

***The Great Sayings in the Gospels***  
***159 - When Thou Art Converted***  
***Luke 22:31-34***

For today's message we are going to back up and try to finish a topic which has arisen a couple of times in the course of this discussion of the Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus.

Immediately after the establishment of the Lord's Table there was a conversation between Jesus and Peter.

Luke 22:31-34

- 31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:
- 32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.
- 33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.
- 34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. KJV

**Introduction:**

I apologize (sort of) on this Mothers Day that I do not have a Mothers Day message especially for you. This topic seized hold of my mind as I was preparing last week's message and I have found myself unable to set it aside and prepare something else. It happens like that sometimes in the life of a preacher. So, for those of you who came expecting a message targeting the ladies in particular and geared toward encouraging them as mothers, I hope you will not be terribly disappointed if instead of speaking to you as mothers I speak to you as Christians and bring to you something that is pressing upon my heart.

There is no greater need in the life of any Christian, no matter what their age or what role God has assigned them in life, than to become as useful as they might possibly be in the service of God and of their fellow man, particularly to those in the church. Jesus encapsulated that great goal in the words of v.32 of our text, "strengthen thy brethren."

We who love the Lord and His church also love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We long to see them prosper in every way. We want them to be well and not sick, to have plenty instead of being in want, to be happy and not sad. But, if our hearts are truly right toward them, we desire to see them prospering spiritually, established in their walk with God, strong and vibrant in their Christian life and witness.

Jesus was addressing that desire in His words to Peter, knowing that the little church which He had gathered was about to be shredded for a little while and each one of them put to a test that they were going to fail. The aftermath was going to be horrific for them unless they could find a leader who would hold them together and guide them until the Holy Spirit was poured out in power. The problem was that this one whom He had chosen to be the leader after He was gone

was going to be the one who failed the most profoundly and publicly on that last night.

A mighty change was going to need to happen and that very quickly for the group to survive. This change, however, that was worked out in the life of Peter is a picture of a profound change that is needed in the life of every person who identifies himself or herself with Jesus Christ. We typically use the word '*conversion*' to speak of the change which occurs at the new birth but it is obvious that Jesus had much more than that on His mind that last night of His earthly life.

*"When thou art converted,"* was an indirect way of saying some things that Peter did not want to hear and which would have offended him if someone else had said them.

**(1) You are about to be set upon by the devil.**

Jesus had said, "Satan hath desired to have you," and He had said, "I have prayed for you," but He did not say that He had prayed that Satan not have him, merely that Peter's faith would survive the 'sifting.'

Now, there was a classic case in the Hebrew Bible of a man being set upon by the devil and that was a horrific event. The man's name was Job and Peter knew well what he had suffered. So, these could not have been welcome words to him. No one gets tackled by the devil and have it turn out to be anything less than a horrific experience.

What are such situations all about? Well, for a believer it is always the attempt of the evil one to shake him loose from his faith or cause him to so badly betray his testimony and the Lord that he becomes useless with a ruined testimony and a crushed soul.

So, this was not welcome news.

**(2) You are currently less than you need to be for the task I have for you.**

Peter might have had cause to argue with that idea. "But I have been 3 ½ years with you, Lord. I repented of my sins under John's preaching and was baptized by him. You, Yourself, chose me personally and empowered me, along with the others, to cast out demons, heal the sick, and preach the gospel. I walked on the water during the storm on the Sea of Galilee and I was one of the three You chose to go with you up the Mt of Transfiguration where I saw Moses and Elijah with my own eyes. You took me, James and John, and no one else, with you to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead! How can you say that I am not both capable and prepared for whatever task you might have for me?"

But the words of Jesus are clear. Peter will not be capable to strengthening his brethren until he has been 'converted.'

**(3) The third thing we glean from these words is related and connected to the second.**

"Your brothers are going to need strengthening and you are inadequate right now for the task."

Again, the case could be made that this was not true. All that Peter had been doing for the past

3½ years was watching Jesus help and strengthen people. He had learned from Him, asking many questions. As we have already noticed, Peter had been enabled and empowered to help people himself away from the direct Presence of Christ.

So, why did Peter need to be ‘sifted’ and then ‘converted’ before he could be useful, and why were these other 10 men going to need to be strengthened?

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Before we attempt to answer that questions, let us consider some other thoughts.

