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Profile of an Imperfect Disciple

Luke 22:31-34

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August 2, 2026

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

Intro

- We are about halfway through the book of 1 Peter and in the second half Peter will be calling us to a high standard of faithful living;
 - citizens submitting to authorities,
 - servants respecting their masters,
 - wives submitting to husbands,
 - husbands honoring wives,
 - and believers suffering all kinds of injustice.
- It is possible you might feel like these are just more high standards to follow.
 - Another list of things to fail at.
 - And if we fail, then what does that say of our faith?
- It would be easy to think, well, of course the great Apostle Peter can do these things, but I’m just an imperfect disciple.
- But we must remember the man writing 1 Peter is the same man who overestimated his own loyalty and then denied his savior three times.
- This is the same guy that was overzealous, overconfident, and stubborn headed.
 - He was a deeply flawed disciple of Jesus
 - And yet he was a true disciple.



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- Peter is not an armchair disciple giving us an impossible standard to follow.
- He is living proof that Jesus is in the business of taking the most unlikely followers and shaping them into the kind of people that can be used by God.
- And that is why I want to take some time to look at Peter himself.
- If you feel like an imperfect disciple of Jesus this morning,
 - that you've let Jesus down in some way
 - or you aren't much use to him
 - then I want you to take a look with me at the profile of the imperfect disciple Peter.
- In our passage this morning we will extract four realities all true disciples have in common including Peter.
- First...

1. Disciples have Flaws (31a, 33-34)

"³³ Peter said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.'³⁴ Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.'"

- At the Last supper, Jesus is preparing himself and his disciples for his final hours before his crucifixion, He shares with Peter a prophetic word.
- But instead of calling him Peter at first he says,
 - "Simon, Simon..."
- Jesus wanted his disciples to be prepared for what is about to happen but it was painfully clear those closest to him still didn't understand.
- Repeating Peter's former name communicates Christ's sad and tender heart for Peter.
 - Jesus is not addressing Peter the rock in this moment, but a man blinded by his own pride.
- And he proves Jesus right, as Peter immediately dismisses the warning of Jesus.



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- Self-confidence had been Peter's weakness throughout the Gospels
- But when Jesus initially called Peter to follow him, Peter confessed, "I am a sinful man, O Lord."
- Rarely did that level of self-awareness appear elsewhere in the Gospels.
- More often than not, Peter thought he knew better than the other disciples and even Christ himself.
 - Peter rightly confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God, and yet he rebuked Jesus for saying the Christ would have to die.
 - This massive blind spot in the life of Peter was precisely what Jesus was warning him about in this passage.
 - And yet Peter continued to deny he would deny Christ.
- Peter tells Jesus, "I am ready..."
 - but we know (and Jesus knew) nothing could have been further from the truth.
- Have you ever said something in overconfidence and later regretted it?
 - We have a running joke in my marriage that if I say I am 100% sure I remember something then I am 100% wrong.
 - But if I am, let's say, 82% sure of something, then I am most likely right.
 - The issue when I am 100% sure I am right is not necessarily my memory, it's my pride blindness.
 - It is precisely when we think we have arrived that we are in the most danger of stumbling.
 - Pride is a flaw that blinds us to our other flaws and to our need to listen to Jesus.
- Ultimately Peter denied Jesus, not despite his zeal and overconfidence but because of it.
- But why did Peter respond so defensively?
 - Why do we?
- The simple answer is that we are just prideful.
 - We think certain sins and failures are beyond us.
- But I think sometimes there is something else behind the denial of our flaws.



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- Perhaps we are defensive because we don't want to admit that despite our stated desires to follow Jesus, the possibility of failing is painfully likely.
- Perhaps our pride flares up when we secretly know we have flaws but don't want to publicly admit it.
- Or perhaps it stems from a fear that if we did fail, it would mean we are somehow unworthy of love and beyond redemption.
- Friends, listen to the voice of Jesus today.
 - He speaks your name slowly and tenderly. "Simon, Simon,"
 - He knows you better than anyone else and even better than you do.
- Lower your defenses and ask yourself,
 - Are there sins you think are beyond you?
 - Have you determined to never fail because of the hopeless shame you fear you would bear?
 - Would you rather deny your flaws if it meant saving face?
- We must be willing to hear the hard truth from Jesus.
 - All true disciples are imperfect disciples that have flaws.
- Denying we have them will not keep us from future failures,
 - but rather (as in Peter's case) expedite failure.
- J.C. Ryle once said, "The best and highest saint is only a poor weak creature."
- The sooner we accept that we are imperfect disciples with flaws, the sooner God can address those flaws and the more prepared we will be for attack.
- Which brings us to the next reality for every true disciple...

