

# “But I Have Prayed for You”: Our Interceding Savior and Invincible Security (Part 1)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>31</sup> “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”  
<sup>33</sup> Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31–34)

### A Sunrise in Syllables

- A. We come to now what, in my opinion, are some of the sweetest verses in all the Bible.
1. Yes, there are some darker realities here—satanic opposition, naïve self-confidence, the denial and abandonment of our Savior, and things like this.
  2. But when seen in the larger context, we realize that what we have here is less like the darkness of deep night and more like the darkness of early morning—that time when all is tingling with expectation of dawn’s first light. Indeed, when we are done considering these verses before us, we shall find it’s not darkness and shadow that we are left with here, but brightness and glory!
    - a. This text is a new morning wrapped in words, a sunrise in syllables.

### Where Is Jesus and What Is He doing?

- A. I should say I’ve personally turned to these words many times in my struggles as a follower of Christ and found in them great encouragement and reason to hope.
- B. It all really comes to something I’d like to bring out here at the beginning by asking a simple question: If I were to ask you where Jesus is now and what He’s doing, what would you say?
1. I imagine some of us might say: “Ah I know where He is, He’s in heaven on a throne beside His Father.” Okay true enough. But now what is He doing? “Well, He’s ruling and reigning.” Yes, yes, I suppose that is right. That’s a wonderful theologically accurate answer.
  2. Others of us may focus on the outpouring of His Spirit after His ascension and the fact that while He is in heaven, He is also by way of His Spirit here on earth and He’s leading and guiding and ministering to us. That also is wonderfully true.

3. But there are others of us might come at an answer to the question a bit more subjectively—meaning we’d come at it from the perspective of our own experience and feelings. And, you know, I have no doubt, that some of us are not so cheery on the matter.
    - a. We might not say it out loud but we feel it—deep in our bones we feel it. He’s absent. If He is in heaven on a throne, it’s clear His attention is elsewhere. If He is on earth by His Spirit, He certainly does not seem to be here with me. Just look at my life. Just look at the way things have been going. I feel abandoned, forgotten, even, if I dare say it, forsaken.
      - i. We may know objectively, theologically, He has ascended to heaven, sent back His Spirit, and all this, but subjectively we feel very little of these things. They don’t encourage us. They don’t help us, it would seem.
- C. And so there is something else to bring out on this point. Something situated, it seems to me, between the realities of His heavenly rule and reign and His earthly spiritual presence and guidance. It’s something our text begins to hint us towards.
1. It’s as if the Spirit, with these words, is gently placing His hand in the small of our back and walking us up the mountainside whereby we are given greater glimpse of our Savior and His precious activity.
    - a. Is He at the Father’s right hand, ruling and reigning, yes.
    - b. Is He present here by His Spirit, leading and guiding, sure.
    - c. But do you want to know what else He is doing, this very moment, both there and here, both now and always? He is praying, He is interceding, He is pleading with the Father on yours and my behalf.
      - i. If I could be so bold, it’s as if the Son is not only on the throne with scepter in hand, and not only on the earth moving powerfully by way of His Spirit . . . He is also on His knees, laboring tirelessly in prayer in effort to keep us faithful, to keep us from the devil’s grip, to keep us for the Father’s lap.
 

(1) He’s praying. That’s what this text says.
- D. I’m not sure how many weeks we’ll be here. Maybe one more. Maybe two. I do know at least, Lord willing, what we shall be considering for at least this week and next.
1. I’ve got three headings for us to consider—this week we’ll get through the first two, next week we’ll wrap around and take on the last one. They are: (1) Satan’s Demand (v. 31); (2) Jesus’ Prayer (v. 32); and (3) Peter’s Denial (vv. 33-34). So let’s get to work!

## (1) Satan’s Demand (v. 31)

- A. With this we come to consider v. 31 in particular, where Jesus says: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat . . .”

1. I'm just going to break this down bit by bit for us . . .

“Satan demanded to have you . . .”

A. The first thing to notice is the presence and activity of this spiritual being called “[the] Satan.”

1. Remember, this is not so much the name of this being so much as it is one of his titles. Satan is a transliteration of the Hebrew word שָׂטָן that means the “adversary,” the “accuser.”

- a. It pictures this arch-opponent of God and God’s people as one standing before the heavenly court accusing and condemning.

B. And I think this is the reason we see this peculiar word used in the Greek to describe what this Satan is doing: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded . . .” It’s a word used only here in the Greek Bible, and it’s technically defined as follows: “to ask for with emphasis and with implication of having a right to do so” (BDAG).

