- e. He knows precisely where the devil wants to shake you & where you are going to blow it.
- f. And He's already put in a prayer on your behalf that when you trip, it won't be fatal, but will instead become the means by which you discover all over again the love & mercy of your Heavenly Father.
- g. And that you'll stand up, dust yourself off, throw your head back, hands high and shout praise to God for taking your silly goof and turning it into a marvelous lesson.

B. Failure

1. If you feel like a failure today, remember this - Jesus has prayed for you!
2. Even before you fell, He'd already talked to the Father about you & your need for forgiveness.
3. You can only *fail* if you *refuse* to get up after falling.
4. God wants us to learn from Peter that *even our falling* is covered in His grace and becomes a part of His plan.
5. It seems we never see God in our falls; only in our successes.
 - a. A strange attitude for people who have the cross as the center of their faith.
 - b. Charles Colson said,
“The kingdom of God is a paradox, where through the ugly defeat of a cross, a holy God is utterly glorified. Victory comes through defeat; healing through brokenness; finding self through losing self.”
6. Don't let past falls become failure. The past cannot be changed, but our response to it can be.
7. Don't think imperfection disqualifies you & sets you on the sideline.
8. God *uses broken* things.

- a. It's broken soil that produces a crop.
 - b. Broken clouds give rain.
 - c. Broken grain gives bread.
 - d. Broken bread gives strength.
 - e. Only a broken alabaster jar gives forth the sweet perfume.
 - f. Broken grapes give wine.
 - g. It's Peter, broken & weeping, who returns to greater power than ever.
9. Without his fall in the courtyard, he would only have gone on to real failure later.
10. A stumble often prevents a fall because it reminds us to take caution as we walk.
-
11. Some here today, or someone listening to this study on the internet or radio, may feel very much like Peter as he fled the high priest's courtyard.
12. You feel like an abject failure.
- a. Though once you walked with Jesus, you've done something from which you think there's no return.
 - b. Maybe you've lost **everything** to sin; family, business, friends, and a day doesn't pass that you aren't reminded of your fall.
 - c. I've got news for you – EVERYONE FALLS.
 - d. But **failure** is only in not getting up again.
 - e. Or maybe it's not something you've **done**; maybe it's more a **fear of falling**; there's some inner, secret struggle that cripples you & renders you spiritually lame.
 - g. The devil is just as happy with those who fail through **never** stepping out in faith as those who never rise after a fall. It makes no difference to him.
13. Peter teaches us that a fall does not a failure make.
14. Rather, **Jesus has prayed for us** & God will turn our halting, imperfect steps into the means by which He shows His glory.
15. Last Word: To all those who feel like a failure - The cross is proof there's no sin God cannot forgive, & no length He will not go to restore those who've fallen.