

“PROPHECY OF PETER’S PUSILLANIMITY.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Mark 14:26-31

Introduction.

My sermon title this morning is dedicated to the memory of Don Noteboom who loved interesting and uncommon and sesquipedalian words.

I have been waiting 40 years to show off this word in a sermon title and now that I finally got a chance to couldn't pass up the temptation. I heard a pastor preach a sermon in Wichita, Kansas on “Pusillanimous Peter” and I have never forgotten it.

There is a difference between what Judas did and what Peter did and there are fancy words for each. What Judas did to Jesus is called *perfidy*, a deliberate breach of faith or a calculated violation of trust.

What Peter did to Jesus was *pusillanimous*, that is cowardly, a lack of courage. He was not premeditatedly or willfully disloyal. He just emotionally unraveled under the stress of the moment.

Peter was well known for being impulsive and rash. When he saw Jesus walking on water he was quick to want to do the same. When Jesus first foretold His suffering and death Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him for saying such things (Mark 8:32-33).

When Jesus was washing the disciples feet,

John 13:8-9 Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” 9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

This final episode of pride will prove to be the most disastrous and humbling. To get the full insight into this passage we need to take into account Luke's telling of this story.

Luke 22:31-32.

Luke 22:31-32 “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 brothers.”

It's one of the mysteries of this open universe that we live in, a universe where there are principalities and powers, good and evil forces, that there is communication between them.

Most of you are familiar with the story of Job and of Satan's conversation with God and how Satan had to have God's permission before he could bring any trouble into the lives of God's children. From Job and from what Jesus says about Peter we are given insight into the nature of the spiritual realm.

There are two serious implications from this we need to know and remember as we face the difficulties of life.

First, Satan is real and Satan is powerful. Scripture doesn't let us be naïve about this. Satan is called the prince of darkness and the god of this age and the ruler of the air. He is able to blind the eyes of unbelievers, to take life like the children of Job, to ruin health and incite people to do evil like Judas, and even cause natural disasters like in Job. He's a roaring lion, a liar and a deceiver. He plucks up the good seed of the Word before it takes root and sows weeds among the wheat. He stirs up division, strife and persecution.

He has thousands of years of experience to draw on and he has brought down some of the strongest servants of God, including David and Peter.

Satan is driven by a pure hatred of God and all God's children. His fury is fueled by a mad desire to destroy everything that is good. He will stop at nothing and try everything he can. He really is a roaring lion on the loose. It's absurd that we are so complacent and casual and nonchalant. We clearly don't have a grasp of the reality of the situation.

Satan is real and powerful and we would be wise to take him seriously. He's supernatural and he can only be fought with supernatural weapons like those given to us in Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:11-18 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened

on the *belt of truth*, and having put on the *breastplate of righteousness*, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the *gospel of peace*. 16 In all circumstances take up the *shield of faith*, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the *helmet of salvation*, and the *sword of the Spirit*, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all *prayer* and supplication.

The second implication is God and Satan are not equal but opposite forces of good and evil. God is God, He is Lord of all the universe and everything and everyone in it. Satan is a creature, a fallen angel, created by God and therefore inferior to God and ruled by God.

This is more important in our day and age than ever before. With all the wickedness and violence we see and hear about, it can shake our faith that God is the supreme God able to bring good out of everything for those who love Him and called according to His purposes.

We have to remember the words of Jesus, He knows Satan and knows what Satan is up to; and Satan had to ask permission to sift Peter and all the disciples.

Right now some of you are thinking faster than I can preach and you have already raced on to some pretty big questions. Like if God is so powerful over Satan then why doesn't God stop him now and why does God let him keep doing the terrible things he's doing?

We know from Revelation a day is coming when God will put an end to Satan and cast him forever into the fire of hell. As Martin Luther's great hymn puts it, "his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him." With a single word God will flick him into hell the way we flick a bug off our sleeve. So why does God delay?

God is not obliged to answer our questions. He is God and His ways and His thoughts are not ours and are above ours. But Jesus does give a hint of an answer in Luke's text. He uses the word *sifting*.

"Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat."

God has a sifting work He wants to do for His glory and for our eternal benefit and Satan is His pawn to accomplish this work. We hear it in a passage I read at Don Noteboom's funeral yesterday.

I Peter 1:6-7 [Concerning your salvation] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is

tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 4:12-14 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

James 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Sifting grain means separating the chaff from the kernel. God uses suffering and affliction to purify and perfect us and His church. God leads His Son and us through suffering to bring us to glory.

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 ... provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Satan's purposes are evil, he means to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10), but God's purposes trump his purposes as God means to refine, purify, glorify and to give life that we might have life abundantly (John 10:10).

God has purposes and plans for Peter that can only be accomplished through being sifted and tried and broken of his pride.

When everything seems out of control, remember everything is completely under control. Satan may think he's winning, but we know that while some battles seem lost, the war is already won and Jesus has secured the victory.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

In this life we will have trials and afflictions, lots of them. These will come to sift and test and try and improve our faith. These will come to humble us and increase our dependence on God.

The good news is that we have an advocate with the Father who is Christ the Lord and He is praying for us.

