

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 30 November 2025. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Peter's Conversion

Matthew 26:31-35

Back in 1984, in China, an evangelist named Yun was arrested for the “crime” of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and he was thrown into a freezing cold prison cell, in the dead of winter, along with four other Christian brothers. All night long they prayed and wept for the salvation of souls in China, and sang songs of praise to God. Normally, the prison guards would have crushed such “superstitious activities” immediately; but because it was so freezing cold, they wouldn’t get out of their warm beds to stop them.¹

However, the next morning was a different story. The head prison guard came up to Yun and waved his electric baton in his face menacingly. He yelled at him, and ordered him to kneel down before him; but Yun answered, “I will not kneel down before you. I will only kneel down before my God.” The prison guard screamed, “I am your Lord! I am your God! If you kneel down before me, I can release you immediately.” With righteous indignation, Yun retorted, “In the name of Jesus, you are *not* my God. You are just an earthly officer. My Lord is in heaven. I am a heavenly man.”²

Well, the officer wasn’t having that. He called for some other officers, and they held him down, while he applied the electric baton to Yun. As the hundreds of volts of electricity jolted through his body, Yun cried out, “Lord, have mercy on me!”; and immediately, the electric baton stopped working. No matter what they did, they couldn’t get the baton to work. This clearly was not just a coincidence. The chief guard began to sweat with fear, and finally turned and ran away.³

However, the next morning, Yun and his brethren were moved to another prison, in Wuyang. Shortly after they’d arrived in their cell, they heard other prisoners being brought through the prison gate; and Yun quickly discerned that these new prisoners were Christians, as well. But then, Yun heard something that caught his ear. A guard mockingly asked one of the new prisoners, “Are you an earthly man, or a heavenly man?” The Christian answered, “I don’t know what you’re talking about”; and so, the guard specifically asked whether he were like that “heavenly man” that they had just brought into the prison, or not. The man could no longer pretend not to understand. He clearly was being asked whether he were a follower of Jesus; and he knew what the consequences would be if he said “Yes.” What would he say?⁴

Before the end of this message, you will find out what this man’s answer was. In the meantime, we will turn to **Matthew 26**, and read about another “heavenly man” who was once asked essentially the same question that that Chinese believer was asked. You know his name: it is **Peter**. Like Peter, and like the Chinese brother, we who know Christ as Saviour are often asked the question, “Are you a heavenly man?”, or “Are you a heavenly woman?” Sometimes the question is asked very overtly, and bluntly; and other times, it is asked so subtly, that we don’t even realise that we are being asked it. Either way, though, God takes our

response very seriously. That is why every believer *must* be prepared to answer the question, “Are you a heavenly man?” The title of this message is **Peter’s Conversion**.

Matthew 26:31-35

I. Jesus’ prophecy (vv. 31-32)

At the end of last week’s message, we read **Matthew 26:30**. In that verse, we are told that Jesus sang a hymn with His disciples. The last hymn that *all* Jews sang at the close of the Passover meal was **Psalms 118** (the *Hallel*); and, as we saw last week, this psalm is a prophecy of how the Foundation Stone of Israel would be rejected by the builders. Undoubtedly, Jesus explained this psalm to the disciples, and informed them, once again, that He was about to be rejected by the religious leaders of Israel, and crucified. However, His death wasn’t the only item that Jesus discussed with them that night. There were *many* important things that Jesus told them that evening, as they got up from the table, left the Upper Room, walked through the streets of Jerusalem, passed the Temple, went down into the Kidron Valley, and entered the Garden of Gethsemane. Four chapters of **John—chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17**—record the things that Jesus said at the end of the Passover meal, and during that walk to Gethsemane. He comforted the disciples with the promise one day **He will come back** to take His people to the Father’s House in Heaven. He reminded them of the truth that **He and His Father** are one. He used the **illustration of a grapevine** to illustrate that He is the Vine, and we the branches, and that in order for us to bear spiritual fruit for Him, we must abide in Him. Jesus talked about the importance of **love**, and told them that all men will know that we are His disciples by our love for each other. He warned them that **persecution was coming** to them, and that soon, those who killed them would think that they were doing God service. But then, Jesus hit them with the biggest bombshell of all: **soon He would leave them**, and go back to His Father in Heaven. However, He promised them that He would soon **send them the Holy Spirit** to comfort them, and to remind them of all things that He had taught them. Jesus then **prayed to His Heavenly Father**, and asked the Father to keep the disciples in His name.

