

**Text: Luke 22:31-32**

**Title: “Holding the Rope”**

**“BE THOU MY VISION”** – That hymn was written about 1300 years ago and it came out of a vibrant movement of Celtic Christians in Ireland and Scotland. Celtic Christians had a powerful sense of the presence of God. Many times we feel that God is far off, that there’s a huge gap between us and God in heaven. But then there are times and places where we feel God is just right here. Celtic Christians called it a “thin place” ... where the gap between heaven and us is really thin and we experience powerful intimacy with God. Your car can become a “thin place” as you commute. Your kitchen table can become a “thin place.” At your office you can close the door and draw near to God. Even a hospital room or a doctor’s office can become a “thin place” where you feel God is so near. Our worship experiences can be a “thin place” where the gap between heaven and earth is really small. In our 40 Days of Prayer we want to upgrade to that kind of intimacy with God in prayer. Let’s pray.

When we open our Bibles we’re in a “thin place” where God is near, so let’s turn to Luke 22:31. We’ve been studying the prayer life of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. We’ve seen that while Jesus was never offline with the Father, there were “thin places” where we see Jesus’ intimacy with the Father in prayer. Here in Luke 22 controversy and conflict are swirling all around Jesus. He is literally hours away from His crucifixion. He has gathered His disciples around Him to prepare them for that. Yet in all of this Jesus wasn’t self-absorbed. Luke shows us that from here right through to Jesus’ death on the cross He prays ... for Himself, but also for His followers and particularly their leader, Peter. **Read Luke 22:31-32.**

**PHOTO ILLUSTRATION** – Maybe you’ve been on a climbing wall or you’ve watched your kids or grandkids on one. If so you know before you start climbing you get in a harness that connects you with someone called a belayer who holds the rope for you so that if you lose your grip and slip you don’t fall all the way to the ground and injure yourself. That’s a powerful picture of what happens when we do what Jesus did and pray for others ... for our spouses, our kids, our grandkids, fellow believers and those who need to become believers. One of the greatest privileges we have is to hold the rope for others through prayer as they face the challenges of life. And knowing that others are praying for us gives us a sense of security like the belayer gives to the climber on the wall. We know someone’s got the rope and they won’t let go.

Now here in Luke 22 Jesus has been preparing His followers for His death. The church Jesus forms after His resurrection will need selfless leaders, and Jesus explains what that means. Then it's like Jesus swings around and rivets His attention to Peter (also known as Simon):

**Luke 22:31-32a - “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon...”**

Jesus knows what's ahead for all His followers. When He says, “Satan has asked to sift you,” the “you” is plural. Each of them would go through this fire and Jesus prays for them, but He has His eye on Simon Peter, “I have prayed for you, Simon.”

During His earthly ministry Jesus prayed often for His disciples. We saw a few weeks ago how Jesus prayed before He chose the twelve apostles. For your homework this afternoon go home and read Jesus' prayer in John 17. You'll see how Jesus prayed for His first disciples and for all who would become His followers through their witness, including you and me. That's right? Jesus prayed for us. And after Jesus rose from the dead, went back to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to this earth He continues His ministry of prayer.

**Romans 8:34b - Christ Jesus ... is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**

**Hebrews 7:25b – (Jesus) always lives to intercede for them.**

So this very moment, in His heavenly ministry Jesus is praying for us. And we are partners with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit in the work of praying (interceding) for others.

**Ephesians 6:18 - And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.**

Now back to Luke 22 Jesus shows us how important it is to hold the rope for others in prayer. First, we can pray that they will...

**1. STAND AGAINST SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION.**

In Luke 22:31 Jesus said, “Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.” The name Satan refers to the devil. The name means “the adversary.” Satan is going after Jesus and he will also go after anyone who is trying to follow Jesus. You need to know that Satan opposes the work of God by going after the people of God .

Satan is *devious*. The Bible says we need to be aware of his schemes. Satan is a *deceiver* who plants lies in our minds to tempt us to sin. Satan is a *destroyer*. The Bible says that he holds the power of death. But Jesus came to destroy the works of the destroyer. Jesus in us is greater than Satan in the world. So we pray for others to stand strong in the battle against Satan.

**Ephesians 6:13 - Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...”**

We need to hold up the shield of faith to protect ourselves, our loved ones and friends from the fiery arrows Satan shoots at us. Husbands and dads and grandads, suit up for battle and fight in prayer for your family. Pray for their protection and strength. Jesus taught us to pray, “Deliver us from the evil one.” Wives and moms, pray protection over your children. The stakes are high. Hold the rope for others so they can stand against spiritual opposition. Also we learn from Jesus to pray that others can...

## **2. GROW THROUGH LIFE’S TRIALS.**

In v.31 Jesus said Satan has asked God to sift Peter as a farmer sifts wheat. Notice that Satan doesn’t have free reign in our lives. As believers we are under the providential protection of God. Satan’s motive is to *destroy* us, but God only permits Satan’s activity to the degree that God will use it to *develop* us. The only activity of Satan that gets through to us is what God will use for us.

So Satan asked to “sift” Peter. What does that mean? It’s probably the picture of what a farmer would do with wheat when it was gathered from the fields. He would take a pitch fork and toss the wheat up in the air. When the wind is blowing it would separate the grain from the useless chaff. The grain fell back to the ground and the chaff was blown away by the wind. Now grain doesn’t know pain, but we do. And maybe you’ve been through a trial where it feels like you’ve been tossed around like a farmer tossing wheat in the air with a pitchfork. And it will be a painful trial for Peter. But in v.32 Jesus said, “I have prayed for you in this trial that your faith may not fail.”

