

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 And he said to Him, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” 34 And He said, “I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.”

The church universal, or that which claims to be the church, call it christendom perhaps, all of the different iterations of those who identify in some form with Christ, is made up of true believers, true christians, and false.

In our vernacular perhaps we could state that within the church there are real christians and phony christians. People who claim to be christians, but aren't. They aren't real. What's the difference you say? What comprises a real christian and separates those folks from all of the claimers who are not real?

We go back, as always, this is a very familiar passage to you folks, Paul's proof text for christians. 2Cor. 13:5 *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?*

In real regeneration where Christ quickens a dead-from-sin spirit within a person, quickens their spirit to life, Christ enters into that person, and that person enters into Christ. There is a spiritual union with the God who created us. The sin that killed us is taken out of the way, and that union with Christ and God that was severed because of sin is re-joined.

When that happens God's Holy Spirit enters us and dwells with us. Inside our hearts, as we say. He becomes Lord of us and center of our being. We long to please Him, motivated by a love relationship that drives us to do what is pleasing to Him. That brings sweet fellowship with Him.

And when we sin, our flesh gets the better of us and we go against His will and wishes, that love bond is harmed, temporarily, until we confess that sin and walk together again as friends. It's as real as can be. Regeneration must

be accompanied by real change. We no longer walk as this world walks and talk as this world talks.

The Spirit of Jesus, dwelling within us, makes all things new. Again, to the Corinthians, Paul has to define these things; 2Cor. 5:17 *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

So then, back to our discussion of real and false. Genuine and phony. Within the parameters that we've just restated in biblical form. True believers and false believers. Real genuine born again believers, born again being the terminology to define regeneration from death to life, and on the other hand, the self deceived.

Jesus spoke of this reality so that we should not be astonished at the things we see going on in the name of christianity. Turn with me to Matthew 13, or listen if you will. This explains so much of the confusion we are seeing and even greater confusion that I believe we will be seeing very soon. This is important;

Matt. 13:24 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 "But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. 26 "But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 "And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

At harvest the wheat is separated from the tares in a winnowing process. If you've never seen how wheat is winnowed, go to YouTube some time and type

in winowing wheat. It's fascinating and can bring a passage like this to life for baby boomers who thought all bread just comes from the grocery store by magic.

Tares are useless weeds. When the wheat with the tares was ready, the wheat berries are ripe and golden, the stalks would all be harvested together. At the top of the good stalks are the wheat kernels that become flour and then bread.

So you put the stalks into a bag or you can lay them on a cloth, and the berries, the kernels are physically beat with something until they are all separated from the stalks. A wood handle with a hinge of two rings lets the end piece keep slapping the stalks over and over. Then you throw the stalks in a pile to get burned.

But the wheat isn't ready yet, you then pick up the berries which are all mixed up with smaller pieces of stalks and you sift that so that the kernels fall through. And you throw out the non kernel stuff. Smaller and smaller sifter grates keep sifting out the trash while the kernels fall through.

Finally you simply pour what's left, mostly kernels now, you pour it from one container into another container with a wind blowing and as they are in free air between containers, maybe a 4 foot drop, the heavy wheat kernels go straight down into the other container while the chaff, all of the non wheat kernel stuff, gets blown away. At the end you have a container of beautiful clean wheat kernels, all of the chaff is gone right down to dust sized chaff. That gets burned.

Jesus story of wheat and tares was understood perfectly by the people of His culture. They've seen it thousands of times. They've all had a turn doing this process. Tares are part of the chaff that gets destroyed. Wheat is the valuable stuff that is kept.

Jesus point is that at all times, in the church, from the beginning of the church age to the end, there will be both wheat and chaff growing together, side by side, in the same field. That field is christendom. It claims to be the church.

But a day is coming when the worthless chaff will be separated out and burned. Not everything in the field is true wheat.

Fast forward to our passage this morning. Satan has demanded to sift the disciples like wheat. Let's look at this because I think you may see this passage in a way you've never understood it before.

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

Simon, Simon. Let's stop just here for a moment. Jesus has renamed Simon, remember? What's his new name? Petros. Peter. Rock. Why? A couple of things come to mind and we can perhaps identify.

Rocks are masses that are thick and hard. Impenetrable. That's both good and bad. It's hard to get anything inside of a rock. Peter was hard headed. He's a block head. Rock. But, that's good, because once those properties are there, they don't get shaken out very easily either.

You get something into that thick skull, it's pretty steadfast. Waves can move sand and seaweed all over the place. But they can beat against a rock for eons without changing it. Rocks are immovable, mostly. That's the characteristic we identify most with rocks. Solid. You can count on them being steadfast. Rocks aren't blown around with every wind of doctrine. Steadfast.

All of those characteristics were why Jesus renamed Simon, Rock. Peter. But when we come to our passage this morning, Jesus doesn't call him Rock. He uses his old name. And to make things worse, He says it twice. Ouch.

Not only are you not acting like Peter the rock, you're acting like your old self, Simon, times two. Simon, Simon. Anytime Jesus doubles down like that on a name, it means failure, failure. It's always an indicator of trouble. Simon, Simon. Jim, Jim doh!

