

Sift You as Wheat

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September 19, 2015

Let's turn to Luke 22 to see a very interesting scripture. Now the context is Christ's last Passover. They have already taken the bread and the wine. Then Christ told them that there was a traitor in their midst. And the disciples started wondering among themselves who the traitor was. We'll start the narrative in Luke 22 verse 24, which I'll read out of the NLT. If you have a marker, you will want to put it here because we're going to come back several times during the sermon. Now, notice this. Right after taking the bread and the wine and talking about a traitor in their midst, notice what they do.

Luke 22:24. *Then they began to argue among themselves as to who would be the greatest in the coming Kingdom. (NLT)*

So, this tells you what's on their minds. "Look at me! I'm going to be the greatest." Verse 25, notice Christ's response.

25) Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men order their people around, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' (NLT)

The King James says "benefactors."

26) But among you, those who are the greatest should take the lowest rank, ... (NLT)

I wish we had learned that years ago, but this is what Christ says.

26b) ... and the leader should be like a servant. (NLT)

What a concept!

27) Normally [Christ says], the master sits at the table and is served by his servants. But not here! For I am your servant.

28) "You have remained true to me in my time of trial.

29) And just as my Father has granted me a Kingdom, I now grant you the right

30) to eat and drink at my table in that Kingdom. And you will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (NLT)

Now notice what He says next. This is astonishing in many ways. Christ is looking at Peter and He says:

31) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to have all of you to sift you like wheat. (NLT)

Keep in mind the context is the disciples were arguing over who is the greatest. Then, Christ says to Peter—and, as we're going to see in a little bit—"Satan's asked to have all of you," not just Peter, but the rest of them.

The question is: Why did Christ use the term sift you like wheat? Sometimes when I read the Bible, I ask myself "Why did God put it in those terms?" or "Why does God say it this way?" or "Why did He do that?" And so, the question is: Why did Christ use the term sift you like wheat? Because He's referring to Satan coming after Peter, and, as we'll see, the rest of the disciples. And the other big question is: Does this term apply to us today? So the title of the sermon is,

Sift You as Wheat

And we're going to investigate why Christ used this term and its full ramifications in the time we have today.

1. What does Christ mean by the term sift? What is He referring to?

The Greek word for "sift" is Strong's #4617 and it's the Greek word "siniazo" (sin-ee-ad'-zo), which means just what it says, *to sift*. It's from the Greek word "sinion" and that means *a sieve*. Now this applies today as we would sift flour.

I can remember as a little kid sitting in the kitchen watching my mom baking something. She had a sieve with a little lever on it. She would fill it full of flour and she would just crank that lever. She had a bowl that the flour would go through to. When she got to the bottom, every once in a while if you looked at the sieve, the flour was gone, but there was some stuff left in the sieve. We see here that there was some stuff left behind that wasn't flour and you didn't want to eat it or put it into whatever you were baking.

We need to remember this key which is that sifting separates the pure flour from the contaminants. Then the contaminants would be thrown away. Now in Christ's day, it referred to separating the wheat from the chaff. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown in their commentary says this about chaff:

... the refuse of the grain which has been threshed and winnowed. This is partly dust and dirt, but the real chaff is the hard and inedible coat of the grain. By threshing most of this is separated and then on a windy day, the grain is tossed into the air and the chaff and shorter pieces of straw are blown away.

Again, this is a separation of the pure wheat from all of the contaminants that you don't want when you're using the grain for food.

With that in mind, let's go to Matthew 3, which is the account of John the Baptist. We're going to see that John the Baptist spoke of this very fact. Matthew 3, this is the King James and we'll begin in verse 7.

Matthew 3:7. *But when he [referring to John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, ... (KJV)*

Now remember, John's baptism was the baptism of repentance. So the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to witness his baptism and He said to them; notice this:

7b) ... he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who [has] warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (KJV)

He didn't mince words. And John said what was on his mind.

Now, as an aside, this doesn't directly apply to the subject at hand, but at that time.... Again, I asked myself, "Why does he use the term "generation of vipers?" What's he referring to?" And if you research it, at that time many thought in Christ's day that vipers ate their way out of their mother's belly. So when John the Baptist used the term "generation of vipers," he was referring to a group that would kill their own mother. They were that evil. This is about the worst condemnation you can accuse anyone of—that you would be willing to kill your own mother. John was not mincing words.

Going on in verse 8, John says:

8) Bring forth therefore fruits meet [meaning suitable] for repentance: (KJV)

Or, as a demonstration of your repentance.

9) And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to [be] our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (KJV)

In other words, "God doesn't need you guys." Notice what John says in verse 10.

10) And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which [brings] not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (KJV)

This is going to have application to wheat and chaff.

