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"MINDFUL OF THE MASTER"

by Michael Hayes

Matthew 16:23 (ESV)

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

It is here we see the Lord's passionate rebuke of a man to which few (if there be any today) can measure to as far as men alone are concerned. The apostle of our Lord, the one through whom the Holy Ghost was pleased to pen at least two of the sacred epistles of holy writ, the one whose zeal and fervor was seemingly unmatched even among the chosen twelve, that same one who upon Pentecost would preach in power unlike anything that was witnessed before, the very one who would seal his own testimony of his devotion to Christ in his own blood, none other than our beloved Simon Peter. And yet, we see the old adage ringing true through him, that indeed the best of men, are men at best. Friends, might we ourselves consider this stern rebuke from the Savior to our elder brother, lest we "*also be tempted*" (Gal 6:1, 1 Cor 10:12).

Surprising, perhaps even shocking that we should read these harsh words: "*Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me.*" And especially from the lips of our blessed Redeemer, when we consider this is a response to His devoted follower. A comparison to Satan!? Christ's chiefest adversary? Not only is Peter indicted as a devil, but that devil of devils! What could Peter possibly have done to receive such a strong rebuke? According to our Lord, one of his closest followers was indeed acting as a devil in trying to hinder the work of God. We see that although Peter was well intentioned with the desire to protect his Master from harm, it was this carnal mindset that blinded him from seeing the redemptive plan of God in the suffering of Jesus Christ (vv. 21, 22). Peter's frame of mind was one that was not yet fully submitted to what Christ had revealed regarding his need to suffer at the hands of unjust men upon unjust accusations. In rebuking Christ, Peter saw a noble endeavor to uphold justice and honor for his Master. However, in actuality, he was unknowingly aiming to prevent Christ from doing exactly what He condescended to earth to do, "*to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Lk 19:10). Consequently, in seeking to advance the cause of Christ, he himself becomes a "*hinderance*" to the Lord and engages in the work of God's adversary.

My friends, would you readily admit with me that sometimes it is all too easy for us to read the scriptures like the armchair quarterback who criticizes the athletes from the luxury of his recliner? That is to say, as if we ourselves are not subject to the same futility of mind, frailty in temptation, and faulty understanding of the high things of God. We see also in our text the Lord addressing the root of this admonishing one of His closest followers: "*For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*" Peter was confident that his plan for Christ was better than what the Lord Himself had revealed to be the will of the Father (v. 23). Peter was missing the big picture. Peter was living in the

passion of the moment. Peter had not taken the time to patiently listen and ask the questions that he should have. Peter acted according to the flesh and although his motives may have been pure, he earned a stinging rebuke in the presence of his fellow disciples. It is my conviction that God has providentially seen fit to preserve for us the intimate details of this dialogue, not for the purpose of perpetually shaming Peter through the ages, but that we as the sheep of His pasture may ourselves be reprov'd, corrected, and instructed in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). The question then is this, how might we take what is revealed to us here and make use of it in light of our own devotion to this same Master? Let us consider a few things.

Firstly, let us see and understand that the most intimate followers of Christ are not infallible themselves. Any man or woman who takes up their cross to follow the footsteps of the Savior is ever dependent upon the grace of God not only from their conversion, but subsequently in the everyday walk of self-denial and sanctification. This battle against imperfect conformity to Christ is something that lingers with us until the glorious consummation of this present life when we “see *him as he is*” and we are forever transformed into His glorious likeness (1 John 3:2). We would do well to consider this for a few reasons. One reason that this is important is because it is this biblical understanding of our weaknesses in light of the perfection of the One whom we follow that leads us to a more heartfelt dependence upon God Himself. Consequently, our hearts are turned to a desperate looking to Him that is used by Him to make us more like Him (2 Cor 12:9, 2 Cor 3:18, Heb 12:2). How marvelous this is! Another reason is that we being taught of God through the example given in this scripture might learn what not to do by Peter’s example. Perhaps a healthy meditating upon this text would incline us to think twice and consider what God has said before we speak hastily, even in our endeavors to do as God desires. We want to be careful to ensure that we are not pressing to do our own will in matters of serving God while neglecting to walk in what He has revealed to be His will. In this way, we must give the utmost attention to the word of God so that we would be found doing the will of the Father, and not work of the devil (v.23)!

Secondly, let us the readers understand that the Lord was pleased to reveal to us by way of the preserved details of this inspired scripture, the reason that our brother made this awful mistake. The Lord says, “*For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*”. Examination of the Savior’s indictment here leads us to understand this — that in the absence of spiritual mindedness we are tempted to think carnally, even in our approach to serving God. Is it not true that we live in the age of clever devices and worldly schemes all under the guise of supposed gospel ministry? Today, men and women alike forego biblical fidelity and the descriptive patterns set forth in scripture in favor of the schemes devised in their own imaginations, as if we have not received sufficient instruction from God Himself. Is such practice not blatant disregard for what God has spoken? Make no mistake, beloved, this epidemic of pragmatism and scriptural indifference is being employed by those who are well intentioned, but sadly they may find themselves doing the work of Satan. May we be warned, and be careful to make certain that our minds are prayerfully renewed daily in the word of God (Eph 4:23, Rom 12:2), that we might not fall prey to our own indwelling corruptions (Jer 17:9, 2 Cor 4:2).

Lastly, we can be encouraged to know that God has a mighty arsenal at His disposal, composed of imperfect vessels just like our brother Peter. A man tremendously used of God, Martin Luther once spoke rightly (and experientially) when he said that “God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.” It is true that not one of us is perfect, and that none of us know what it means to function perfectly without the daily striving unto blood against our sin. My friends, one would not need to look very far outside of the apostle Peter’s experience here in the Gospel of Matthew to see any one of the manifold instances where our great God exercised His sovereignty in the affairs of men, and providentially accomplished His will through the use of imperfect vessels. All this He did many times while actively sculpting them like clay in the process. In fact, these very narratives of God’s providence divinely intertwine to create the whole tapestry of God’s story of redemption, pointing us all the more to that true and better Adam, the perfect God-man Jesus Christ. God even uses the failure of the believer for that same believer’s own good, in bringing about a Godly sorrow unto repentance that carries with it a sanctifying element (2 Cor 7:9). The late Martyn Lloyd-Jones called this God’s “Knocking off the rough edges.” Of course, the fact that we are not yet made perfect like Him should never serve to excuse our disobedience to His word or any indifference toward His revealed will. O may we still be vigilant and watchful in prayer that the Lord would keep us from both “*hidden faults*” and “*presumptuous sins*,” those sins which we ourselves are ignorant of and also the ones we know to be transgressions (Ps 19:12,13). Let us be counted as those crucified and dead to the carnal mindset of this world and all that it craves, and may we with singleness of heart seek those things that are above, to do the will of God as the people of God for the glory of God (Matt 6:22, Col 3:1).