1. Now that struck me. You take this title of Satan as accuser—as if in a courtroom—and you bring it together with this idea of demanding to have Peter—as if he has the right to claim him for himself—and you are left with a profound sense of man’s precarious place in this life and before God.

- a. Because here’s the truth of the matter: Satan does have a right to us, in a sense, doesn’t he? We have all aborted our high calling as men and women made in the image of God to partner with Him in turning the world to glory. We’ve all piled rebellion upon rebellion, transgression upon transgression, sin upon sin.

- i. Before the high court of heaven, Satan has an awful lot to work with. The evidence is unmistakable. The case is unimpeachable. The verdict is unavoidable. Guilty as charged. Into the devil’s custody we go.

C. It’s the sort of thing we see happening in that text I love to return to from time to time in [Zech. 3:1-5](#), where the prophet, speaking of these visions God’s giving him, says this: “<sup>1</sup>Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. <sup>2</sup>And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’ <sup>3</sup>Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments . . .”

1. Now pause. Don’t you see it? The devil has quite a case! He’s come to accuse Joshua, to condemn him before God, the Maker and Judge of heaven and earth. And Joshua is just filthy, every garment, from head to toe. It’s a vivid picture of the sin that stains on the inside of a man.

- a. And this, remember, is the high priest in Israel. This is the guy who’s supposed to go in to the Most Holy Place and make atonement for all the people. And he’s filthy. What’s God going to do? The high priest needs a High Priest . . .

D. And that's what's pictured in what happens next, v. 4: [“<sup>4</sup>And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’<sup>5</sup> And I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.”](#)

1. The devil can demand. He's got legitimate grounds. He's got legal right. But He has to go through our God and our Savior, the High Priest of High Priests, to get to us.

a. That's what's happening in [Zechariah](#) with Joshua. And that's what's happening here in [Luke](#) with Peter . . .

E. And you know, it's happening with us as well.

1. And I broaden it out this way because the language in the text before us actually requires it. We don't see it in the English, but the Greek word for you here brought out twice in [Luke 22:11](#) is actually in its plural form: [“you all”](#)—[“Satan demanded to have you \[all\], that he might sift you \[all\] . . .”](#) That's what's being said here.

a. So we see in this, then, the broad stroke of the devil's demand. Satan isn't just coming after Peter. He's coming after all the disciples.

F. And, therefore, by extension, we can be sure he's also coming after us.

1. Opposing. Accusing. Demanding. And, again, He has an airtight case, doesn't he?

a. Anyone else feel filthy in their sin? Dirty inside and out? Guilty as charged?

b. Oh, but Jesus, by way of the cross, has cleaned us and claimed us for Himself. So whatever the devil had on me, the penalty for such heinous crimes was incurred by Him.

G. This is the meaning of Paul's words in [Col. 2:13-16a](#): [“<sup>13</sup>And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,<sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.<sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.<sup>16a</sup> Therefore let no one pass judgment on you . . .”](#)

1. The rulers and authorities here are the spiritual powers of darkness, Satan and his allies. They had legal right over us because of our sin.

2. But when Christ took our sin upon Himself on the cross and triumphed over it all in His resurrection, He canceled the record of our debt forevermore.

3. And in so doing, He defanged and declawed the devil and thrust him out from the heavenly courtroom in shame.

a. And we, the beloved children of God, because of the blood of only beloved Son of God, are set free!

“ . . . that he might sift you like wheat . . . ”

A. Now, why does Satan demand to have Peter? What does he want to do to him? “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat . . .” (v. 31).

1. Now, what’s that? Some of you don’t need me to explain. You’ve experienced it, maybe you’re even going through it right now. But still, let me try to make sense of this . . .

B. First thing, let’s just make sure we’re clear on the image.

1. In the ancient world, so far as I understand it, sifting wheat was one of the last steps in the whole process of getting grain and things. You would plant, you’d water, you’d harvest, you’d thresh, you’d winnow, and then you’d sift.

a. To sift the wheat, you’d use what they call a sieve, which was essentially like a big strainer or filter, and you’d take it up in your hands and shake it quite violently—and, in the process, the genuine wheat would begin to separate from any of the remaining chaff and impurities that had gotten mixed in with it.