*11) I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he [referring to Christ] that [comes] after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the [holy spirit], and with fire:
12) Whose fan ... (KJV)*

“Whose fan” refers to a fan that provides the wind that would separate the wheat from the chaff. And we see that,

12b) ... [Christ has a fan] in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, ... (KJV)

“Floor” refers to the winnowing floor or the threshing floor.

12 continued) ... and gather his wheat into the garner; ... (KJV)

“Garner” simply means in the Hebrew a *granary or a barn*.

12 continued) ... but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire [once it is separated from the wheat]. (KJV)

This occurs once the chaff is separated from the wheat. Now, John the Baptist is referring, obviously, to the lake of fire. And with that in mind, let’s go to Luke 19 and just read verse 27. Christ is very emphatic about this. Not everyone is going to be in the Kingdom of God. And this is their fate—those who are not in the Kingdom of God.

Luke 19:27. *But those [My] enemies, ... (KJV)*

Christ’s enemies, and how did we become enemies?

27b) ... which would not that I should reign over them, ... (KJV)

They want their own way, not Christ’s way. He says:

27 continued) ... bring [here], and slay them before me. (KJV)

That is the chaff. And God’s true children—righteous children, approved children, as we’re going to see—are the pure wheat.

Now, let’s look historically at an account of how Satan sifted a human being. This is the account of Job. Let’s go to Job chapter 1. We’re going to see that Satan asked permission to sift a human being. And Christ, the God of the Old Testament, gave him that permission up to a point, as we’re going to see. Job 1, we’re going to begin in verse 6.

Job 1:6. *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the [Eternal], and Satan came also among them.
7) And the Lord said unto Satan, Where [do you come from] Whence come you? Then Satan answered the [Eternal], and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. (KJV)*

Now notice.

8) *And the [Eternal] said unto Satan, [Have you] considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that [fears] God, and [eschews] evil? (KJV)*

We see here that God introduces the subject. God has a plan and He is introducing the subject.

9) *Then Satan answered the [Eternal], and said, [Does] Job fear you] for [nothing]?*

10) *[Have you not] made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he [has] on every side? [You have] blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. (KJV)*

Satan says, "No wonder he likes you. No wonder he worships you. You've given him everything."

11) *But put forth [your] hand now, and touch all that he [has], and he will curse [you] to [your] face.*

12) *And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he [has] is in [your] power; [but] only upon himself put not [your] hand.... (KJV)*

So we see here a fundamental principle that we'll bring up later. That is, God puts limits on Satan. God says, "You can deal with his family, his possessions, but don't touch his body." Going on the latter part of verse 12:

12b) *... So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.*

13) *And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:*

14) *And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the [donkeys] feeding beside them:*

15) *And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; [yes], they have [killed] the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell [you]. (KJV)*

So, the servants who took care of the donkeys and who took care of the oxen are dead. And those donkeys and oxen are now gone. If that wasn't enough, verse 16:

16) *While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God ... (KJV)*

This is interesting. Today we would say that it is an act of God, blame God for all the bad things in the world. They didn't know this was from Satan.

16b) *... The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and [has] burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell [you].*

So now the sheep are gone and the shepherders are gone.

17) While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, [yes], and [they've killed] the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped ... to tell [you]. (KJV)

So the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, the sheep and all his servants—employees you might say, but they were his slaves or his servants—they're all gone. So Job's livelihood is gone in a matter of moments. Then in verse 18, if that wasn't enough:

18) While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, [Your] sons and [your] daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

19) And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell [you]. (KJV)

And Job is quickly finding out that life is indeed fragile. Things can change in a moment.

Then in chapter 2 and verse 1 after all of this, there is another encounter between God and Satan.

Job 2:1. *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the [Eternal], and Satan came also among them to present himself before the [Eternal].*

2) And the Lord said unto Satan, [Where have you been? And Satan answered ... and said [the same thing he said before], From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. (KJV)

Now notice what happens this time.

3) [God says] unto Satan, [Have you] considered my servant Job, ... (KJV)

Now, God is starting to play with Satan a little bit. God says:

3b) ... that there is none like him [on] the earth, [he's still] a perfect and an upright man, one that [fears] God, and [eschews] evil?

Satan had said, "If you let me touch his possessions—all he has—he's going to curse you to your face." Well, obviously Job hasn't done that. So, God, again brings up the subject. Going on in verse 3:

3 continued) ... [he] still [holds] fast [to] his integrity, ... (KJV)

Now notice this.

3 continued) ... although [you referring to Satan moved] me [God] against him, to destroy him without cause. (KJV)

Now here God is allowing Satan to think that he is manipulating God. He said to Satan, "You moved me to do this. You provoked me to do this." That is not the case, but God is allowing Satan to think that.