2. Disciples have an Accuser (Luke 22:31b)

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

- Even though Jesus is addressing Peter in this moment, the word "you" in this first verse is plural.
 - "Satan demanded to have you all, that he might sift you all like wheat."



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- Peter and the other disciples were easy targets because of their many flaws, but they were important targets because of their faith in Jesus.
- So how does Satan go about destroying his targets? He seeks to sift them.
- To sift wheat requires shaking it violently to filter out what is real wheat and what is worthless chaff.
 - Satan wanted to shake Peter and the other disciples so much that he could expose their weakness and prove that their faith was fake.
- Now the term Satan is a title given to the devil.
 - Satan means Accuser.
- And this is not the first time the Accuser made an accusation against one of God's disciples.
- In the book of Job, Satan goes to God and asks, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"
 - Satan then requests permission from God to run a spiritual experiment to prove his hypothesis true.
 - His hypothesis is "If you take away the blessing, he can prove this man doesn't really love God."
- In a similar way, the devil was given permission from God to test prideful Peter.
- Satan wanted to shake Peter from his faith and prove he was never a true disciple in the first place.
 - This was his tactic with Job, with Peter, and it's no surprise he wants to do the same thing to us as well.
- Satan targets our faith because it is what ties us to our savior.
 - Faith displeases Satan because it is the thing that pleases God.
- So Satan will try to shake us by taking away any comfort or security.
 - He exploits our weakness, tempts our desires, and brings us to a breaking point.
- And if we fail, the Accuser will say,
 - "See it was all fake.
 - Your love for God was nothing but empty talk.
 - I sifted you and all that came out was worthless and unredeemable."



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- And at the point when our flaws are realized, it can catch us by surprise and shake us.
 - “I thought I was past that sin
 - I thought I was beyond that level of failure.”
 - “Am I even saved?”
- Satan wants you to question everything.
 - This is his tactic, and Jesus is warning Peter and all of us of the reality of the enemy.
- So we must not be caught off guard by this enemy and his tactics.
 - But I have found that even those who believe in God might scoff at the idea of Satan.
 - If you imagine Satan as a little red man with horns and a mustache, you may be tempted to ignore the fact that you have an enemy and be caught unaware.
- Have you ever heard of a card shark?
 - It’s someone who pretends to be bad at a card game, loses a few rounds to you, but then bets you double or nothing that you can’t beat him again.
 - And in that last game, the Card Shark displays his hidden expertise to beat you without a sweat.
 - But the Card Shark only robs you blind if you first underestimate him.
- Believer, you must not underestimate your enemy.
- But we must also not attribute more power to Satan than what he truly has.
 - Satan attacks believers in this way to shake us from our faith, but God must first sovereignly allow it.
 - Now why would God allow this attack on his disciples?
- The preacher Charles Spurgeon explains,
 - “God grants to Satan permission to try his people in this way, because he knows how he will overrule it to his own glory and their good. There are



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certain graces which are never produced in Christians, to a high degree, except by severe temptation.”

- Remember Satan wants to sift us and prove we are not true fruit-bearing wheat, but only chaff to be burned.
- And we know Peter was shaken, but his faith was not destroyed.
 - Instead, Peter’s faith was ultimately refined, and in the end the chaff of his pride was shaken away.
 - Satan’s plan backfired!
- Well, how did that happen?
 - Peter denied Jesus, didn’t he?
 - This brings us to the third reality for disciples.
- Despite Peter’s flaws and Satan’s intent, Peter’s faith was preserved because disciples have an Intercessor.

3. Disciples have an Intercessor (Luke 22:32a)

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

- Jesus prophesies Peter’s denial, but before he does, he prays for him.
- “I have prayed for you”
 - Jesus, knowing his disciple’s flaws and knowing the enemy’s tactics, preemptively prays for Peter.
 - But notice he doesn’t pray that Peter would not deny him, but that Peter’s faith would not fail.
- The word for fail here doesn’t mean to make a mistake. It means "to cease entirely."
 - It’s the difference between failing a test at school vs. ceasing to be a student.
- So yes, Peter’s faith failed in one sense, but it did not completely fail in the sense of ceasing altogether.



