

Articles and Sermons :: Let Not Your Faith Fail -poonen

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Let Not Your Faith Fail

by Zac Poonen

In Luke chapter 22 verse 31, we read of Jesus warning Peter of a danger that lay ahead of him. He told him "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." We see that God did not prevent Peter from denying Him. Why didn't Jesus say "Simon I have prayed for you that you will not deny Me even once." Why did the Lord pray only that Peter's faith may not fail, even if Peter himself fell? Isn't it interesting that the Lord did not pray that Peter might not fall? Some of us would like the Lord to pray for us that we might never fall. We would like the Lord to say to us "My son, my daughter, I have prayed for you that you will never fall and never fail." But interestingly enough, our Lord doesn't pray such a prayer for us. What did Jesus pray for Simon? That when Satan tempted him, his faith would not fail. He didn't pray that Peter should not fall in temptation, but that when he did fall, his faith in God's perfect love would not fail him - so that even when Peter reached the bottom of the pit of failure, he would confess, "God still loves me". That is faith - and that is the confession we must always have on our lips and in our hearts - no matter how low we may have sunk or fallen - that God still loves us, JUST AS WE ARE.

It was with a purpose that God allowed Peter to fail. That purpose was to sift Peter. What Satan really wanted was to destroy Peter altogether, but God would not allow him to do that. God does not allow us to be tested or tried beyond our ability. So Satan was allowed to sift Peter. As a result of his failure, Peter was cleansed of a whole lot of chaff in his life. That is the real purpose with which God allows us to fail too. Isn't it a good thing for the chaff to be removed from our lives? Certainly. When a farmer harvests the wheat, he has to sift it before he can use it. Only then will the chaff be removed from it. The Lord uses Satan to remove the chaff from our lives. Amazingly enough, God accomplishes this purpose by allowing us to fail repeatedly!! God used Satan to fulfil that purpose in Peter and He will use Satan to fulfil that purpose in our lives too. There's a lot of chaff in all of us - the chaff of pride, self-confidence and self-righteousness. And God uses Satan to make us fail repeatedly, in order to remove that chaff from us completely.

Whether the Lord is succeeding in fulfilling this purpose in your life or not, you alone know. But if the chaff is being removed, you will be humbler and less self-righteous. You won't look down on others who fail. You won't consider yourself better than anyone else.

God permits Satan to remove the chaff from us, by allowing us to fail repeatedly. So don't get discouraged if you fail. You are still in God's hand. There is a glorious purpose that's being fulfilled through your repeated failures. But your faith in God's love for you must not fail at such times. That was what Jesus prayed for Peter and what He's praying for us today. He's not praying that we may never fail, but He's praying that when we do reach rock-bottom, our confidence in God's love will still be unshaken. Jesus then told Peter, "When you turn back and are strong once again, strengthen your brothers". It is only when we are broken that we can be strong enough to strengthen others.

It was only when Peter was weak and broken, that he became really strong - so strong that he was able to strengthen his brothers and sisters. We could say that Peter's preparation for Spirit-filled service came through his experience of failure. If he had been filled with the Holy Spirit, without this experience of failure, he would have stood up on the day of Pentecost as a proud man, as a man who had never failed, who could look down, despisingly, at the poor lost sinners in front of him. And God would have become his enemy, for God resists the proud!! Peter had to come to such a zero-point to go, before he could be what God wanted him to be. That's why Peter himself warned other Christians saying, "Don't ever forget how you yourself were once cleansed from your sins" (2 Peter 1:9). He warns them there that if they do forget that, they will become blind and short-sighted.