*4) And Satan answered the [Eternal], and said, Skin for skin, [yes], all that a man [has] will he give for his life.
5) But put forth [your] hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse [you] to [your] face. (KJV)*

Satan says, "That was his possessions, but let me touch his body and he's going to curse you."

Job 2:6. *And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in [your] hand; but save his life. (KJV)*

So again, God puts limits on Satan. "You can go this far, but no more."

Job 2:7. *So went Satan forth from the presence of the [Eternal], and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown [of his head]. (KJV)*

So we've seen here in this first point that sifting refers to separating the wheat from the chaff. Here is the key. Satan is attempting to cause Job to become chaff. Satan wants Job to curse God; thereby, becoming unprofitable to God; thereby, becoming chaff, which will ultimately be burned in the lake of fire. That is what Satan wanted to do and he wanted to do this and more to Peter and, as we're going to see, the rest of the disciples. That leads us to the second point.

2. Satan wanted to sift all of the disciples, not just Peter.

Let's go back to Luke 22 verse 31 and this time I'll read it out of the King James. Christ is addressing Simon.

Luke 22:31. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan [has] desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: (KJV)*

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say this under the word you: "Not Peter only, but them all." The NLT said "all of you" referring to all of the disciples.

Clarke says this about Luke 22:31 and about the term "Simon, Simon," when one's name is mentioned twice.

When a name is thus [repeated] in the sacred writings, it appears to be always intended as an expression of love, manifested by a warning voice. As if he had said, While [you] and the others were contending for supremacy...

Remember they were arguing who was going to be greatest. Going on with the quote:

Satan is [endeavoring] to destroy you all: but I have prayed for [you], as being in [the] most danger. [Referring to Peter]

Of course, there is a lesson for us. Satan was provoking the disciples. He was provoking their pride so their pride would rise to the forefront and they would begin to look to themselves. And they would begin to cause division by arguing to see who was the greatest. All of this is an effort to destroy the disciples, but they didn't see that. They didn't recognize that.

Clarke goes on about the phrase "Satan has desired you." Clarke says this:

That is, all the apostles.... The plural pronoun, humas, sufficiently proves that these words were not addressed to Peter alone. Satan had already got one, Judas; he had nearly got another, Peter; and he wished to have [them] all.

Now Matthew Henry's commentary says this, which is very interesting.

The general notice Christ gives to Peter of the devil's design upon him and the rest of the apostles (v. 31): The Lord said, Simon, Simon, observe what I say; Satan [has] desired to have you, to have you [meaning all the disciples; going on,] all in his hands, that he may sift you as wheat.

If we understand this, when he's referring to Peter, it explains it very well. He said, "Peter, who used to be the mouth of the rest in speaking to Christ." He has the boldest personality. He was the one that spoke first. He was the one that spoke for the rest of the disciples.

Peter, who used to be the mouth of the rest in speaking to Christ, is here made the ear of the rest; and what is designed for [a] warning to them all ... is directed to Peter, because he was principally concerned, being in particular manner struck at by the tempter:

Peter tended to be the leader and if Satan can get to the leader, then Satan can get to the others. Going on:

Satan has desired to have you. Probably Satan had accused the disciples to God as mercenary in following Christ, and aiming at nothing else therein but enriching and advancing themselves in this world, as he

accused Job.... "Give me leave to try them," [said] Satan, "and Peter particularly."

So you see in the second point, it wasn't that Satan was just going after Peter alone, he was going after all the disciples. And that leads us to the third point as it applies to us today.

3. Satan wants to sift all of us, every single one of us.

We have to remember that Satan is our accuser. Let's go to Revelation 12:10. We know this scripture but, as we look at this scripture, let's understand it in context of Satan wanting to sift God's people as wheat and this is how he does it.

***Revelation 12:10.** And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. (KJV)*

Now remember this is Revelation. It's looking back over 6,000 years of history to the Old Testament times of the prophets and the leaders that God dealt with and gave His spirit to as well as all of those for 2,000 years in the New Testament that because of repentance and baptism had God's holy spirit. And from the viewpoint of Revelation looking back on that when they say "he accused them before our God day and night," this refers to the entirety of 6,000 years of Satan accusing those God is calling and dealing with.

The Greek word for "accuser" is Strong's #2723. It's the Greek word "kategoreo" (kat-ay-gor-eh'-o). We get the English word "category" from it. And it means *to be a plaintiff, that is, to charge with some offence.*

So, we're being told here that Satan charges us with offenses before God. Satan is saying, "Did you see what he thought?" or "Did you hear what he said?" or "Did you see what this woman did?" and you call them Christians and they're supposed to have your holy spirit." There is just this continual dribble from Satan to God to accuse the brethren. The key here, as with Job and as with Peter and the disciples, is that Satan wants to convince God that all of us are chaff. We're not worthy for eternal life. We're all chaff. We're worthy to be burned up in the lake of fire.

