
An Eclipse of Faith

By David Wilkerson

April 21, 2008 “[Jesus] said 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: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

“And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me” (Luke 22:31–34).

In a previous message, I wrote of how Peter endured an “eclipse of faith.” Such experiences have faced devoted Christians throughout history. I have felt prompted by the Spirit recently to revisit this subject and explore it further, to shed light on “eclipses of faith” being endured by so many saints today.

As you recall, Peter’s eclipse happened at Passover. Jesus turned aside to his bold disciple and revealed, “Simon, Satan desires to have you, so that he might sift you like wheat.” Some scholars translate this to mean, essentially, “Peter, Satan has demanded I turn you over to him, that he may shake your very life.”

The warning here is clear: Satan was about to orchestrate a supernatural attack on Peter’s faith. To sift means to “shake violently, up and down, sideways, back and forth, to stir in every way.” Simply put, the devil wanted to shake the foundations of Peter’s faith in the severest way possible.

Earlier that day, Peter had boasted of having an unflinching faith. He had said to Jesus in front of the other disciples, “Lord, I will never doubt you. I would die before I ever mistrusted you.”

Make no mistake: Peter’s faith wasn’t just froth or mere emotion. Of all the disciples, this man had demonstrated boldness of belief time after time. It was he who stepped out of the boat to take the first few steps on the water toward Jesus. And Peter had declared such faith in Jesus’ divinity — saying, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of God” — that Jesus said he would build his church upon this testimony. Peter’s belief was real — and that is the very reason the devil went after him.

Satan doesn’t demand opportunities to break down people whose faith is weak or wavering. Few of us realize this truth when we’re in the midst of a trial. We don’t see that we’re in the fire because of our walk with Jesus, that the devil is trying to quench our hunger for God’s presence. Think about Peter: here was a man about to become a pillar of God’s church, launching the gospel into the world at Pentecost. You can be sure Satan was not going to let that happen without a fight.

Of course, all Christians are tested concerning their faith. It happens as the flesh rises up against the spirit to lust after the things of the world. I thank God for the day-by-day faith that sustains his saints in this battle.

But for some servants, Satan’s sifting is much more than a war between flesh and spirit. It is an on-site, face-to-face, supernatural attack by the devil himself to try to destroy their belief. Such servants’ faith comes under direct, well-devised attacks by forces of hell, shaking them mentally, physically and spiritually. Yet I want to show you how God has ordained our faith to come through these severe fires.

Jesus knew the satanic onslaught to come upon Peter was aimed at his faith. So he prepared his disciple by telling him, "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." Jesus even forewarned Peter he would fall: "And when you are converted [when you have come through it], strengthen your brothers." Finally, Jesus said something his disciple simply couldn't receive: "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows this day, you will have denied three times that you know me."

Stop and think about this: what if Jesus had spoken this about you? How would you have reacted? "But Lord, you know I've been faithful. I have forsaken all to follow you. And you've given me promises to keep me from falling. But now you're saying I'll do unspeakable things, that I'll talk like an atheist. How could this be?"

I believe most Christians would have this reaction. We may have experienced times of sifting, but few of us could imagine Satan's attacks being so severe we would be tempted to deny Jesus.

Now picture Peter standing outside the religious council, warming himself by the fire. This was the hour Jesus warned would come, when the power of darkness would seem to eclipse everything. I can only imagine the awful things Satan injected into Peter's mind then, causing him to wonder:

"I can't believe what's happening to Jesus. If he were truly God, how could he allow such humiliation to take place? He's supposed to be the Son of the living God. Yet if he can't deliver himself, how can he deliver me? All the things he told us are going up in smoke. Where is God's power, his presence at this desperate hour?"

Many of us have asked the same questions in the midst of our trials. We are just as baffled as Peter when we cry out to the Lord and don't hear answers...when our situation goes from bad to worse...when we're reduced to soul-shaking terror.

What do I mean by the phrase "eclipse of faith"? In nature, a solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the earth and the sun, obscuring the light either partially or totally. For a while, the sun seems literally to disappear, and the daylight suddenly becomes dark. The Greek meaning of eclipse is, "I am absent," or, "I cease to exist." In ancient thinking, the sun was actually extinguished for a while by the gods.

For Christians, a "spiritual eclipse" is a dark hour when God seems to be absent from our lives. It happens most often during times of testing, as Satan moves in to try to obscure our vision of the Lord. He attempted it with Peter, throwing everything in hell at the disciple to try to send his faith into an eclipse of total darkness.

Tell me, have you ever faced such an eclipse? An hour when your mind was flooded with questions? When your prayers seemed to fall on the ground, and God's Word seemed closed to you? When you felt your life was empty, useless, a total failure?

At such times, you hear whispers of accusation: "After all the praying you've done, all the revelations you've received from God's Word, all your testifying of God's faithfulness — after all of that, you're still weak. You can't practice what you preach." Suddenly you're tempted to think, "This faith-walk doesn't make sense in my life. None of it adds up for me, and I can't make it work. I don't think I can go on with this. I'm too beaten down. I can't handle it anymore."