C. But now, with that image in mind, we still can’t be quite sure what Satan sifting us like wheat really means?

1. For this, I think we get a clue here if we skip ahead to v. 32 for a moment and make note of just what it is Jesus is praying for Peter. You see, presumably, Jesus is praying against what the devil is attempting to do.

a. Therefore, when we see that Jesus is praying in particular that Peter’s faith not fail, we are left to assume that Satan must be laboring in effort to see that it does.

i. In other words, bringing this all together, Satan sifting a person like wheat, is his attempt to so shake and rattle a follower of Christ that he gets the disciple to abandon his faith altogether.

(1) And, hence, this sad individual shows himself part of the chaff, not the genuine wheat. He falls away from the faith, through the sieve, into the devil’s jaws.

D. Some of us may feel dangerously close to such a thing—especially these days. You feel shaken to the core.

1. We’ve seen people we thought were walking strongly with God, throughout the course of this pandemic, just disappear. Where did they go? Through the sieve? Perhaps. I don’t know.

a. So this is no empty threat. It’s happening even now.

- E. I thought of [Rev. 2:10](#) and the church in Smyrna, where Jesus says: “Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
  - 1. You say: “Okay, the devil’s after my faith, I got to keep the faith.” But, if you’re like me, you’re thinking: “How do I do that? I’m so fickle. I’m so frail. I’m so prone to wander and doubt. If it’s on me to stay faithful unto death, there’s no way I’m making it to the crown of life!”
  
- F. Oh brother/sister, here is where the sun first starts to break through the lingering darkness of early morning!
  - 1. You see, it’s not on you.
    - a. Peter thought it was, and he declares boldly: “I’ve got this!” But we all know how that ended up. He had to learn. He would remain faithful to Jesus, but not because he is faithful to Jesus, but rather because Jesus will be faithful to him.
      - i. Or more specifically, because Jesus is praying for him and his faith that it may not fail . . .

## (2) Jesus’ Prayer (v. 32)

- A. So this leads to heading two now and Jesus’ prayer, which comes into view there in [v. 32](#) in particular: “. . . but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

### The Great Adversative

- A. With this “but” at the beginning of [v. 32](#) here, we have one of the great adversatives in all the Bible.
  - 1. Everything seems to be flowing in one direction, and a bad one at that, like a river tumbling towards a cliff’s edge waterfall.
  - 2. But then, suddenly, with the surprising interruption and interposition of God, not only is the flow dammed and stopped in its course, it’s actually reversed!
    - a. There’s an eruption of grace as it were that pushes the current of Satan, sin, and death backwards, and we suddenly find ourselves, not tumbling over the cliff’s edge to our doom, but en route to God, salvation, and eternal life!
  
- B. Other examples of such great adversatives can be found in texts like [Eph 2:4](#), listen to it in context: “<sup>1</sup>And you were dead in the trespasses and sins<sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—<sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . .” (vv. 1–5).

- C. Or, in a similar vein we might consider [Titus 3:4](#), which, again, in context, reads: “<sup>3</sup>For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.<sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,<sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,<sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,<sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (vv. 3–7).
- D. And right alongside these majestic and magnificent texts we could put [Luke 22:32](#): “<sup>31</sup>‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,<sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers’” (vv. 31-32).
1. It’s the breaking of the dawn. It’s the damming of the demonic. It’s the turning of the tide. And it all hinges on the prayers of our Savior!

## Four Observations

- A. Let me offer up four observations about Jesus’ praying here, and then we’ll be done.

### Observation #1: It’s Passionate

- A. The Greek word here translated “I have prayed” is an interesting choice = Gk. [deomai](#).
1. It’s not the standard word for prayer. It carries a bit more emotional force, it seems to me. It’s defined: “to ask for something pleadingly” (BDAG), and is, therefore, many times translated: “to beg”!
    - a. There are more self-respecting, sophisticated words Jesus could have chosen here. This is face in the dirt begging—going low, in desperation, with passion.
- B. Just look at how this word is used elsewhere in Luke’s gospel and you’ll get the sense of it:
1. [Luke 5:12](#): “While he [Jesus] was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged [Gk. deomai] him, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’”
  2. [Luke 8:28](#): “When he [the demoniac] saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg [Gk. deomai] you, do not torment me.’”
  3. [Luke 9:38](#): “And behold, a man from the crowd [with a demon-possessed son] cried out, ‘Teacher, I beg [Gk. deomai] you to look at my son, for he is my only child.’”
- C. And now here Jesus is saying: “That’s the kind of thing I’m doing for you and your faith Peter . . . disciples . . . church.”
1. It’s astounding to think about. The Son is pleading with the Father for your ongoing faith and security in grace. He stands in the gap, as it were, only He’s not standing, He’s on His knees, on His face.