Now, let's go to Psalm 1:1 and see what David says about that very subject—separating the wheat from the chaff and the chaff being burned. Psalm 1:1, we normally focus on the beginning, the first three verses of this because it is very positive.

***Psalm 1:1.** Blessed is the man that [walks] not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor [stands] in the way of sinners, nor [sits] in the seat of the scornful.
2) But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law [does] he meditate day and night. (KJV)*

And because of that, verse 3:

3) And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that [brings] forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he [does] shall prosper. (KJV)

What a positive thing! Then we get to the “but” in verse 4.

4) The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind [drives] away. (KJV)

That’s the ungodly. And Satan wants to cause all of us by his provocations to become chaff.

The Bible Background Commentary by Keener says this:

Winnowing was familiar to all Palestinian Jews, especially to the farmers. They would throw harvested wheat into the air and the wind would separate the heavier grain from the lighter chaff. [Notice this.] The chaff was useless for consumption and was normally burned.

So, Satan accuses us to God, trying to convince God, by pointing out our faults and our weaknesses and our sins, that we are chaff. Satan is constantly pointing out when we fall short and when we sin, saying that we are worthy to be separated and we are worthy to be burned just like chaff.

Now let’s go back to Luke 22:31. Again, I’ll read this out of the King James.

Luke 22:31. *And the [Eternal] said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan [has] desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: (KJV)*

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown’s Commentary about the phrase “desired to have” is very interesting. It says:

Rather ... properly ‘asked and obtained’; alluding to Job (Job 1:6-12 2:1-6).

And we know as we just read that Satan came to God and asked and obtained permission to go after Job.

So, Jamieson Fausset and Brown’s Commentary says:

Rather ... properly "asked and obtained"; alluding to Job (Job 1:6-12 2:1-6), whom he solicited and obtained that he might sift him as wheat, insinuating as "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10), that he would

find chaff enough in his religion [meaning Job's religion], if indeed there was any wheat at all.

So Satan's motive was to go after Job and to provoke Job to curse God and then prove to God that "Job's religion is nothing but chaff. Job is nothing but chaff; so You need to take care of Job."

Matthew Henry goes on to say:

He [referring to Satan] desired to have them, that he might sift them, that he might show them to be chaff, and not wheat. The troubles that were now coming upon them were sifting, [The troubles that they were enduring were sifting.] and would try what there was in them: but this was not all; Satan desired to sift them by his temptations, and [endeavored] by those troubles to draw them into sin ... to shake out the wheat and leave nothing but the chaff. Observe, Satan could not sift them unless God gave him leave: He desired to have them, as he begged of God a permission to try and tempt Job.

So you see Satan's desire has not changed. He went after Job. He went after Peter and all the disciples. And nothing has changed. He is coming after each and every one of us.

Let's go to John 10:10, the Parable of the Sheepfold. We've talked about this before but let's look at just this one verse from the viewpoint of sifting as wheat and the Accuser of the brethren as trying his very best to get us to become chaff.

John 10:10. *The thief [comes] not ... (KJV)*

The "thief" refers to the thief that jumps over the wall of the sheepfold to get in among the sheep.

John 10:10. *The thief [comes] not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: ... (KJV)*

God's people—all of us! Christ says:

10b) ... I [however] am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (KJV)

So, (as with Job, as with Peter, as with the disciples) Satan is trying to cause us to become chaff. That's the third point, which leads us to the next. We've seen this but we need to emphasize this.

4. Satan can do nothing to us without God's permission.

He must ask God for permission to touch any of God's people. Let me read what Clarke has to say regarding Luke 22:31, "Satan has desired you." This is very interesting.

But we see by this that the Devil cannot even tempt a man unless he receive permission. Notice this next sentence. Referring to Satan:

He desires to do all evil; [but] he is permitted only to do some.

Satan wants to perform all evil relative to God's children, but he is permitted only to do some because, God, as we saw with Job, sets limits on Satan.

We saw that. Remember in Job chapter 1, He set limits on Satan. God said, "You can deal with his family. You can touch his possessions, but you leave him alone." And then in Job chapter 2, God said, "You can touch his body, but you can't take his life." So in both cases, God sets limits.

God was manipulating Satan. Without a doubt, Satan thought he was manipulating God. He thought he had God wound around his little finger. Yet, God was manipulating Satan in the case of Job to do God's will. He had Satan like a puppet on a string and God brought up the subject. He set limits, but the goal was to do His will in Job's life and all of this was done for Job's ultimate good.