Application and conclusion, *Lessons from the text:*

First, Jesus chose those twelve men knowing all that they would do. He chose them knowing that they would betray him and desert him. He chose them knowing their sin. He later chose Paul knowing he was chief among sinners.

Our sin doesn't disqualify us from ministry and service. Only our unrepentance does. We are all sinners and God still calls us into His church and into His service.

He knows our weaknesses, our failures, our imperfections. While we were yet sinners He loved us and while we continue to sin, He loves us. He bears with our infirmities and so we should learn to bear with each other's infirmities. Let us learn to make allowances for each other.

Furthermore, Jesus means for our weaknesses and infirmities to be the cause or source of our helping others. It's our weaknesses that are a help and encouragement to others. Our own fall into sin can be the wisdom another needs to avoid the same. Our own experience of forgiveness and grace can be the source of compassion we show another.

Our standing firm in the faith, our being strengthened in the faith is a family affair, it takes a church. There are some in our church who are carrying some pretty heavy burdens, shouldering some heavy loads. Some are in pain, some are caring for loved ones, some are fighting some pretty big battles either internal or external. Some just need a little help for a short time and some need it for the long haul.

God means to help us through others, and God means to help others through us.

Second, notice how much comfort we miss when we don't pay attention to Jesus' words. He plainly said to the disciples, "After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

That went right over their heads. They didn't hear it and they didn't remember it when they needed it most. Not a single disciple remembered it after the crucifixion. When He was betrayed they scattered like cockroaches in the light and when He was crucified they became utterly despondent and hopeless. And when He rose on the third day just as He said they wouldn't believe it.

How dull we are and how often we fall into error when He don't know God's Word and don't take it to heart. How many times have we read the Bible, how many sermons have we heard, how often are we hearing without hearing?

Don't neglect the truth of God's Word, it's medicine for your soul and strength for every trial.

Third, notice how foolishly self-confident we can be. Peter couldn't conceive of ever denying Jesus. Peter thinks he's the exception to the rule. "Maybe everyone else, but not me, Lord. Not only will I not deny you but I will willingly die for you."

And all the other disciples chimed in saying the same thing. Not one of them persevered even another twelve hours. Jesus bursts the bubble, "not only will you desert me, but you will do it tonight and you will do it three times."

How little do we know of our own hearts and souls. You hear of someone else's fall or sin and you think you would never do that.

God has imprinted on my memory a conversation I had with a Christian brother back in about 2005. He confessed a particular sin to me and in the midst of our conversation I said something like I was certainly a sinner as well and had plenty of my own but that particular one wasn't one of them, that wasn't something that tempted me. And within a year I fell to that temptation and I remembered my words. I have since gone back to him and confessed my arrogance and sin.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride and over confidence will be broken, and sometimes at a great cost, as Peter learned.

Who of us truly knows the depth of the sin in each of our hearts and what we are capable of? Who of us knows how far we might fall if faced with a particular temptation?

Name any sin, name the worst sin, and but for the grace of God there go I. The seeds of every wickedness are in the soil of every one of our hearts.

I Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Watch and pray, stand firm in your faith and if we resist him Satan will flee. I pray daily, “Lord, lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil and the evil one.”

We should all be more mindful of our weaknesses and continually seek the help of the Holy Spirit. Pride quenches prayer, let us humble ourselves under the hand of God.

Think about how weak and frail we really are. And think about how strong Satan really is. How do you explain that we are still standing, that we have not completely succumbed to every temptation? Is it not due to the miracle of God’s grace and the intercessions of Jesus? Jesus ever lives to daily intercede for us, to daily supply everything we need.

We are not the reason, we are not the explanation.

I Peter 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jesus’ work for us was not finished on the cross. He labors night and day, without ceasing, never sleeping, making intercession for us. God exerts His power without ceasing to guard and protect us and keep us for that day of our resurrection.

Let your confidence be in Christ and in Christ alone.

Fourth, remember to pray for your pastors and elders, for the shepherds of the flock. It’s a special strategy of the enemy to attack shepherds so he can scatter the sheep. He will stir up the attack from within or from outside, he doesn’t care. Pray for the shepherds of all God’s people.

Another pastor and his family was attacked this week in Nigeria and fifty people taking refuge in his home including women and children were burned to death. The danger is real, only supernatural weapons will work in this battle. Watch and pray.

Because of Christ’s victory we must not be overly fearful, but because of the enemy we must not be overly neglectful.

In this great demonic chess match against Jesus, Jesus knows every player and every move. At every single step Jesus is methodically fulfilling one prophecy after another and predicting every step that Satan takes before he takes it. The plan is falling into place exactly according to plan.

Satan may think he has some pretty good moves, but he has met his match in Jesus. When Jesus prays to the Father, that power is ultimate, it trumps every other power.

If you love Jesus but you find yourself despairing of your lack of faith or over your pusillanimity, your lack of courage or boldness, or if you are depressed over your failures, take heart and be of good hope. Jesus is praying for you and though Satan is real and strong, Jesus will not let him win or ruin your faith.

Glory to God for His great mercy and grace and for His good purposes in our lives and for His provision of a perfect Savior who is also our great Shepherd of the sheep and who guards and keeps us constantly under His care.