It was as Jesus was finishing that prayer that they crossed over the Brook Kidron, and came into the Garden of Gethsemane; and it was at this same time that Jesus made the shocking prediction that we just read. Let’s read again **Matthew 26:31-32**. **(Read Matthew 26:31-32.)**

The Old Testament prophecy that Jesus is quoting here is in **Zechariah 13**. This amazing prophecy is packed with layers of truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s go back to **Zechariah**, and read that prophecy; and then, we will break it down.

Zechariah 13:7

In this verse, we see, first of all, that God gave a command: He commanded His **“sword”** to **“awake.”** Now, this is very similar to a command that God gave in **Jeremiah 47:6-7**. In that passage, God commanded His sword to **“awake,”** and to smite the wicked inhabitants of Ashkelon, and the other cities along the Gaza coast. Now, it is no surprise that God would give such a command concerning Gaza. It was only just and right that God’s sword would be “awake” against the Philistines, who were the enemies of God, and the enemies of His people, Israel. However, God wasn’t speaking about His *enemies* here in **Zechariah 13:7**: He was talking about *His own Shepherd*. God the Father is speaking here of His own beloved Son, and is calling Him **“my shepherd.”** Throughout the Old Testament, the Messiah is portrayed as the “Shepherd of Israel,” who proceeds forth from God Himself. Why, then, would God command *His own sword* to smite His beloved Son? Why would God the Father treat His Son as though He were His *enemy*? *How* did He “smite” Him? And *what*, exactly, was the “sword” that God used to smite Him?

The answer is simple, yet profound: God the Father “smote” His Son, the Shepherd of Israel, through the agency of Satan, and evil men! God used Satan and his demons, as well as Herod, Pilate, the Sanhedrin, and the Roman soldiers, to be His **“sword,”** to smite His Son on the cross, so that our sins might be paid for. Now, God did not *force* these men to do what they did. These men crucified Jesus of their own freewill. Yet, all along, God was using their rebellion to accomplish His own plan! That is why Isaiah prophesied, **“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.”** Ultimately, *God the Father* “smote” and “bruised” His Son on the cross, by allowing Satan and his demons, and all his evil human instruments, to put Him to death.

Now, let’s dive deeper, and get some more insight as to who the “Shepherd” is. **(Read Zechariah 13:7 again.)** Did you notice what else God called His Son? Not only did He call Him **“my shepherd”**: He also called Him **“the man that is my fellow.”** Why is this important? Well, first of all, the Hebrew word for **“man”** is not one of the ordinary words for “man,” such as *adam*, *iysh*, or *ba’al*; it is the word *gever*, which means **“mighty man.”** It is the same word that is used in **Isaiah 9:6**, where Isaiah prophesied, **“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”** The Hebrew for **“mighty God”** is *El Gibbor*, which literally means “God-mighty man”! Jesus is a “mighty man” because He is no ordinary man: He is the *God-Man*. But that’s not all. The Father also called His Son **“the man that is my fellow.”** The Hebrew word for **“fellow”** is *amiyth*, which means “companion.” However, the word *amiyth* doesn’t describe any ordinary companionship: it describes a union between two people who are *equals*, and enjoy “common rights and privileges.”⁵ An *amiyth* could also be described as “a man coequal with me.”⁶

Friends, this word perfectly describes the relationship of Christ to His Father. He is a true man; yet, He is a man on equal footing with God the Father. Such could not be said of any ordinary man. Jesus is the Son of Man; yet, His human nature is so united with His divine nature, that He is truly on equal footing with God the Father!

Now, let's dive even deeper. Zechariah prophesied, ***"Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."*** This is the part of the prophecy that Jesus specifically quoted. Jesus identified these words as a prophecy of Himself, which was soon to be fulfilled. He was warning the disciples that very soon, their faith would be so battered and crushed, that they would all run away in fear, and abandon their Shepherd. That very night, at the hour when Jesus would need the human love and support of His followers the most, they would desert Him.

Now, Jesus' disciples were *temporarily* scattered; but their unity wasn't broken for long. Four days after Christ's crucifixion, the disciples were gathered in the Upper Room. Their faith had been nearly crushed; but despite their fear and despair, they had reunited, and assembled together. But then, the most joyous moment in their lives occurred. The risen Christ Himself appeared to them, and said, ***"Peace be unto you."*** The disciples were no longer scattered, but assembled; and once again, their hearts were filled with joy.

