

The Lord's Day Morning  
"Jesus' Prescription for Hope"  
Luke 22:31-32  
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March 13, 2016 – Morning sermon

We will start by looking at Luke 22 where Jesus is closing out His ministry. He has gathered with His disciples and some think it's actually in the Upper Room and others think this is taking place as He and His disciples take that 45 minute walk to Gethsemane from Jerusalem. During this time He gives these two simple verses which are quite poignant. Luke 22:31-32 says [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.*" Here ends the reading of God's Word and we ask God's special blessings on it as He ministers it to us.

As most of you know I'm the pastor of pastoral care here at Briarwood. My wife and I have been here almost eleven years. We have a wonderful ministry because we get the chance to work regularly with people who need us. Sometimes I tell people when you see me you're seeing the preacher you don't want to see and that's because I sometime show up in your life when there has been a problem, trial, tribulation, a death or perhaps some kind of loss.

That was illustrated beautifully for me a few years ago when there was a woman in our church who was in the hospital who was gravely ill. She was in intensive care for several days and there was some question whether she would survive this illness but she finally improved enough where she came out of ICU into one of the regular hospital rooms. The doctors still weren't sure if she would survive this though and at that point I went to visit her and the family. I recall getting off the elevator at the hospital, turning and walking down the hallway and when I turned to go down the hallway she was on a doctor came up alongside of me. I remember the doctor asking me about my day and me asking him about his exchanging some pleasantries and we came to this lady's room where some of the family members were standing. I greeted them and went into her room where I prayed with her and then left.

A few days later I found out I had walked down the hall with her doctor and I was not aware that is who he was. As we were walking down the hall toward her room one of her sons saw us and he said to his siblings, "Oh no, they have called the preacher, mom is not going to make it." Fortunately she did make it. She is back among us and is doing very well. I don't mean to portray myself as the Rodney Dangerfield of pastoral care or anything like that but we are really blessed. We love the fact that we have the opportunity to minister to people who need hope and that's what this family needed. Indeed, that is where we find the disciples in Luke 22.

The disciples need a lot of hope but they don't know it yet. We find that Jesus has been trying to tell them again and again what will lie ahead in His ministry. In Luke 18:31 we read for a third time Jesus explained that He would be killed which says [31] *And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.* But in Luke 18:34 it says His disciples did not grasp what He said.

I'm not sure we would be any different because Jesus was on a roll. He was having an astounding ministry. He was experiencing unbelievable power and popularity. He was healing many and astounding the skeptics. He was shutting up His opponents. He was delighting growing crowds. He was just unprecedented. Undoubtedly, the disciples would have thought

‘we are part of this and this is unbelievable.’ Jesus is getting ready to usher in this Divine Kingdom and we’re (the disciples) are right in the middle of it. We’re not just in the middle of it but we’re Jesus’ favorites. We don’t only get to sit in the crowd but we get the stage pass. We’re walking with Him every day.

In fact it’s no wonder that the disciples would discuss among themselves who would be the greatest in the Kingdom because they thought they would be. I don’t think we would have been much different from them if we had been in their shoes. It reminded me of an article I read a little while ago of the 2007 New England Patriots. That year the New England Patriots dominated pro football by steamrolling team after team after team and went to the Super Bowl that year undefeated. I can only imagine some of those players thinking as they got to the Super Bowl what their ring would look like when they won. Would it have one, two or three diamonds? Will it be heavy? Will I wear it often? And the New York Giants ended up winning the Super Bowl 10 to 6 and some think it was the most profound upset in Super Bowl history.

That’s where the disciples might be. At this moment they are kind of checking out their Super Bowl ring. Jesus is on the verge of introducing God’s Kingdom. The Romans will be run out of town. The Jews will emerge as the prominent people of the world and they can only imagine on and on but Jesus knew it would be much different. Peter even boasted in Luke 22:33 saying, [33] *Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”* How much would change in just a matter of a few hours. Jesus knows what is going to happen. He is going to be captured. The disciples will be scattered and Jesus will be brutally executed and buried. It will be stunning. That’s why Jesus looks at Peter on this very tender occasion and says from Luke 22:31–32 [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.”*

Jesus gives us one of the best prescriptions for hope that is found in all the Bible. You and I are likewise clueless about what is lying ahead for us. I’m in constant conversations as well as probably you are with what is happening in America today. Many of us are distressed and discouraged because of what is happening. People are saying we are coming up to an election that could be the most important in American history but then I remember four years ago that is what they said about that election. In 2020 they will probably say that about that election as well because we are dealing with very serious and difficult problems.