## Observation #2: It's Personal

- A. Back up in v. 31, you remember, I mentioned that the word translated “you” there was in the plural. Well, you need to know that suddenly and profoundly shifts now in v. 32—it’s no longer plural, it’s singular.
1. Meaning, it’s no longer the disciples in general that are in view here, but Peter in particular: [“<sup>31</sup> ‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you \[all\], that he might sift you \[all\] like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you \[sg.\] that \[the faith of you \(sg.\)\] may not fail. And when you \[sg.\] have turned again, strengthen your brothers’”](#) (vv. 31-32).
- B. In other words, if v. 31 speaks to the broad stroke of the devil’s demand, v. 32 speaks to the personal touch of our Savior’s intercession.
1. This certainly doesn’t mean Jesus hasn’t been praying for the others. He’s just wanting to highlight the fact that He’s been praying passionately and personally for Peter.
- C. It’s a reminder that Jesus knows your unique trials and temptations, the places you’re most vulnerable, the things you most fear, the hurts you try to hide, the scars you carry, the sins that allure, the doubts you deal with, and on and on.
1. I thought of [Heb 4:15](#) where we’re told that [“we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses . . .”](#) It’s put negatively here, but the positive import is simply this: In Jesus we do have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses.
    - a. He knows. He cares. And He’s praying. And His high priestly prayers always perfectly match your deep valley despairs.

## Observation #3: It's Powerful

- A. Let’s be honest. What good is a passionate and personally appropriate prayer if it doesn’t work? It’s just akin to wishful thinking at that point. “I wish I could help you Peter but the devil’s tied my hands. I’m praying fervently, relevantly, but impotently.”
1. What good that be for Peter or for us? I don’t need a mere sympathizer. I need a Savior.
- B. Well, that’s just what He is. His prayers are not just passionate and personal, they’re also powerful. What Jesus prays for comes to pass.
1. So Jesus says: [“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again . . .”](#) (v. 31)—“when” not “if.”
    - a. There is no question in Jesus’ mind. Peter’s faith will not ultimately fail. Why? Not because of Peter’s strength. We’ve seen how far Peter’s strength can go. But because of Jesus’ strength and prayers on his behalf.



- C. And you've got to hear that and appropriate that for yourself as well. He's not going to let you go. His prayers are passionate, and personal, and powerful, not just for Peter, but for you.
  - 1. This is why we say repentance is a gift, faith is gift, it's not ultimately you who begins and completes these things, but Him: "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).
    - a. And one of the means by which He brings this good work He's begun in you to completion is prayer—not yours, His! And not just passionately, nor personally, but powerfully.
      - i. And also now we see . . . perpetually. And this is where we'll close . . .

#### Observation #4: It's Perpetual

- A. In our text, that action verb pray is in the past tense: "I have prayed . . ." It makes us feel like it's a one and done sort of thing.
- B. But that is not the picture we get of Jesus elsewhere. Indeed, we get the sense that He never stops praying for us.
  - 1. That is at least part of what the author of Hebrews means when he says: "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).
    - a. Where is He right now, what is He doing?
      - i. He's before the Father, interceding for you. And because He lives to make intercession for you, because He is perpetually praying for you, you will be saved to the uttermost, kept by Him and brought safely to glory.
- C. You know, Paul riffs further on this idea in Rom 8: " <sup>31</sup>If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."  
<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 31–39).
  - 1. The central idea here is this ongoing intercession of Jesus. It all turns on this.

- a. If He is interceding than whatever hardship or trial or sieve shaking comes our way, it will not be able to separate us from His love and more than that it shall only prove to have worked for our good in the end.

- i. We'll have more to say on that next time, but for now let me end with this .

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- D. Dane Ortlund, in his wonderful book *Gentle and Lowly* devotes a whole chapter to the verse I just referenced from Hebrews. And in it he writes this: “One way to think of Christ’s intercession . . . is simply this: Jesus is praying for you right now. ‘It is a consoling thought,’ wrote theologian Louis Berkhof, ‘that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life.’ Our prayer life stinks most of the time. But what if you heard Jesus praying aloud for you in the next room? Few things would calm us more deeply” (84).

- 1. What if? What if you could your Savior praying for you right now?

- a. What if you could hear His passion?
    - b. What if you could see how right on target and personalized His prayers for you are? That He always knows the right things to say, the stuff that’s really going on?
    - c. What if you knew He was upholding you and keeping you right now, that your faith, however hard this current trial may be, will not fail, because of Him.

- i. Wouldn’t that bring a deep calm? Wouldn’t that change everything?!