However, this raises a question. Why, at the end of the verse, does Zechariah say, ***"And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones"***? The word ***"little ones"*** means "small or insignificant ones." Who are these ones whom the world regards as "small," "insignificant," and foolish? Who is the remnant of sheep that is so small in number, that the atheist Mark Twain once mockingly called them as "a company so small as to be hardly worth the saving"?⁷ These "little ones" are the ones whom Jesus called His ***"little flock"***—those who are saved! Yet, what does God say about His Son's little flock? He says, ***"I will turn mine hand upon the little ones."*** What does this mean? The word ***"upon"*** is the Hebrew word *al*, which means "upon" or "against"; and in this context, it means "I will turn my hand *against* the little ones." What does this mean? Just what it sounds like! It means that God would continue to allow His disciples to experience persecution. The night of Jesus' arrest was *just the beginning* of a life of persecution, which *all* Jesus' followers would have to endure.

Christian, you have been called to take up the cross, and follow Jesus. A cross signifies death! While it is true that God protects His sheep from danger, it is also true that *persecution* is a standing guarantee for all believers in this church age. Get used to it, Christian. Embrace the suffering that you must endure for Jesus' name! For now, in our society, the most suffering that we usually experience is to be

laughed at by unbelievers; but the day may come, within our lifetimes, when we will have to suffer imprisonment, confiscation of goods, separation from family, or even death, for Christ's name. The possibility of suffering and death is very real for God's people; and it is a standing possibility until Jesus returns.

Jesus' disciples were permitted to **"go their way"** on the night of Jesus' arrest, and escape trial and death; but it was only for a time. Eventually, nearly every one of the Apostles died a martyr's death. This is to be expected, since Christ's sheep are identified with their Shepherd. If the world hated Christ, it will also hate you, Christian. If Jesus was smitten, we shouldn't be surprised if we be smitten, too. However, the good news is that no matter what may happen to us, nothing can ***"separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Romans 8:35-39

II. Peter's protests (vv. 33, 35)

(Read Matthew 26:33 & 35 again.) When Peter heard Jesus' prediction that he, and all the other disciples, would abandon their Lord that night, he was dumbfounded—and obviously hurt. He said, ***"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."*** Peter wasn't the only one who made this protest, either. As we saw in **verse 35**, *all* the disciples said the same thing.

Now, the disciples had contradicted Jesus' words many times before—especially whenever Jesus told them that He was going to die on the cross. They didn't want to believe that their Lord was going to die; and they voiced their unbelief very openly. Peter was the one who had dared to tell Jesus, ***"Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee"***; and Jesus had to rebuke him sternly for saying that. However, *this* was the most vehement denial of Jesus' words that Peter had ever made. Peter said, ***"Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will not I be offended."*** Peter *thought* that he would be the one exception. *Every one* of the Apostles thought that he would be the one person who wouldn't deny the Lord, or abandon Him, no matter what. But they were very wrong. They still didn't know the depths of evil in their own hearts; and they were ready, in a moment, to proclaim their own goodness.

Proverbs 20:6, 9

For three years, the disciples had sat under Jesus' teaching every single day; and in that time, their opinion of themselves had changed. They had sounded the depths of the evil in their own hearts, and had come to realise that it was much deeper than they had thought. Remember that time when Jesus commanded Peter to launch his boat out into the deep, and he would get a huge draught of fish? Remember how Peter (being the expert fisherman that he was) thought that Jesus didn't know what He was talking about? Remember how he **dragged his feet about** it, and then finally condescendingly said, **"Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net"**? Peter smarted for that one, didn't he? After the net suddenly became so full of fish that it began to tear, and they had to call another boat to haul it in, Peter realised that he had messed up again—big time! Seeing the sinfulness of his unbelief, he said, **"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."** Now, don't misunderstand: Peter *had* seen the depth of his sinfulness on the day of his salvation, when he believed on Christ. (That's *why* he believed on Jesus! He realised that he needed a Saviour.) However, that incident with the net and the fish brought Peter to a whole new level of awareness of his sin. *All* the eleven saved disciples had been experiencing this increasing awareness of, and sensitivity to sin, throughout Christ's ministry. That is why, at the beginning of the Passover meal, when Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him, the eleven saved disciples all said, **"Lord, is it I?"** They knew their hearts were wicked; and they actually feared that they might be capable of doing such a dastardly thing. However, they still hadn't sounded their hearts deeply enough.