So, through these examples, we learn that Satan can't touch us without God's permission and God will grant that permission only when it suits God's will to fulfill His ultimate purpose in our lives. That leads us to the fifth point and this is something that as we go through trials, we can't forget.

5. All that God causes or allows in our life is for our good and not our harm.

It was true with Job. It was true with the disciples. It is true with us. Everything God allows to happen, to come our way—either causes or allows—is for our ultimate good and not our harm. Let's go to Jeremiah 23 and we're going to begin in verse 23. We'll just read verses 23 and 24 out of the King James. God sets Jeremiah straight and all of us straight. God asks a question.

Jeremiah 23:23. *Am I a God at hand, [says] the Lord, ... (KJV)*

Meaning, "Am I a God that's close by? I see everything. I hear everything?"

Jeremiah 23:23. *Am I a God at hand, [says] the [Eternal], and not a God afar off?*

24) *Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? ... (KJV)*

Is that possible?

24b) ... Do not I fill heaven and earth? [says] the [Eternal]. (KJV)

I think, when it's all over with and we get to sit down with God and Christ, we're going to see that God's spirit permeates everything—everything. We might find out that what is physical is a manifestation of God's spirit. We don't know. But the fact is that God is everywhere. He hears everything. He sees everything. He knows what we think, what we do, what we say. He is absolutely sovereign. He can do anything He wants, but He has a purpose for each one of us. He has a purpose individually for each one of us and He is intimately involved in our lives. Every day He is intimately involved in our lives. He is not far off.

Einstein's concept of God was like a clock. God wound the clock up, put all the energy into the universe (big bang), set the clock on a shelf and just walked off, and just let it run. God is saying, "I am not that way. I'm not far off. I am involved in your life every minute of every day." So with that in mind, let's go to Romans chapter 8 and look at verse 28. We read this often when we go through trials, but let's read it with the understanding of sifting wheat from chaff and Satan the accuser trying to get us to become chaff.

Romans 8:28. *And we know that ... (KJV)*

Not "We think" or "We suppose." It's "We know."

28b) ... that all things ... (KJV)

It's not "some things." It's not "most things," but:

28b) ... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (KJV)

We have been called individually by name. We have been baptized, repented of our sins, received the holy spirit. God has promised us a kingdom to go to for an eternity. And He says, "Because of that fact, because of your calling, everything that comes your way did I either allow to happen to you or cause to happen to you and is for your ultimate good in order to be My children eternally in the Kingdom of God."

Now our job is to make sure that He knows—God knows, Christ knows—that we love Him with all our heart. Our job is to make sure that every day we put Him first; we love Him with all our hearts; and that we need to show God that we do understand that everything that He does is for our ultimate good and not for our harm.

God is not the harsh, cruel god that is waiting for us to step out of line so he can just bring the hammer down because he gets some kind of perverse pleasure in causing us pain. That's the pagan concept of God. And that is the concept of Protestant churches in the fire and brimstone crowd. Or in many areas of the Catholic teaching, there is the same thing.

Everything God does is for our benefit. Let's go to James 1 and we'll begin in verse 2. I'm going to read it out of the New Living Translation. James is talking to brothers and sisters, called out ones, baptized ones, part of the body of Christ.

James 1:2. *Dear brothers and sisters, whatever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. (NLT)*

Now that sounds counter-intuitive. It's an oxymoron.

3) For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. (NLT)

That's a blessing.

4) So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything. (NLT)

What God causes, or allows, builds strength in us, endurance in us, character in us. Verse 12:

12) God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (NLT)

That has to be our goal. Our eyes have to be fixed on that crown of life.

13) And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either.

14) Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires ...

15) These evil desires lead to evil actions ... (NLT)

That's a principle we all need to remember. Evil desires ultimately lead to evil actions if they are not stopped. And then James said:

15b) ... Evil actions lead to death.

16) So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.

17) Whatsoever is good and perfect comes to us from God above ... (NLT)

All the good things, all the perfect things are from God. Now He allows some imperfect things to come to us. He allows Satan to come to us, but He put limits. The goal is for our ultimate good.

17) Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heavens' lights [the universe]. Unlike them, He [God] never changes or casts shifting shadows. (NLT)

What that means is, for example, let's say you have a tree in the middle of your yard or in the middle of a field. In the morning as the sun traverses the sky, the shadow shifts all the way. And as the sun is setting, the shadow is now on the other side of the tree. What He's saying is that shadows shift but God doesn't. God is the same today, yesterday, forever. So we can have absolute faith that anything God allows or causes to come our way is for our good and never for our harm. That's the fourth point.

5. The fifth point is Satan sifts us or tempts us or attempts to sift us where we are weakest.

This is something that applies to us as we look at the end goal and applies to us between now and the time that goal is achieved.