We are at a place in America that could be very discouraging for those who love the Scripture and the Gospel but we find that the problems of America are warped by the challenges in our lives. We don’t wonder who will be elected in November for there are some here that are wondering if they’ll still be alive in November or their family member will be here then. People are facing some major problems. Others may not be near the end of life but they are wrestling with other difficulties in life. Perhaps they are wrestling with expectations in life that are not being met. Maybe you thought a marriage would always be really good but it hasn’t turned out that way or perhaps you wonder about the bad decisions your children are making. Perhaps you are seeing trials and tribulations that you are helpless to help with but we find we’re really clueless about what is happening today, tomorrow, next week or next month. So a prescription for hope isn’t just for the disciples but it’s for you and me as well.

We need Jesus to give us the same directive. When Jesus says to Peter, ‘Simon, Simon’ most commentators think Jesus is speaking very affectionately with great concern. It’s a term that some think is pointing out Simon’s weakness about his impending failure because Jesus

knows what is about to happen. I think He gives us three elements for a prescription for hope in this text that are very simple but very important.

The first is that Satan will attack. In this passage He says to Peter that Satan has demanded to have you. Jesus knows the first step in hope is knowing clearly what you are facing. Many are desperate for hope in this world and they don't know who they're facing. Perhaps they have grown up being taught that there is no such thing as Satan or personal sin or sin in the world and yet for the life of themselves they can't figure out what is going wrong. Why do they always do the right thing? Why do they turn, are cruel and betray one another? They don't have a theology of sin that they understand and therefore they are hopeless. Perhaps it's the other extreme where they have no problem believing in Satan but they just think he is boss, in control and sovereign. When you watch the media today it seems as though evil is having a hay day in our culture and they despair. They are hopeless. Jesus makes sure that we and the disciples are not on either extreme. Certainly Satan does exist and we need to understand that but at the same time Satan is not boss and we need to understand that as well.

I'd like to point out three observations about this text. First is the word 'you' in Luke 22:31 is plural. "Satan has demanded you..." That isn't singular. He wasn't just speaking of Peter here but He is speaking of the disciples as well. He has in mind that they need to know and understand exactly what is going on and I also believe He is speaking to us. In fact, in Job 1 we see the character of Satan when it points out in Job 1:7, [7] *The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."* Jesus is calling on Peter to be very careful because Satan is looking. He is prowling around just as he did in Job's day seeking to cause mischief and for people to be alienated from God.

In Luke 22:3 which says [3] *Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve*, we see the reason because earlier in the chapter Satan had ensnared Judas. He had drawn Judas away and now I'm sure he is thinking since he was able to get Judas that he could go after the big gun, Peter himself. What a prize that would be for him. Jesus warns Peter that Satan has demanded to have him. We often forget in adversity and struggles in this life there is likely even more intense encounters going on in the spiritual world and we need to understand that. Remember the word 'you' is plural here as Satan is prowling among us looking for someone to devour.

Secondly, we see that Satan needs permission to act. Here in Peter's case permission has been granted to Satan and he will act on this permission. He is forceful. He is a bully. He is intimidating but he is not free to act on his own. Ultimately we read in Scripture that he works under the sovereign hand of God and we see that in Job as well. In fact it is God that approaches Satan in Job 1:8 which says [8] *And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"* Then it says in Job 1:12, [12] *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand."* So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. After this, Job loses his property and his children. Then in Job 2:6 it says [6] *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."* Then Job lost his health. The important part of those passages is that it shows that Satan is limited and that he can only do what God permits. God is sovereign over Satan. Satan is given permission but he is also restrained. He is also controlled. A boundary is set around him and he must submit to the sovereignty of God.