Christian, there was a day in your life when *you* fathomed the depths of sin in your heart, for the first time. If you *hadn't* seen your sinfulness, you never would have seen your need of Christ, and His gift of salvation. That's why there was a day in your life when you said, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. Please save me! I believe you died for my sins, and rose again. Please come into my heart, and be my Lord and Saviour!" If you be a true child of God, you *have* seen your sinfulness, and you *have* mourned over your sin. But have you continued to sound your heart *since* the day of your salvation? How much do you *really* understand that your heart is **"deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"**?

Think of it this way. Have you ever seen an aerial photo of the shoreline of some tropical island, as taken from a drone or aircraft? The water close to the shoreline is crystal-clear, and you are able to see the ocean bottom very clearly, for perhaps a quarter mile out from the shore. The ocean bottom descends gradually; and you can see rocks, corals, vegetation, and even fish, in that shallow water. But then, there suddenly comes a point where that gradual shelf suddenly disappears, and you no longer see the ocean floor. Suddenly, the water is dark blue. Why? Because that is the point where the ocean floor stops descending a few feet at a time, and suddenly drops almost straight down, and keeps going down for several miles. *That*, Christian, is what your old, natural, sinful heart is like.

A religious, but lost person may consider his sin deep enough to wade in up to his ankles; but he certainly doesn't consider his sin is deep enough to perish in. In contrast, a true believer knows that his sin *is* deep enough to perish in. A true believer *knows* that ***"The wages of sin is death."*** That is why, on the day when he first realised his sinfulness, he cried out to the "Lifeguard," the Lord Jesus Christ, to save him from sin, death, and hell. That is why *you* cried out to Jesus to save you, Christian. However, as you grow closer to the Lord, and delve into His Word, you realise, more and more, that your sinful heart is deeper than any ocean. In fact, it is fathomless! You begin to realise that there is no depth to which you could *not* sink, apart from the grace of God! That is exactly what Peter (and *all* the disciples) were about to discover that evening. They were about to see just how *unfaithful* their hearts really were. They had proclaimed their own goodness in the Garden of Gethsemane, before the soldiers arrived; but when the threat of death for Jesus' name suddenly came upon them, they realised the truth of **Proverbs 20:6: *"But a faithful man who can find?"***

Charles Spurgeon once said, "A primary qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God's work well and triumphantly, is a sense of our own weakness. When God's warrior marches forth to the battle, strong in his own might; when he boasts, 'I know that I shall conquer: my own right arm and my conquering sword shall get me victory,' defeat is not far distant. Are you mourning over your own weakness? Take courage—for there must be a consciousness of weakness before the Lord will give thee victory." Christian, you have a new heart, which is created in righteousness and true holiness; but never forget that your *old* heart is still with you; and it is completely capable of denying the Lord—whether in words, or in deeds. Fathom the depth of the sin in your sinful heart, Christian, and know its treacherousness well! Do *not* trust your heart! Trust the one who is *greater* than you heart, and knows all things. Run to Christ for the strength you need to overcome sin in your life.

III. Jesus' second prophecy (v. 34)

(Read Matthew 26:34 again.) If Peter was stunned by Jesus' prediction that they would all abandon Him that night, imagine how stunned he was by *this* prophecy! Imagine the Lord, whom you love so much, looking you in the eyes and flatly telling you that before morning breaks, you will deny three times that you even know Him! If this were all that Jesus had told Peter, it probably would have been unbearable. However, Jesus had words of hope for Peter, too. Let's look at the parallel account in **Luke**, and see what else Jesus said.

Luke 22:31-34

Peter was about to have a great fall. Yet, Jesus had words of encouragement for him. As Peter's great High Priest, He promised to *pray* for Peter, that his faith would not fail. Not only that, but He promised that through this ordeal, Peter would be equipped to **"strengthen"** his brethren. That word **"strengthen"** means "to make steadfast." At this point in Peter's life, he was *not* being "steadfast." He was spiritually weak, and was ready to be sifted violently, like wheat. That's why Jesus called him by his old name "Simon," instead of "Peter" (which means "little rock"). However, Jesus had good news: very soon, Peter would be **"converted."**

Now, what does *that* mean? Is Jesus saying that Peter wasn't even saved, and that he wouldn't be saved until after His resurrection? No, that is *not* what He was saying. We know that Peter was saved, because in His High-Priestly prayer to His Father in **John 17**, Jesus said that none of these twelve men was lost, except the "son of perdition" (Judas Iscariot). Is Jesus saying that Peter was saved, but that he would *lose* his salvation on account of denying Him, and would have to get it back again? No, that isn't what Jesus was saying, either. Jesus promised that His sheep will *never* perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of His hand.