Satan attacks us, attempts to sift us not where we're strong, but where we are weak. Any general sends out reconnoitering parties to the enemy to see where their lines are the weakest, where they can be breached. It may not be in the front. It may be in the rear. It may be to the side on a flank.

Let's go back to Luke 22 verse 21 out of the King James. Notice now we're jumping to the beginning of the story about the traitor.

Luke 22:21. But, behold, the hand of him that [betrays] me is with me on the table.

22) And truly the Son of man [goes], as it was determined: ... (KJV)

He's telling them this, but obviously they didn't understand.

22b) ... but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!

23) And they began to inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. (KJV)

As I pointed out in the beginning, notice in the next breath, verse 24:

24) And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. (KJV)

Again, this shows where their minds were. Matthew Henry says this in his commentary:

Some suggest that Satan demanded leave to sift them as their punishment for striving who should be greatest, in which contest Peter perhaps was very warm: ..."

What Matthew Henry is saying (and it's probably true) is that Peter being the boldest and the most aggressive was the one that was in there arguing the most vociferous that he was the greatest and he should be their leader. That's why Christ said, "Simon, Simon," because he was the one pushing himself the strongest.

Satan knew that pride is man's universal weakness. And you can look at all the troubles in the world and most of those troubles come down to pride of a human being. And it's the same with us. We are no different in our human nature. Let's go to 1 John 2 and we'll read verses 15 and 16. The thing we all have to watch out for is pride. Pride can destroy good things. Pride can destroy converted minds. We've seen that. Pride can cause people to go astray.

1 John 2:15. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world [physical stuff]. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (KJV)*

We know that. Notice verse 16.

16) For all that is in the world, ... (KJV)

What is in the world? John lists three things.

16b) ... the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, ... (KJV)

The NLT adds "pride in our ... possessions." Pride in our rank, pride in who we are.

26 continued) ... the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (KJV)

Notice the end result of pride. We've seen it so many times. We've seen it in the church. We've seen it in the world. Let's go to Proverbs 29 and read verse 23. If we succumb to pride, this is the result. We've seen it in presidents. We've seen it in athletes. We've seen it in media stars. We've seen it in history.

Proverbs 29:23. *A man's pride shall bring him low: ... (KJV)*

That's a guarantee.

23b) ... but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit. (KJV)

We're no different than Job. We're no different than the apostles. We're no different than Peter and it's something that we have to watch out for because Satan was in amongst the disciples. He was stirring up their pride. And right after Christ said, "There's a traitor in your midst," they're starting to argue about who is the greatest—just stirring up human pride! And Christ knew that their pride would destroy them if they did not overcome it. And Satan was trying to destroy the work that God was going to do through them.

Let's go to Proverbs 16 and look at verse 18. This is a guarantee and this is what Satan was trying to do. He was trying to provoke their pride.

Proverbs 16:18. *Pride [goes] before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (KJV)*

That was starting to work in the disciples on that night. Let's go back to Luke 22:25. So, Christ here teaches them that a self-exalting attitude was ungodly and incompatible with His message and incompatible with His behavior.

Luke 22:25. *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. 26) But [you] shall not be so: ... (KJV)*

They're arguing about who is the greatest. Christ says, "Don't be that way."

26b) ... but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; ... (KJV)

Esteem others better than yourself.

26 continued) ... and he that is chief, as he that [is a servant or that does] serve [or a slave]. (KJV)

Be a slave because that's what Christ was doing.

27) For [which] is greater, he that [sits] at meat, or he that [serves]? (KJV)

Obviously, the one that sits at the head of the table to be served.

27b) [Christ said,] ... is not he that [sits] at meat [or at food]? [Notice this.] But I am among you as he that [serves]. (KJV)

Christ said, "What you're allowing Satan to do amongst you tonight is not going to work. You can't be that way. You can't be like the rest of the world. You have to be slaves. You have to be servants. You have to set yourself underneath everybody and not exalt the self."

So, the lesson for us today that we must do is that we need to identify and work on our own weaknesses. And pride is at the core of it all. If we strengthen our weaknesses, guess what? That makes Satan's job harder to get to us because, remember, he attacks our weaknesses. And if we overcome our weaknesses and overcome that area of concern, it makes it harder for Satan. It's like a city with a wall around it. If there is a weakness in the wall or part of the wall has crumbled down, guess where Satan is going to attack. But if that wall is built up, it is stronger and it makes his job much, much harder. So that leads us to the seventh and final point. This is the encouraging good news about all of this.