The very idea that a true believer would need to undergo some profound additional change is:

- (4) foreign to the theology of many, and,
- (5) fodder that is used for deception by others.

Let me explain. The so-called Evangelical world is roughly divided into two camps on the situation of the ordinary believer. One camp says, “You were given everything you need at the New Birth, and everything that you will ever need. What you need to do is learn what you have and use it to be what you need to be.” The other camp says, “Oh no, you need a further experience of grace. You must receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. Then you will be ready and able to serve God as you should.”

I find myself somewhat in disagreement with both camps. We are indeed given many wonderful things at our salvation... all of the framework for a fruitful and profitable life. But we are not, at the outset, able to ‘strengthen the brethren’ any more than a human infant is able to do brain surgery, counsel a person with a troubled mind, or lead a country.

Part of what the developing Christian needs is time, information, and encouragement to enable him to grow. Development and teaching within a living and nurturing church family can go far toward maturing the disciple of christ.

But there are many pitfalls. If the doctrine is critically flawed or if the environment is not one to stimulate growth, the passing of time will not solve any problems. The writer of Hebrews bewailed the fact that those to whom he was writing had spent much time in the faith but had not matured properly.

Heb 5

12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. KJV

Heb 5:12

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. NASU

And Paul was saddened by the fact that the Corinthian believers, though having been some time

in the faith, were still spiritual infants.

1 Cor 3

- 1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.
- 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. KJV

It is obvious that even sincere believers having spent much time in the faith can still be in a place to need profound change to make them useful in the service of God.

And the case before us today demonstrates that even one who has had a good spiritual education in a good environment for a length of time can find himself needing something more so that he can be useful.

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Think with me for a minute about all of the things that were said to Peter near the end of Jesus' ministry.

Matt 16:16-23

- 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.
- 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.
- 18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
- 19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
- 20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.
- 21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.
- 22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.
- 23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. KJV

“You are blessed, and My Father has revealed truth to you.”

“You are an instrumental part in the very foundation of the church.” (Peter/rock)

“Get behind me, Satan. You offend me and you do not understand spiritual things, only human ideas.”

And our text.

Luke 22:31-34

- 31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may

- sift you as wheat:
- 32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.
- 33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.
- 34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. KJV

“Satan had desired to have you and sift you as wheat.”

“I have prayed for you.”

“Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning you will deny me three times.”

It almost makes me dizzy and I am sure Peter’s mind was spinning as well. He is blessed and has had divine truth revealed to him. He is a rock. He is the devil and doesn’t understand heavenly things. The devil wants to crush him. Jesus has prayed for him but before the night is over he is going to deny Jesus three times.

But Jesus had said similar things to the whole group.

Matt 18

- 1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
- 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
- 3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. KJV

They foolishly asked, “who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Jesus says, “Greatest? Let me tell you something, if you are not *converted* you will not even *see* the Kingdom of heaven.”

They all needed to be converted but Peter is sort of the test case, the front man, the first one through the door as it were. And, since he is the one in focus, we find ourselves discussing him.

***So, he and the others were in need of conversion, but how so?***

Peter, like us, had a fundamental flaw which rendered him ineffective for helping and strengthening others spiritually. I have attempted over the years to resolve what I think it was; cowardice? Pride? Deficient love for Christ? Lack of true devotion?

If you will recall the one thing that Jesus dealt specifically with Peter about between the Resurrection and the Ascension was Peter’s love for Him.

John 21

- 15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

- 16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.
- 17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. KJV

This, like many of the things which Jesus said, was carefully nuanced and we miss that in the translation.

The first two times Jesus asked Peter the question, He used the word for love which He used when He spoke of the most important commandment.

Matt 22:35-38

- 35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,  
36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?  
37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.  
38 This is the first and great commandment. KJV

When Peter responded, however, he used a word meaning something less, brotherly love. The third time Jesus asked the question, He changed the word to match the one Peter was using.

What was going on and what are we to learn from this? We must remember what we know of Peter. He was almost always the first one to speak and he almost always got it wrong. He wanted to walk on the water. He wanted to build three tabernacles on the Mt of Transfiguration. He declared that he would stand with Jesus, even die with Him, no matter what the others did.

What was his problem? Peter's love for Jesus was too large and his self-perceived love of Jesus was much smaller than he thought. But the Peter that we encounter there by the Sea of Galilee is a much different man than the one who had sworn allegiance the night before the crucifixion.