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- His faith looked like it ceased, but there was yet a spark of faith still alive.
- We have an aloe plant in our kitchen that suffers from a lack of water and from being constantly knocked over by accident.
 - Not too long ago, I found this poor plant knocked over on the ground once again and it just looked dead to me.
 - I threw the thing away.
 - But before long, Megan rescued it from the trash.
 - I thought she was crazy for repotting and watering it, but just a few weeks later that “dead” plant was green and growing again.
 - That just goes to show something might look dead, but with the right intercessor, what life remains can be recovered and restored.
- Peter’s faith faltered, but because of Jesus, it never ceased.
- And Jesus was so confident in his preservation of Peter’s faith that he told Peter, “When you have turned...”
- Jesus fully anticipated the inevitable repentance that corresponds with genuine faith.
 - When Peter denied Jesus and the rooster crowed, the eyes of Jesus and Peter met.
 - In wounding the heart of our LORD, Peter cried tears of repentance.
- These tears were evidence that Jesus’ prayer of preservation was answered.
- Only Jesus could have preserved his faith.
- That was true of Peter, but what about us?
 - What is our hope that our worst moments are not the end of our faith?
 - The answer is Jesus alone.

We have the same intercessor as Peter.

- Hebrews 7:25 says Jesus, “...is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”
- Brothers and Sisters, Jesus didn’t just die for you; he lives for you.



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- Even now, the resurrected Christ stands in the throne room of God presenting himself as eternal evidence of his undeniable claim over your redeemed soul.
- Jesus alone is the guarantee that our faith won't cease completely.
- We know that Peter believes this to be true of us as well.
- He reminds us **1 Peter 1:5** that we, "by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."
- What a relief!
 - We have nothing to boast and nothing to fear, for it is God's power keeping us till the end.
- A quote often attributed to Martin Luther goes like this, "When I look at myself, I do not see how I can be saved. When I look at Christ, I do not see how I can be lost."
- So if the accuser hurls your sins in your face, you can say,
 - Yes, I have failed my LORD, but my LORD has prayed for me that my faith may not fail.
 - Yes, I am weak, but it is God's power that guards my salvation.
 - Yes, I have fallen, but Jesus still stands as my intercessor.
- You see, there is no accusation that Satan can hurl at you that Jesus does not answer on your behalf.
- So let me ask you:
 - Is your hope built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness?
 - Do your flaws and failures leave you nothing but Jesus to lean on?
- The joy of the gospel is my salvation is not earned in my own strength nor is it kept by my own strength.
 - Jesus has saved,
 - Jesus has prayed,
 - and Jesus intercedes along the way!
- Only after his terrible denial did prideful Peter finally come to an end of his spiritual defensiveness.
- The now broken Peter could finally fully rely on the prayerful preservation of Jesus.



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- By the grace of our Intercessor Jesus, imperfect disciples are preserved.
- And we are preserved for a purpose.

4. Disciples have a Purpose (Luke 22:32b)

"Strengthen your brothers"

- After his resurrection, Jesus restored Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.
 - And there, Jesus tasks the imperfect disciple Peter with feeding his sheep.
 - Now to forgive and restore a fallen disciple is one thing, but to trust him with great responsibility is another.
- Tim Keller once noted, "Jesus knew Peter at his absolute worst and still entrusted him with His church."
- Why?
 - Because Peter was humbled and broken to the point of usefulness.
 - A believer is like a baseball glove;
 - the more broken in we are, the more effective we can be.
 - A disciple who has been forgiven much is more likely to forgive.
 - A disciple who has been humbled is more likely to be humble.
 - A disciple who has been shown tenderness at their weakest is more likely to do the same for others at their lowest.
- Peter wasn't a perfect man after that day on the beach, but he carried himself with a new sense of purpose.
 - After the ascension of Christ, we read in Acts 1:15, "In those days Peter stood up among the brothers..."
 - Peter would go on to fulfill the command of Jesus from Luke 22. He would stand up and strengthen the brothers.
 - In fact, the entire letter of 1 Peter was meant to strengthen the brothers.
- By the grace of Jesus, you too can take the lessons learned from your failures and strengthen the brothers.
- Your past struggle may be someone's future strength.



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- If you have tasted the poison of sin, then warn your brothers and sisters of its bitterness.
- If you have been humbled, then caution others of the deceitfulness of pride.
- If Jesus has gently restored you, be all the more gentle as you restore your brothers.
- So let me ask you,
 - Do you believe you are useless because of your past failures?
 - Or do you believe, in your repentance, God wants to use you all the more?
 - What past sin or struggle that you have repented of can strengthen the brothers?
 - How does God want to use you in your restoration?
- Imperfect disciples are true disciples who have flaws, who have an Accuser, who have an Intercessor, and who have a purpose.

Conclusion

- In his letters, Peter calls us to a high standard of faithful living in the face of suffering, but these letters come from a man who was sifted, who once denied Jesus, who was restored, and who, in the end, discovered his faith rested not in himself but in Jesus alone.
- This is why Peter can write 1 Peter 5:10, "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."
- To him alone belongs the glory.