There's so much in these words we have to take them slowly and glean all of

the nuances. Why Simon? Well, consider the previous discussion that we looked at last week. They're having a fight about who's going to be the boss, the head man. Who is second in command if Jesus isn't there. Who in their company is the greatest.

The obvious contenders are Peter, and the sons of boanerges. The sons of thunder, James and John. For sheer force of personality it takes two brothers to counter one Peter. But they were contenders and they had a family connection. Their mother is a relative of Jesus mother and James and John's mom doesn't mind going to Jesus and asking Him to put her sons in front of Peter in this tension.

That's our context. That's the background plus another thing has happened. In all of the narratives at this point in time, they have sung a hymn and departed from the upper room. In John's gospel Judas has been dismissed to go quickly and do the evil act of betrayal.

This discussion is perhaps on the way to their hiding place within the olive groves on the mount of Olives. With all of that in mind, let's consider the logic of Satan.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

Satan has already sifted out one tare. Judas. The winnowing process has proved that Judas was not a true disciple. Judas is not a true believer. Judas is dis-illusioned by the writing he see's on the wall. Jesus isn't going to kick out Rome and bring in a messianic era of prosperity.

Judas has decided to abandon a ship that seems to him to be going down, and he's going to get whatever he can as he exits. 30 days wages is better than nothing. He's made up his mind. He's out.

That was easy. Judas blew down like a house of cards with just a tiny wind. One down, eleven to go. From Satan's perspective. Nothin' to it.

Satan has demanded . . . We should stop right here and re-affirm that Satan's demands are at the complete disposal of God who is sovereign. Satan can demand all he wants. God does what He wills in his sovereignty. Not because of Satan's demands, but because He is God.

Psalm 115:3 puts it this way, *“Our God is in the heavens. He has done whatsoever He pleases.”* In Daniel 4:35 we read, *“He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth. And none can stay His hand or say to Him, ‘What are You doing?’”*

That includes Satan. Satan can demand all he likes. God has a sovereign plan and God can actually use evil that Satan will accomplish to accomplish His good plan.

Nothing that's about to happen, including all of the evil that Satan is unleashing by way of Judas will ultimately harm God or change His plan. God takes the good and the evil and works all of it to accomplish His good pleasure.

Satan wants to sift the other disciples through the sifter and the fan and doubtless Satan the accuser is saying something like, let me at these other disciples of yours, and let's do a bit of sifting and we'll find out who is wheat and who is chaff. Put them in the sifter. There's no wheat there. They're all the same as Judas. Let me at them. Let's do a bit of wheat sifting, shall we.

That's the scenario, and God isn't going to stop Satan. He's going to allow the sifting to happen. In that sentence; *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;*

In the grammar of the original language what you don't see clearly in the translation is that the word 'you', sift you like wheat, that word is plural. Peter's going to get sifted for sure. The bigger they are the harder they fall. But that plural word means Satan is requesting, I'm sure it was demanding, but it's like a 3 year old demanding a wise parent, demand all you want kid, it may

or may not happen like you want.

In this case, Satan is demanding to put all of these men through the sifter, and God for His own purposes, is going to allow it. For one thing, there is prophecy involved here that must be fulfilled. Satan is unwittingly aiding God in fulfilling prophecy that was spoken over 500 years before this night.

Zechariah 13:7 says; “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate,” Declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones.

In Matthew's account, chapter 26, the parallel to our section listen to Jesus words about this prophecy; *31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’*

This sifting of you like wheat in a sifter is necessary because it was prophecied and Satan's demand is going to be co-opted by the sovereignty of God to accomplish something that was written 6 centuries earlier.

Satan demands. God allows. Prophecy is completed. Tell me God didn't oversee all of it. Tell me God didn't write this book and cause all of it to happen according to His good pleasure according to His purposes.

Satan comes making demands to mess with the disciples and God says, yeah, we can do that, and prophecy is completed. Amazing truths! But it wasn't much fun for the disciples. Sifting can be painful. But in the end the real remains and the waste is discarded to be burned.

32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Again, interesting words here that make up the underlying thought. Jesus says but I have prayed, and that greek word is the word that would be translated

begged. I have begged for you. I have besought God in your behalf.

Satan demands, Jesus begs. These teachers that say you should demand things from God are more in the style of Satan than Jesus. Jesus begged His Father on behalf of who?

*32 but I have prayed for **you**, that your faith may not fail; and **you**, when once **you** have turned again,* In the greek, all of those incidences of you are singular. Who is the singular you? Peter. He is, as it turns out, the alpha doggie. Whatever Peter does, the others are going to follow along. Jesus begged on behalf of Peter.

Peter, Satan has requested to take you down a notch and I'm going to allow it. But you're going to stand up again, and when you do, go help your weaker brothers who are also going through the sifter.