Consider Peter's language in the midst of his eclipse of faith. When someone asked him, "Aren't you a

follower of this Jesus?" Peter lied, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know who that man is." When pressed about it a second time, he again responded, "I don't know him." Finally, when asked a third time, Peter uttered a curse and screamed, "I've never been with this man!"

Talk about a total eclipse of faith. Peter sounded like an enraged atheist. His faith was completely shattered. He had crossed a line, actually denying Jesus. This same bold disciple who had cast out demons had now sunk to total unbelief. Some must have thought, "Surely God is finished with Peter, removing his anointing from his life. After all, how could any true servant of God speak this way?"

I'll tell you how it can happen. It occurs when we're under the enemy's heavy barrage and God seems completely absent. That is precisely the time when Satan's voice comes through so loud and clear we lose all sight of the Lord. Suddenly, we feel our life has been spent in vain, that it has counted for nothing. In that dark moment of eclipse, the devil has created such chaos we can't possibly see a way out. We can't imagine God's power being able to deliver us.

Satan had wanted Peter to spin out into total despair. Indeed, the disciple realized to his horror, "I denied Jesus. Not just once, but three times. What has happened to me?" Imagine the cloud of condemnation cloaking Peter's mind in that hour.

What about you? Have you lived under condemnation because at one point your faith went into eclipse? Maybe you continually turned to a sinful habit or doubted God's ability to work his covenant promises in your life. Since then you've lived in a spiral of fear, guilt and condemnation.

We all know how God delivered Peter out of this horrible time. He did it the same way he delivered other holy men in Scripture who faced their own eclipse of faith.

1. Elijah, a man who truly heard from God, suffered a severe eclipse of his faith. Elijah's faith literally opened and shut heaven. Here was a prophet fearless in his testimony, a man whose rugged faith in God caused kings to fear him and hell to tremble. When Satan had Israel in his grip, Elijah rose up in faith and brought down all idolatry.

Yet this holy prophet endured a dark eclipse of faith. Satan knew the impact that Elijah's faith would have on Israel, and he orchestrated an attack through wicked Queen Jezebel. It happened at the moment of Elijah's greatest triumph: he had just slain 400 prophets of Baal and raced on foot from Mount Carmel to Jezreel. But when he arrived, he learned Jezebel had put a price on his head, declaring, "Elijah is a dead man."

Emotionally spent, Elijah's faith collapsed. In a single dark hour, the powerful faith that could open heaven had shriveled into doubt. Hiding in a cave, exhausted, Elijah fell into a deep depression. He gave up on life, saying in so many words, "I'm through with faith, hope, zeal. Life isn't worth living. I've given everything I can, but it has all blown up in my face. Doesn't God care? Lord, take me out of this mess. Just kill me."

You may think of Elijah the same as Peter: "Surely this man has crossed a line. How could a holy servant preach righteousness and do such mighty works, yet deny God cares?" I ask you: did God remove Elijah's anointing for blaring such unbelief? Did he rebuke the prophet for his accusations? No, God ministered to his servant, feeding and strengthening him. In fact, he sent an angel to prepare a meal for Elijah so full of supernatural nourishment it sustained the prophet for forty days.

2. Jeremiah also suffered an eclipse of faith. Here was a powerful preacher of holiness and repentance, a fearless prophet who had the mind of God and walked in the fear of the Lord. Yet as we read Jeremiah 20, we find this man suffering a horrible eclipse of faith.

Jeremiah was preaching at the temple gate when a Satan-possessed priest, Pashur, marched up and slapped the prophet's face. Pashur ordered Jeremiah dragged off and locked in a public stock, where he was mocked before passing crowds. When released, Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on Pashur and his followers: "You, Pashur, and this city are coming down. You're all going into captivity" (see Jeremiah 20:6).

Immediately, a darkness of soul descended on Jeremiah, and he collapsed in discouragement. The once-penetrating holiness preacher now vented dark feelings toward God: "Lord, you deceived me. The word you gave me has become a reproach. Every day I'm ridiculed. You've abandoned me, so I'm quitting you. I'm not going to speak your Word anymore. All your promises are empty. My life and ministry have ended in shame. You should have killed me in the womb" (see Jeremiah 20:7-8).

Tell me, did Jeremiah cross a line here? Could such language come out of anyone who claims to serve God? We find our answer in the very next chapter: "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah" (see 21:1). The prophet's eclipse passed, and God did not miss a beat. Jeremiah's most effective ministry lay ahead of him.

God is always aware of the devices and attacks Satan uses against his most effective servants. In both Elijah's and Jeremiah's lives, God knew their faith would endure the eclipse. He knew their cries came out of confusion and pain. And Scripture makes it clear: not for a single moment did God lift his anointing from either of them.

Most of us can't relate to the severe siftings and faith eclipses of these spiritual giants. As we read about Elijah and Jeremiah, we think, "I have never been pressed to the point that I begged God to take my life, as Elijah did. I've never accused God of deceiving me, as Jeremiah did. And I've never said to the Lord, 'I quit.'" These men's eclipses were total, a temporary overshadowing of their faith. I can't relate to that."