What was Jesus saying, then? He was saying that after Peter had *repented* and *changed direction*, he would strengthen his brethren. The word **"converted"** means much the same thing as the word "repent." Though they are two different Greek words, they both mean "to turn the heart, mind, and will, and change direction." "Repentance" shouldn't happen merely on the day of one's salvation: it is something that believers must *continually* do to stay in good fellowship with Christ. Through his hard fall, God humbled Peter, and performed a radical change in his life. Through this fall, the Lord made Peter into a strong man of faith, instead of a weak, wavering Christian. The Peter who stood up boldly on the Day of Pentecost and preached the Gospel was a far cry from the weak, vacillating Peter on the night of Jesus' arrest. Satan meant to ruin Peter—to "sift" him "as wheat"; but God meant to strengthen Peter. God took Peter's failure, and used it for good. God used this failure to expose what was really in Peter's heart. Peter never forgot his failure; nor did he forget the reasons *why* he failed (pride, self-confidence, and prayerlessness). Through his dramatic conversion, Peter was able, years later, to "strengthen" his brethren; and years later, he wrote these words of comfort to them.

2 Peter 3:17-18

Christian, be on guard! You cannot lose your salvation: but you *can* be greatly influenced by the ungodly—to the point of appearing like an unsaved person. Lot *looked* like an unsaved person after he had lived in Sodom for a while. David *looked* like an unsaved man on the night when he lusted after Bathsheba, and then lay with her. Peter *looked* like an unsaved man on the night when He denied the Lord. These

were saved men; but when they stumbled, they did not *look* like believers. They fell from their steadfastness; and it was a hard fall.

All Christians have had "sifted as wheat" moments, when their loyalty to Christ failed miserably. Perhaps you've not denied the Lord in words (by saying "I don't know Jesus," or "I'm not a Christian"); but you've denied Him in deeds—or by your mere silence, at the moment when you should have spoken for the name of Jesus. If so, take heart. If you be a child of God, you are still "wheat." The ungodly are ***"like the chaff, which the wind driveth away"***; and just as chaff is burned, so all who die in their sins will be burned with unquenchable fire. But *you* are wheat: and one day, you will be gathered into God's heavenly granary.

Matthew 3:7-12

Christian, Satan means to "sift" you as wheat, as violently as he can. His goal is to ruin your effectiveness for God; and he will use everything in his arsenal to do so. Perhaps you have badly fallen, and you are so wounded, that you feel that you can never get up and serve the Lord again. If so, this is a lie from the pit of hell! Christ means to use your fall to show you your sin, bring you to repentance, change you into His image, and empower you to strengthen others; so let Him do it! Just surrender, and let Christ convert you—just as He did Peter.

Conclusion: On that freezing cold winter morning in 1984, in the prison in Wuyang, China, a faltering, weak believer was faced with the question, "Are you a heavenly man, or not?" He hesitated, and finally said, "I'm a man from the earth, not a heavenly man." The guard responded, "Because you're just an earthly man, tonight I will put you in the cell of a heavenly man." Little did that guard know that by putting that weak believer into the same cell with a strong believer, he was playing right into God's hands! As soon as that weak believer was put into Yun's cell, Yun was filled with righteous indignation, and said, "You should say No! No! No! to the devil!" He then went over to the cell wall, and began to use his forefinger to write on the dirty wall. In his zeal, he pressed so hard on the rough cement, that his finger began to bleed; and with blood, he wrote the words, "No! No! No! Don't be afraid! Don't trust in man, trust only in Jesus!" The man was so convicted, that he began to weep, and cried out to God for forgiveness. Later, after the man was released from prison, he became a strong believer, and a house church leader.⁸ He may have *looked* like chaff; but he was really wheat: and God used Yun to strengthen him. Just as wheat is profitable, so God has saved you, Christian, so that you might be profitable to Him. Allow God to remove the "dirt" and "rocks" of sin from your life, so that He may use you for His glory!

Perhaps you have never been saved. Maybe you have only an outward show of faith in Jesus; but your faith was never real. If so, stop playing games, and repent! Turn from your sin, and

believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! He wants to use your life for His glory; and He is calling you now. Please answer His call!

¹ Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man* (Oxford, UK, and Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2011), pp. 85-87.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Merrill F. Unger, *Zechariah: Prophet of Messiah's Glory* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), p. 232.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 36.

⁸ Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man*, pp. 87-88.