Something profound had happened to the man that fateful night, something that needs to happen to every disciple of Jesus Christ. He came face to face with the fact of his sinfulness and weakness *as a child of God*.

***Why was that necessary and how was it useful?***

- No one can help others who has not been helped himself by the Lord.
- The Lord does not work this kind of help without first crushing pride, grinding into fine powder.
- It was useful in that it brought him to the place of confessing his sin, living humbly, and forsaking his bravado, traits essential in those who would strengthen and help others.

Peter's interaction with Jesus demonstrated that he was forever 'over' himself and through with overstating his love for God.

*Aside:* You point out a person who is constantly bragging his love for God and I will show you an unbroken spirit and a person unqualified biblically to lead or help God's people.

There can be no question but that the Peter we find preaching at Pentecost had become a man capable of strengthening others but we must also recognize the he experienced more conversion than simply the crushing of his pride.

*Another issue we find being changed in Peter's life had to do with prayer.*

Remember that last night in the garden. Jesus had once again taken Peter, James and John a little further with Him than the others. This time He asked them to watch and pray with Him as He went on about a stone's throw from them and cast Himself down before the Father to wrestle over what was happening to Him.

During this time He particularly interacted with Peter who could not seem to keep himself awake, in spite of that which Jesus had told them was going to occur that night and that Satan was desiring to have him.

Matt 26:38-40

- 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.
- 39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.
- 40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? KJV See also Mark 14:34-37.

But some 40 days later we find a Peter who has a very different attitude toward prayer.

Acts 1:12-14

- 12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.
- 13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.
- 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. KJV

Acts 2

- 1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. KJV

For 10 days they prayed constantly and earnestly and from all that we can see in Acts 1, Peter was leading them. The man who could not pray for an hour could now pray for ten days and we can be sure that this habit of prayer continued with him through his ministry.

There is a lesson here for those who desire to be used of God to be a strengthening force and

influence in the lives of others. You must be converted on the matter of prayer into one who is willing to spend extended periods of time laboring before the Lord.

There is nothing so transforming as encountering the Person of God in private and personal times of seeking Him but a mighty transformation, a *conversion*, must take place before that kind of prayer becomes a part of the life. Every disciple who is not giving significant time to this effort should be constantly asking, "O God, make me a person of prayer."

I know of no person who has been a strengthening agent to others who has not been at some point converted on this matter.

***Then, finally, there is that matter of the Holy Spirit and the great experience which happened on the Day of Pentecost.***

Of all of the converting influences which happened to Peter after that awful betrayal of Christ, this was, no doubt, the greatest.

The Power of God fell upon that little band of 120 men and women in such a mighty way that 3,000 souls were added to the church that day. From then on conversions were occurring on a daily basis and even many of the priests (Acts 6:7) were saved. On another day (Acts 4:4) five thousand men were born again. And, right in the center of it all, was Peter.

And it seems that this word which Jesus had used stuck in his mind for we find him using it again in one of his messages.

Acts 3

19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; KJV

He now saw this conversion as essential for everyone.

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***Disclaimer:*** My experience has never caught up to my theology on this matter of the Holy Spirit. However, it is clear to me that the need for special empowering of God's Spirit continues to exist and to be a possibility, that no one can expect to be a strengthening agent in the lives of others apart from being empowered in special ways.

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That being said, the New Testament is full of references to the Holy Spirit and the absolute necessity of His Work in our lives to enable us to do that which we are called to do: be witnesses to the gospel and strengtheners to the church.

Paul prayed for the churches that they might know the power of God's Spirit upon them.

Every person that God has used in revival over the centuries has been a one enabled and



empowered by Him.

Therefore, we concluded that the final part of Christian conversion is this empowering which can only come by the Spirit.

***Mom, Dad, Wife, Husband, Son, Daughter, you need to be converted.*** Otherwise you will never been that encouraging, strength building person in the lives of the people around you that they so desperately need.

That secret sin, whatever it is, that stands between you and complete surrender to Christ must be outed and true repentance must drive it from your life.

If you truly desire to strengthen those around you, your brothers and sisters in Christ, real prayer, earnest prayer, must become a regular and important part of your life.

And... you must seek and find the empowering of the Holy Spirit to enable you to be what you are called to be... a witness for Christ.