Yet this doesn't mean our faith has not experienced an eclipse. Ours may be more hidden. The truth is, we can develop an equally despairing attitude if we feel God has let us down. After a disappointing experience, Satan may implant thoughts like these: "Where is your God now, when you need him? Things are going from bad to worse, but he's nowhere in sight. God promised to make a way of escape for you. Where is he?"

Though we may not express it outwardly, we entertain thoughts that the Lord is not with us, that he's mad at us, that we aren't measuring up in his eyes. So we give God the silent treatment, backing off from him in prayer and neglecting to trust him in our trials.

No matter what level our eclipse may be, partial or total, we have to realize the devil is behind the attack. It isn't being caused by something in our nature, nor by God's wrath, but rather it comes as a supernatural assault from hell. If we fail to recognize this, our downward spiral will continue. We dare not underestimate Satan's determination to shipwreck our faith.

You may ask, "But isn't Jesus right to be offended when we mistrust him? Doesn't it grieve him when we waver and question his faithfulness?" Yes, it does grieve him. And yes, our unbelieving thoughts

can lead to confusion and chaos. Bitterness can take root and, if allowed to harden, can lead to a complete falling away.

But the fact remains, God knows the true depths of what is in your heart, and for him nothing has changed about you. He doesn't suddenly see you as his enemy, changing in an instant because of your troubled spirit. He still considers you his friend, a warrior for the kingdom who's on the cusp of moving into new areas of trust. And for that very reason, you have become a target of Satan.

The devil is absolutely determined to block your vision of God's mercy and grace. Like the moon during an eclipse, he is little by little attempting to cover up your view of Jesus until things become completely dark. Yet, all along, God has planned for your faith to come through this temporary eclipse.

3. Many of us are able to relate to the partial eclipse of faith David endured. In Psalm 55, David speaks of a satanic attack that drained his strength and patience. It caused an eclipse so severe David wanted to run. He moaned, "There is pain in my soul, a pressure that never lets up. It's a battle that never ends. What I'm going through terrifies me. There are times I can't stop trembling.

"Lord, don't hide from me anymore. Please, listen to my complaint. You have to make a way of escape for me. If I only had wings like a dove, I would fly out of this place and hide in some wilderness. I just want rest from this battle."

What was the cause of David's awful battle? It was a voice: "Because of the voice of the enemy" (Psalm 55:3). In Hebrew, the meaning here is "the voice of a man." It was Satan speaking, along with his demonic oppressors: "Because of the oppression of the wicked" (55:3).

David says of these voices, "They cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me" (55:3). He's saying, in essence, "The tongues of devils are hurling accusations at me. Satan and his henchmen conspire against me, harassing me with lies. They dig up failures from my past and bring them before me, trying to make me fearful."

What did David do about this? He cried out to the Lord for help, asking him to silence the enemy's accusations: "Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues" (55:9). "Every day they wrest [twist] my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil.... They mark my steps" (56:5, 6).

David's testimony makes it clear for all of us: this is war. We are facing evil powers, in a fight for our faith against the father of lies. And the only way we can do battle is to cry out to the Lord for help.

Like other holy servants of God, David came out of his eclipse and was used mightily as never before. Beloved, the same joy awaits us just beyond our eclipse. Yet it is when we are at our lowest — at the deepest point of our unbelief — that God is doing his deepest work in us, preparing us to glorify him.

Have you been sifted recently, your faith seeming to fail in a dark hour of eclipse? Like Peter, you may feel utterly defeated. Or, like Jeremiah, you feel God has deceived and abandoned you. Or, like Elijah, you are overwhelmed and simply want your life to be over. You see no way out of your eclipse.

I urge you to do three things:

1. Rest in God's love for you. Remember these servants' examples and the plan God had in place for

each of them through their trial. They were meant to come out of their eclipse prepared for the ministry God had ready for them.

2. Know that no matter deep your unbelieving thoughts, the Lord sees what you are going through, and his love for you never wavers. Though we are faithless, he remains faithful: “We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived; after that the kindness and love of God our Savior...appeared” (Titus 3:3–4).

The Greek meaning of “appeared” here is “superimposed.” God looks on our struggles, worries, fears and questionings — in short, our times of eclipse, filled with foolishness and disobedience — and he superimposes his divine love over us. No matter what our condition, his love reigns over us.

3. Do as David did and cry to the Lord night and day. “Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before you. In the morning my prayer comes before you. Incline your ear to my cry” (see Psalm 55).

Dear saint, make this your prayer, as I have made it mine:

“Lord, at times I have given you the silent treatment. I have backed away from you because of my disappointments. But I step toward you now in prayer, by faith. Hear my cry, Jesus. I know this is not my battle to fight, but yours. I trust you to silence the enemy’s tongues. And I know that your love reigns over me, even at my darkest times. I rest in your delight in me. Amen.”