Thirdly, Satan can only sift. Satan wants to devour and destroy God's people like he did Judas Iscariot but he can only sift. Peter warns about Satan in I Peter 5:8 which says [8] *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* I wonder when Peter wrote those words long after Luke 22 if he had this episode in mind when Jesus warned him about Satan.

Sift is an interesting term and it's unparalleled in Scripture for this is the only place where it appears. Here, sift is the process by which farmers in that day would separate the grains of wheat from the chaff. They would put it in a sieve or a container and they would shake it vigorously where gradually the little grains of wheat would loosen from the chaff, settle to the bottom and they would blow off or peel off the chaff to retain the little grains of wheat. It was a common image back then and everyone knew what Jesus was talking about when He used this term. What we find here is that there is difference between Jesus' sifting and Satan sifting the way he would like to.

A Puritan named John Trapp made this comment in the 1600s; Jesus uses a fan and insists to get rid of the chaff but the devil uses a fan and insists to get rid of the wheat and Jesus won't let him. Jesus restrains him and holds him back. Unlike Satan Jesus' sifting doesn't hurt the wheat but it prepares it to be used. Sifting then becomes redemptive, productive and helpful. In God's providential care, adversity, tragedy and loss passes through the gracious hand of God and is transformed into a tool that prepares us to serve Him. This astonishingly is even true for Jesus. He was the eternal Son of God. He was absolutely perfect and righteous in all His ways. He is the sovereign Lord and Creator of the universe.

Hebrews 5:8 says [8] *Although he (Jesus) was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.* I can promise you in some miraculous way Jesus needed those episodes of suffering in His life to make Him even more of a perfect sacrifice for our sins so that He might be redemptive in our lives. How much more would you and I expect given the sin natures and difficulties of this world that suffering might enter our lives as well, by God's hand and that it might be something that He intends as He did with His own Son? Satan will attack and it is very important that you understand that.

The second element of hope is that Jesus will pray for us. In Luke 22:32 the 'you' is now singular when Jesus says He will pray for you. He is honing in on Peter. It gets personal for Jesus is going to pray for Peter. I tell people all the time that I will pray for them and they are thankful but imagine Jesus telling me or Peter that He is going to pray for him. That is a pretty astonishing reality that Jesus cares that much. It's one thing for me to pray but it's another thing for Jesus to pray. We find in John 17 that Jesus is indeed praying for the disciples but He is also praying for you and me. John 17:20 says [20] *"I do not ask for these (disciples) only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."* That is you and me. We have their word and believe through their word and Jesus prays for us.

We see it in Romans 8:34 which says [34] *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.* This is astonishing that Jesus is praying for us. We see it in the work of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:27 which says [27] *And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* According to His Word, you have the Son of God praying for you and the Holy Spirit interceding for you. What a privilege this is! When you look at my prayer list in my phone, because I have my phone with me all the time, you will see those who are the most important in my life. Can you imagine

seeing Jesus' prayer list and there is your name because you are quite an investment to Him. He died for you and is praying for you as well.

If He is praying for us then a couple of things are true. One is that He anticipates our difficulties. That is exactly when He was praying for Peter. He anticipated what Peter was about to go through and it was going to be tough. Sifting was going to be really bad for Peter. Jesus was not caught off guard or fretting but He was looking steadily and said "I'm going to pray for you Peter. Secondly, He was praying for the right thing. Usually the most important things we pray for is deliverance, healing and that is fine for we need to pray for that kind of stuff but that is not what Jesus prays for. Jesus prays that Peter's faith will endure. If his faith failed then Satan would get his way but if his faith continues then adversity will not win and God will get His way. In fact, Satan's affliction will produce God's glory.

I want to share with you a phenomenal answer to Jesus' prayer in Scripture. The Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 12 tells of an interesting time in His life. We know very little about it but apparently he had this massive vision where in a sense he was taken up to heaven and he saw glorious things which no other person had ever seen. We can imagine they would be fantastic yet he realized because of this experience he might be prone to getting a little cocky or to think he might be superior to everyone else or let his pride take over. So he writes in II Corinthians 12:7, [7] *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.*

What do you think Satan had intended with that little messenger he sent the Apostle Paul? We don't know what that affliction was. Some think it was psychological. Some think it was a physical problem. Many commentaries think it was his eyes because he had problems with his eyes. We don't know but what do you think Satan intended to do with that affliction? I can tell you it was to cause Paul to stumble, fear and reject God and be angry, bitter and hostile. I could hear Paul saying "What's this affliction God, for I'm one of Your guys. I've been faithful. I've been persecuted. I'm the only one hanging in tough and You treat me this way? What gives?"