We need to pray our loved ones and friends through the trials of life. Often we pray that they will be shielded from trials. But God knows that it is only by trials that our faith is perfected. It's when heat and pressure is applied to coal that diamonds are formed. It's when gold is put into the fire that the impurities are burned off. And it's when our faith is put through the fiery trials that it is strengthened.

Rick Warren in last week's group session video said: "Our comfort can be just as dangerous as our catastrophes." And Peter was confident and comfortable, but that's a dangerous condition for a follower of Jesus. So Jesus lets Satan have a go at Peter. There's something more important to Jesus than Peter having an easy, safe, suffering-free life. Jesus will allow Peter to go through the greatest trial of his life in order for him to grow in his faith. You see, Peter thought he was stronger than he really was. Look at how Peter responded. **Read Luke 22:33-34.**

Just a few hours later Jesus was arrested and taken to the house of the Jewish high priest where He was put on trial. But Peter would also go through his own trial that night. Peter followed along after Jesus. While Jesus was on the inside being accused and attacked Peter stood out in the courtyard where people recognized that he was one of Jesus' followers. When they asked Peter if it was true, three times Peter denied even knowing Jesus. And when Peter heard the rooster crow He remembered that's exactly what Jesus said would happen and he went away and wept like a baby.

Peter's faith faltered that evening, but it wasn't a final and fatal failure. The rubber band was stretched, but it didn't break. Peter had to heal up over that failure, but he has one of the greatest comeback stories in the Bible. Why? Jesus had prayed for Peter that his faith would not ultimately fail.

Pray for others as they *go* through life's trials that they will *grow* through those trials. If God chooses not to deliver them *from* the trials then we can trust that He will deliver them *through* the trials. God never quits working to perfect and strengthen our faith, even right up to the last hours of our life.

And take it seriously when others ask you to pray for them. And sometimes the Holy Spirit will bring someone to our mind unexpectedly, but it's not random. Take it as a signal to pray for them. You never know what kind of trial they're going through and how God will use your prayer. The Bible says in James 5:16 that we are to pray for one another because "the prayer of a righteous man or woman is powerful and effective."

Hold the rope for others so they can stand against spiritual opposition, so they can grow through life's trials. And pray for others so they can...

### **3. FULFILL THEIR GOD-GIVEN ASSIGNMENT.**

The Lord has an assignment for each of us, and so did Peter. Now Jesus knew that Peter would stumble but Jesus also saw past Peter's fall to Peter's recovery and restoration. Peter was crushed after denying Jesus like he did. He felt guilty, but God doesn't want us shackled by our guilt. To put it in hockey terms, God doesn't want us living in the penalty box and never getting back out on the ice and into the game. Satan loves to get people so stuck in their past failures and sin that they give up serving God.

Notice Jesus said in v.32, "Simon, I have prayed for you that your faith wouldn't fail. And *when* you have turned back (not "if" but "when"), strengthen your brothers. Help them to grow stronger in their faith."

A few weeks after Peter's failure, the resurrected Jesus came to Peter on the shore of the lake where Peter and the other disciples were fishing. And it's an awkward moment as Peter stands before Jesus not knowing what to think or say. But three times Jesus asked, "Simon (same name as in Luke 22) do you love me?" And three times (the same number of times Peter denied Jesus) Peter said, "Yes, Lord, I love you." And after each of those exchanges Jesus said, "Peter, feed My lambs. Take care of My sheep. Feed My sheep." Peter's ministry would be to lead the disciples to fulfill the mission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations. Jesus said, "Peter, sure you messed up. But failure never has to be final."

Don't let your failures *define* you for the *rest* of your life. Let them *refine* you for the *best* of your life.

Peter went through a season of defeat. He lost his grip and his foot slipped. But Jesus was holding the rope. And He's holding the rope for you in your times of defeat. He's praying for you, and then He calls us as Christ-followers to pray for each other that nothing would keep us from fulfilling the unique calling and assignment God has for us.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Our church has a great passion for global missions. We're like an aircraft carrier with people being launched off in different directions all the time. And many churches today have that same passion for missions. But that wasn't always the case. Way back in 1792 a British shoe maker by the name of

William Carey came under deep conviction that the Great Commission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations was an assignment that Jesus gave to every believer and every church. He challenged his fellow believers in their little Baptist association to “expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.” And William Carey was willing to practice what he preached. After forming what came to be known as the Baptist Missionary Society he became the first missionary to go out. He went to India where he would serve until he died in 1834. William Carey had a good friend and a kindred spirit in Pastor Andrew Fuller. Before Carey sailed away to India he told his good friend Andrew Fuller, “I will go down into the pit ... if you will hold the ropes.”

We need to hold the rope and pray for others that they will stand strong against spiritual opposition, grow through the trials they have to endure and emerge to fulfill the assignment God has given them. Who is on your prayer list? Is there someone you know who doesn't know Christ? Is there someone who is far from God? Is there someone who is serving God in a challenging place and you need to hold the rope for them. We have two prayer walls here at the altar. I want to ask you to come, take a marker and write just their first name. And we will pray over this wall. If you see an answer to your prayer for them in the weeks to come, come draw a circle around their name.