32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

The difference between wheat and tares, real christians and phony claimers, is that when they get sifted, one returns and one is blown away with the chaff. Judas got sifted and his faith DID fail and he became so much chaff to be burned

Peter and the other 10 are going to get sifted but their faith is solid and they're going to have heartbreak and sorrow, but at the end of the day, they're going to remain. True wheat. It's no fun getting sifted. But it's purifying. All of the unnecessary dross, all of the useless junk, everything but the pure valuable fruit, gets removed and discarded. That can be painful.

In a few paragraphs we're going to find Peter weeping bitterly, heart broken at his failure, as Jesus looks up at him after the rooster crows. A knife wound in the heart would be less painful. Sifting is not fun, but it produces pure fruit.

Well, of course, Peter being Peter is in full control and he's going to let Jesus

know that He's wrong about all of this.

33 And he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" And Matthew 26 tells us all of the disciples said the same thing.

Sound familiar. With real persecution closing in on christians in our land we've talked real big from this pulpit. I'm right there with Peter; *"Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"* But talk is cheap. In the crush of the moment, when the sifting came, Peter didn't quite fulfil his bragging did he.

There's a lot of big talking going on these days if you're like me and listening to what's getting said in the faithful churches. I hope when the moment comes, we'll live up to some of the boasting about faithfulness until death.

And you've got to hand it to Peter, when the gaurd came to arrest Jesus in the garden, Peter launches into action. Out comes the sword and off comes an ear. He was going for it. Peter isn't just hot air. But things had to go according to Jesus plan, not Peters and Peter fails as soon as things are removed from his control and put under God's.

I talk real big in the safety of these four walls from this pulpit. But I spend time worrying about my own weakness when the day comes that I'm in the sifter. The answer is what happens to these men. Those of us who really do belong to the Lord, it's not going to be any fun getting sifted, but when it's over, like the wheat, we'll still be here. Worse for wear, and maybe broken hearted because of failures we'd like to have done better, but immovable from His grasp.

Failure in testing doesn't mean you lose your salvation. Judas didn't lose his salvation, he wasn't saved in the first place. He was a tare among the wheat. Judas walked away because he wasn't a believer.

Peter's going to fail, and so are the rest of these men. They're going to flee for their lives. But the failure isn't permanent, because they belong to Jesus and

He isn't going to let them go.

MacArthur says; If I could lose my salvation, I would have lost it a long time ago. If it was up to me, but it isn't. Finishers finish because Jesus simply won't let go, no matter how hard we blow it. We are kept.

Peter survived this sifting and in fact Peter fulfilled Jesus command to not only help his brothers, the other 10 disciples, but through his writing, Peter has been helping all of the brothers from that day until this one.

Peter's letters are amongst the strongest statements of the doctrine of eternal security of believers in all of the Bible. The perseverance of the saints. Listen to his opening statement in his first epistle;

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are **protected** by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

We are under the watchful protection of none other than the risen Jesus. He initiates salvation and then He keeps us. If you're wheat, you're going to make it through the sifter and out the other side. We have an inheritance in place, reserved for us. It's already in place and it's reserved. Not going anywhere. Because we are protected. It's a done deal.

Even Peter couldn't ultimately mess it up. And neither can I. But that doesn't mean it's easy.

34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

Judas abandoned Jesus and walked away. Peter will deny Jesus, and his heart is going to get broken over it, but he never walks away. The difference

between wheat and chaff.

Somewhere around 2010 or maybe a bit earlier I sort of re-discovered John Piper and began to listen to some of his excellent recordings at desiringgod.org. I think it might have been the 2012 together4thegospel conference where I first heard him use the term "finishers". A room full of finishers. And it took a minute for that to sink in. What's a room full of finishers?

Well, a room full of finishers is a room full of guys with hair my color. Guys who have been christians for 35, 45, 55 years and they're still there. Going strong. Seasoned christians who have weathered some storms and don't get too worked up about putting up the plywood over the windows for the next one that's coming. Been there, done that.

Guys like Christian and Hopeful who have made it beyond doubting castle and were now out of reach of Giant despair and the valley of the shadow of death, they were in the country of Beulah where in the distance they could now see the glorious City that they were traveling to. Finishers.

If you've never read Pilgrims Progress, get a copy and begin it today. You can read chapter one on line ([https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Pilgrim%27s_Progress_\(1909\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Pilgrim%27s_Progress_(1909))) while you wait for your hard copy. I recommend the Annotated Pilgrims Progress with notes by Warren Wiersbe.

Peter is the first example of a christian who enters into a season of despair and who we will find out in coming weeks is safely brought through his trial to the other side. He is a type for us. He blunders in, gets bogged down in despair, and is eventually restored to safety.

I say he's a type because every christian will follow in his example at some time. Real christians come out the other side. Tares are the ones who get offended and we never see them again.

I have a homework assignment for you. The passage I read to you from

Peter's first epistle. 1 Peter 1:3 - 9. I want you to take a blank piece of paper and lay it sideways and make 2 columns. In the left column the header is "stuff I do" and in the right column the header is "stuff He does for me"

Then I want you to outline that passage underneath the two headings. You can hand them in next week.