That is not what happened. He said that trial or affliction actually produced humility. It constrained his conceit. Precisely what Satan had intended never happened because in being sifted the grains of wheat were preserved in the Apostle Paul. This was a wonderful answer to Jesus' prayer when He said "I pray that your faith might sustain and not waver" and that is exactly what happened in Paul's life. That is what we have when we come to Him for Satan will attack but we know Jesus is praying for us.

Therefore the last step in this triplet of hope is we will minister. It is astounding for Jesus turns to Peter and says in Luke 22:32b, [32b] *"And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."* Not only will Satan attack and Jesus will pray but we will be equipped to minister. There are a few things we can learn from this. One is Jesus' confidence with Peter. He didn't say Peter, 'if you return' but He said 'when you return.' Peter is about to go out and deny Him three times before the rooster crows and it will be a devastating experience for him but he will be back. Jesus knows he'll be back because He is praying for him to stay firm. This reminds me of Philippians 1:6 which says [6] *And 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.* This is what Jesus knew when He was praying for Peter, 'when he comes back.'

Secondly, we see Jesus' command and that is to return and strengthen your brethren. Jesus knows that those who have been through the deep waters are best equipped to help others.

In fact, weakness is often a wonderful pulpit that God uses to bless us in our lives. In fact, one of the signs we have found that people are actually getting over trauma, loss, disappointment and grief is when they begin to step out of their comfort zone and minister to others in the same area.

We have a wonderful widows' ministry here at Briarwood. I wasn't here when one of our ladies lost her husband suddenly. He dropped dead while making a speech at Hoover Country Club. She kissed him that morning, he left and she never saw him alive again. It was just devastating in her life but a year later God had worked through her, strengthened her and she decided she would start fellowshiping with some other widows in the church. Then came the widows' ministry because of them that has been going strong ever since. It has been used by God to touch countless widows in our church and in our community because her husband died and she became an answer to Jesus' prayer. God is strengthening others through her. That is indeed what we find in our lives. The Apostle Peter is strengthening us through his word even after his catastrophic failure.

There was another man in our church who was falsely accused of crime, tried and convicted and spent three years in prison but God worked in a mighty way. Those who accused him came back and said they lied. They had been set up. It was so unprecedented that upon their testimony the judge actually threw out the conviction and released our church member from jail, but something had changed in his life. He began working with inmates in various jails to bring the Gospel to them. For the rest of his life, God opened up a wonderful prison ministry for him that he never would have had unless he had never been there. In fact, he even ministered to some members of my family because he originally spent some time in jail.

God is unbelievable. He doesn't like to waste our tragedies or difficulties and we find that is a real sure sign that people are beginning to walk away but when we go through those difficulties, losses and disappointments God begins to comfort, encourage and strengthen us through others who have gone through similar things. When you are working with someone who is in the midst of a trial or difficulty be very careful. Don't run in and use as a club Romans 8:28 that says *[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Romans 8:28 is a wonderful and true verse but pastorally it is not something you need to rush in and pound someone on the head with. Sometimes they need to come to passages like this on their own and perhaps you can steer them in an encouraging way. Nonetheless it will be your prayer that they will eventually come to a place in their life where God is using a loss or a tragedy or difficulty for His glory in a magnificent way.

Using adversity to strengthen us is not just my conclusion, but it is Jesus' intention. It is what He has designed in our lives to accomplish. Therefore Jesus does not give Peter the option of letting adversity and failure define him or become his identity. That is very easy to do when people have trauma enter their lives for they will view themselves forever a bereaved person or forever a depressed single person or they will just assume they will never get over this particular temptation and it begins to define them. That is a shame if this happens to you and you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior because He is your identity. He desires to be your identity regardless of whatever circumstances He has taken you through. The key for keeping adversity from defining us is to say "Lord, use this in me and through me for Your glory."