7. Through God, we can overcome any (and I repeat "any") any weakness, any sin, any shortcoming, anything.

1 John 5 and verse 3, let's go there. We'll begin in verse 3 and go through verse 5. Now if a verse starts out saying, "This is the love of God," our ears should perk up, our antennas should go up because we should want to know what God loves.

1 John 5:3. *For this is the love of God, ... (KJV)*

Now we could say, "This is what God loves us to be doing. This is what God wants us to do in expressing His love back to Him or expressing His love toward others. This is what God loves His children to be doing?" Guess what it is?

3b) ... that we keep his commandments: ... (KJV)

That's what God loves us to be doing.

3 continued) ... and his commandments are not grievous. (KJV)

Again, the commandments are for our benefit; they're for our good.

4) For whatsoever is born of God [overcomes] the world: (KJV)

We have the ability to overcome the world as we're going to see.

4b) ... and this is the victory that [overcomes] the world, even our faith.

5) Who is he that [overcomes] the world, ... (KJV)

The question is: Who is he?

5b) ... but he that [believes] that Jesus is the Son of God? (KJV)

And that's not just saying, "Oh, yes, I profess Jesus as the Son of God." It's understanding that Jesus overcame. He overcame to the point that He died on the cross. He overcame pain and ridicule. He overcame tiredness and fatigue. He overcame having His hands and feet nailed. He overcame everything through the power of the holy spirit.

So, Christ encourages the disciples. Let's go to Luke 22 and look at verse 28. He's trying to encourage them and says:

Luke 22:28. *[You] are they which have continued with me in my temptations. (KJV)*

He's saying, "You're not like Judas." Judas was gone at that point. He says, "You've continued with me in my temptations." And here's the encouragement:

29) *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father [has] appointed unto me; (KJV)*

Notice this.

30) *That [you] may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (KJV)*

What encouragement! Christ is saying, “You’re arguing among yourselves who is the greatest. And I’m telling you, ‘Satan’s after you.’ You have to shape up. You have to realize that he’s provoking you and your pride.” But Christ said, “If you overcome and because you have continued with me up to this point, I’m prepared to make you kings over the Twelve Tribes of Israel and you’re going to eat with me at my table.” What encouragement to them.

And then, Christ encourages us down the line in these latter days. He encourages us in the letters to the seven churches. Let’s go to Revelation chapter 2. We know that yes, there are church eras, and each letter to a specific church applies to that specific church era, but that if you look at the whole, the entirety of all the letters, they apply to God’s people over all time because all of us are humans and all of us have similar problems. Revelation 2, we’ll start in verse 26, the letter to Thyatira, but, again, it is to all of us.

Revelation 2:26. *And he that [overcomes], and [keeps] my works unto the end, ... (KJV)*

Christ said to the disciples, “You’re the ones who have stayed with Me during my trials.”

26b) *... [keeps] my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: (KJV)*

The Greek word for “overcome” is Strong’s #3528 and it means *literally and figuratively to subdue; to conquer, to prevail, and to get the victory*. “He that overcomes” Christ says, “I’m going to give you power over the nations.” What a reward!

Now look at chapter 3 and verse 5. This is the letter to Sardis.

Revelation 3:5. *He that [overcomes or he that gets the victory], the same shall be clothed in white raiment; ... (KJV)*

We’re told in Revelation 19, “The bride has made her clothes white.”

5b) *... and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but [notice,] I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. (KJV)*

Now the Greek word for “confess” is defined in Zodhiates’ Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament as *to acknowledge as belonging to one*.

So, what we're being told here is Christ will confess before the Father that "These belong to me. They're mine. They have endured. They've overcome and they belong to me." What encouragement!

Look at verse 12 in the letter to Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:12. *Him that [overcomes] will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: ... (KJV)*

To be able to serve in God's presence, in His temple, in this temple that just boggles the mind. It's of spirit, with the colors, the sea of glass and of that—we can't even comprehend. And He says, "You're going to be with me in my Temple. You don't have to go out anymore." Then verse 21, to all the churches.

Revelation 3:21. *To him that [overcomes] will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (KJV)*

To sit in the presence of God and Christ on their throne? Even to be near their throne? Us? What an encouragement to us!

Revelation 21:7, at the end of the book of Revelation, again talks about "he that overcomes," prevails, conquers, gets the victory.

Revelation 21:7. *He that [overcomes] shall inherit all things; (KJV)*

Everything that is wonderful and good that we see in the prophecies and what eternal life is going to be like.

7b) He ... shall inherit all things; ... and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (KJV)

As younger brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, we will be sons of God for eternity.

