

ST. PETER SIFTED LIKE WHEAT

– *NOVEMBER 15.* – *MARK 14:27-31,53,54,66-72.* –

**"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."
– 1 Corinthians 10:12.**

ST. PETER was admittedly a man of strong character, very courageous, but rather too impetuous. He is one of the two disciples of whom it is written that "The people perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men." (Acts 4:13.) In some respects, therefore, St. Peter may be said to have had less advantage than Judas. Both had equal opportunities in the School of Christ; yet how different the results with the two men! The one went down into the Second Death despised; the other, after ups and downs of trial and discipline, passed to a reward of glory, honor and immortality with his Master, ranking amongst the highest of the Apostles.

Our lesson for today deals with the special "sifting" which came to St. Peter at the time of our Lord's death, and of which he was forewarned by Jesus, saying, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." St. Peter's courage, manifested on so many occasions, was really his weak point. Notwithstanding all that Jesus had said to forewarn him of the sifting experiences that were just before him, St. Peter realized no dread, no fear. Hence he did little watching and praying in comparison with what he should have done, and self-confidence led to his undoing for a time.

It was the same St. Peter who, when told that he would deny our Lord before the time for the cock to crow the next morning, declared that it surely was a mistake, for he was ready to die with his Master. It was the same St. Peter who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, afterward healed by Jesus.

It was the same impulsive St. Peter who was the first to acknowledge the Messiahship of Jesus.

Jesus had inquired what people were saying about Him – who they said He was – and had finally asked, "Whom say ye that I am?" Then St. Peter answered, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus replied that this answer indicated that St. Peter was in a blessed condition of relationship with God, or otherwise he would not have had the knowledge to make this statement. He said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but My Father which is in Heaven." Who could think that this same noble character would be so overwhelmed with fear that he would deny his Master, even with curses!

One thing which impresses itself quickly and forcibly upon our minds is the thought that the writers of the New Testament were certainly very different from the majority of writers in that they told the absolute truth without modification or varnish. Surely no other book is like the Bible in this respect. The founders of great religious world-systems and of various sectarian systems have manifested a very different spirit. Their heroes are all great, noble, educated, heroic. Never would they think of pointing out such weaknesses as those manifested by St. Peter on the night in which our Lord was betrayed, when he denied his Master.

Surely this gives us greater confidence in the Bible – in its honesty, in its truthfulness. We can rely upon the fact that the men who thus freely tell of their failings, and who speak of their lack of learning, must have been men of great courage, great sincerity, great love for the truth. Surely their testimony is worthy of all acceptance.

ST. PETER'S TRIAL UNEXPECTED

Temptations will come in an insidious form. We cannot imagine that at the time when he cut off the ear of the high priest's

servant St. Peter had any sympathy with the thought of denying our Lord. But circumstances and conditions changed. The Master was taken a prisoner. Whatever power He had previously exercised whereby He walked away from His enemies, and they could not take Him because His "hour had not yet come," that power He evidently was not exercising now – His hour had come. To see his Master apparently without friends in Heaven, delivered over to His enemies and led from one tribunal to the other, had a paralyzing effect upon St. Peter.

St. John had such an acquaintance with some one connected with the palace that he was permitted to enter the court and bring St. Peter with him; but they had separated. St. Peter was in the courtyard. It was cold, and he approached an open brazier to warm himself. In the light of the court, surrounded by the gossiping servants of the palace, he was keenly scrutinized by one of the maids, who said, "Thou art also a disciple of the Nazarene."

Stunned by the identification and wondering to what it might lead, St. Peter promptly denied that he had any knowledge of Jesus. Then he moved away to another part of the court, where the shadows were deeper and the people fewer. But again he was recognized as a Galilean and accused of being one of Jesus' disciples. Again he denied the charge. The third time he was approached with the same charge that he was one of Jesus' disciples and a Galilean, and that his speech betrayed him. Again, with cursing, he denied that he knew his Master.

Terrible! we say. And surely St. Peter felt afterward that it was terrible; for just at that time, the early morning, came the beginning of cock-crowing, and he remembered the Master's words that Satan had desired to sift him as wheat, and that before the cock crew he would have denied his Master three times. The whole matter came upon him with crushing force; and, wrapping his cloak about his head, he hastened away into the darkness, weeping bitterly; for just about the time that the cock crew, Jesus

was led forth not far from him, and as he looked at Jesus, the Master lifted up His eyes and looked at St. Peter. It was a sympathetic glance, not an angered one; but it went straight to the heart.

St. Peter's crime was nothing like that of Judas; he had merely sought to protect himself. He had not sought to injure or even to risk the injury of his Master. The thoroughness of St. Peter's repentance is abundantly testified by his subsequent loyalty even unto death. Tradition has it that he was condemned to be crucified; and that, remembering how once he had denied his Master, he felt that it would be too great an honor for him to share exactly the same death as his Lord; and that, at his own request, he was crucified head downward.

THE LESSON TO ALL CHRISTIANS

Our Golden Text voices to all Christians the lesson of St. Peter's experiences – "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." When we are weak in our own estimation and, full of faith, cling tenaciously to the Arm of the Lord, then we are really strong in the might which God supplies through His Eternal Son. Another lesson is that however different the experiences of God's people, all who fall into line for the great promotion to the First Resurrection must expect to endure severe siftings, provings – of their love for the Lord, the Truth, the brethren, and their loyalty to all these.

Let us never forget that siftings are permitted, not because the Lord has no interest in us, but because only those who can stand siftings, trials and tests, are fit for places in the Kingdom.