In the end, the most important reason for hope is the Lord Jesus Christ and my relationship with Him. In our grief class there is a statement that is used on a couple of occasions that is important for people who are in the midst of grieving. The statement is if you

do not know the Lord Jesus Christ then grief is not your biggest problem. You could add that to any trial or tribulation because I'm sure there are people reading this that perhaps may be confused by what I am saying about all this stuff about Jesus. Perhaps you know about Jesus and have learned about Him but you have never actually turned away from your sin, repented and embraced Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He died for you. He died for the sins of His people and He desires for you to come into a faith relationship with Him, to invite Him into your life.

You can invite Christ into your life simply through prayer and in doing so you choose to make Him the Lord of your life. You may say "Lord, I may not have many years left but I really want to walk with You. I want You to use this time for Your glory." He can and He will. I invite you to seriously consider the claims of Christ but if you're already a Christian then make it a matter of prayer of urgent concern that you would say "Lord, I may not be able to remove the afflictions or difficulties or change what has happened to me in the past but by Your grace that is not going to define who I am because I am a child of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and I pray that You will use this for Your glory in me."

I have a wonderful testimony to an answer to prayer. A lady in our church who became a friend of mine suffered from cancer and eventually the Lord took her home to heaven. She wrote a letter to some of her friends and part of it says; "In October of 2015 I received a diagnosis of melanoma cancer and it is all over my body. I qualify for a new chemo drug that is now on the market. If this chemo drug is successful it will shrink the tumors and give me a couple more years of life." Unfortunately the chemo drug did not work as the doctors intended. She goes on to say "If my body does not respond to the drug I may have six months but for me I look forward to going to heaven to be with my Lord and my Savior. Also what a happy reunion there will be with my sweet husband and all the other loved ones and friends. Each of you have been such a wonderful part of my life and I treasure your love, concern and prayers so do not be sad. Be happy for me for I will win either way. If God chooses I will beat this cancer and stay here or I will go to heaven. I won't lose." That's a wonderful answer to Jesus' prayer because I'm confident from Scripture that Jesus was praying for this lady that her faith would not fail and it didn't.

That is one of my great ambitions if life and that is when all is said and done that I will be answer to Jesus' prayer and that He will take those miserable things that happen in my life, those losses, pains and failures on my part, and use them for His glory to strengthen and encourage others. You are a miracle in your salvation. He has saved and set you apart with a place in the heavenly places right now but how much more of a miracle it will be before a watching world if the tragedies in your own life spin around as little messengers from Satan but produce in you what is redemptive, life giving and transformative to those around you. Let's make that our prayer that God will use us for His glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You so much for Your mercy, grace and phenomenal ability to supernaturally intervene in our lives and take the brokenness, pain, hurt and failure and transform it so that we might serve You. Lord, I pray for each one reading this that we will become answers to Your prayer that our faith will not fail and that You will walk with us. I don't want to make light of anyone's difficulties for I'm sure some are really wrestling with some difficulties in their life and whatever the circumstance I pray that You might see Your prayers answered in us. We rejoice and thank You Lord Jesus that You are here, alive and that You are at work and we pray this in Jesus' Name and for His sake, Amen.

## Power Point

### A. Satan will attack

1. “You” is plural (31).

Job 1:7 “The Lord said to Satan, ‘From where have you come?’ Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.’”

2. Satan needs permission.

Job 1:12 “And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.’”

Job 2:6 “And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.’”

3. Satan Can only sift.

I Peter 5:8 “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

Hebrews 5:8 “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”

Ephesians 4:26–27 “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

### B. Jesus will pray for you (32a).

John 17:20 “I do not ask for these [disciples] only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...”

Romans 8:34 “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.”

Romans 8:27 “And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

1. He anticipates the difficulty.

2. He prays for the right thing.

II Corinthians 12:7 “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.”

### C. We will minister (32b).

1. Jesus’ confidence: “when” not “if.”

Philippians 1:6 “And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

2. Jesus’ command: “strengthen.”