Remember through the holy spirit All things are possible. I had a man say to me years ago—he just couldn't conquer this one sin. He kept going back and back and back into this one sin. And he said, "God's going to have to change this in me in the kingdom. I can't change this. After I'm resurrected, God's going to have to heal me of this." I tried to explain that this isn't the way it works. You have to prove to God which is greater, your desire to do this sin or your desire to obey God. This is your time of test. Now, which is it going to be? You just can't continue in sin and then ask God to wave a magic wand and give you eternal life, and, then, get rid of your sin. It doesn't work that way. It just doesn't work that way at all.

Look at Romans 15 and verse 13.

Romans 15:13. *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that [you] may abound in hope, ... (KJV)*

And how do we abound in hope?

13b) ... through the power of the [holy spirit]. (KJV)

That power is available to all of us to overcome any sin, any weakness, any shortcoming. And when we know that, it gives us hope. It gives us joy and peace as verse 13 says.

Then one final scripture under this final point, let's go to Mark 10 and look at verse 17. As conditions get worse and worse and where there is more evil around us, this we have to hold onto and believe in.

Mark 10:27. *And Jesus looking upon them [said], With men it is impossible ... (KJV)*

There are many things men cannot do. And look at the world today—many, many things men cannot do.

27b) ... but not with God: for with God all things are possible. (KJV)

Including overcoming our sins, overcoming our faults, overcoming our weaknesses and it is done through the power of the holy spirit in each one of us. Our job is to exercise that spirit every day. Our job is to grow that spirit every day through prayer, through study, through meditation, through fasting, through getting close to God, and exercising that spirit. If we have an abundance of God's spirit in us, we can overcome anything that comes our way.

So, in conclusion, we've seen what it means to sift. And we've seen that Satan wants to cause us to become chaff and to be burned up eternally. We've seen that Satan tempts us where we are weakest, but he can do nothing without God's permission. So we know that whatever comes our way, God is aware of it because He has given permission. He's allowed it to happen. And what God allows to happen, or causes to happen, is always for our good, never for our hurt, never for our harm, but with the goal of shaping us and molding us to become God with Him in His kingdom.

It's like when Christ talked about the potter and the clay. We're the clay and the holy spirit is the water. The potter pours water into the clay, works it and shapes it. And that's what God is doing with us through the holy spirit. God always gives us the power to overcome.

Now, let's look at the end result. Let's go to 2 Thessalonians 1 and we'll begin in verse 6. I'll read this out of the NLT.

2 Thessalonians 1:6. *In his justice ... (NLT)*

This is something we can hang onto.

6) In his justice he will punish those who persecute you. (NLT)

That we can count on.

7) And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels ... (NLT)

The day we look forward to!

*8) in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus.
9) They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. (NLT)*

They are the chaff that will be burned up.

10) When he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people and you will be among those praising him on that day ... (NLT)

Why?

10b) ... for you believed what we testified about him. (NLT)

Not only believed but obeyed and made it part of our very lives.

Now, let's close with Christ's final words to Peter on this whole subject of sifting where we started in the beginning. Luke 22, these are Christ's final words on this subject and we need to remember these words as it applies to each one of us. Luke 22, we'll read verses 31 and 32.

Luke 22:31. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, ... (KJV)*

"You're here arguing about who is the greatest." And knowing Peter, he was probably, as the commentator said, "warmest" to the idea of being the greatest.

31b) ... Simon, Simon, behold, Satan [has] desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: (KJV)

Here is the key.

32) But I have prayed for [you], that [your] faith fail not: and when [you are] converted, strengthen [the] brethren. (KJV)

So, if Christ prayed for Peter while He was on the earth in Peter's presence—I just ask the question—what will He do for us when He's sitting on the right hand of God the Father? If He prayed with Peter and was dealing with all the physical stuff that He had to deal with, what will He do for us when we need His prayers, when we need His help and He's sitting in all power and all glory on the right hand of God the Father? What can He do? And what will He do for us? I think the answer is obvious. He can do all things—whatever is best for us so that we will be the Father's children in the kingdom.

But then notice, Christ gives Peter an assignment. He said, "I prayed for you that your faith fail not, but," And then what did He say? "Strengthen the brethren." He gave Peter an assignment. And, that assignment is for all of us—every one of us. Those who have had losses, those who are undergoing trials, those who are in pain, those who suffer—the assignment is "Strengthen the brethren." And it's one we would all do well to take personally. Not wait for somebody else to do the strengthening. We need to strengthen each other as time gets closer and closer to the end.

So, the big lesson coming from this account of sifting as wheat is that we always must be on guard against the one who wants to sift us as wheat, who wants us to become chaff and who wants to see us burned up eternally. That's a big lesson. We must be aware of that. We have to be on guard.

And the other big lesson is we must exercise the power of the holy spirit to become what? What we want to become, as is appropriate as we approach the Feast of Tabernacles, we must exercise the power of the holy spirit to become the golden wheat of the harvest.