

Jesus and Peter

(Some thoughts with Dr. Joel Crichlow)

God, our creator, in His loving and caring manner calls us onto Himself. His love and care for us have been supremely demonstrated by the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, to bridge the chasm that, due to our sins, separates us from Him. When Jesus walked on earth among man He showed us God's plan to call us, God's desire to set a course for our lives, and God's faithfulness in sticking by us through thick and thin. Jesus did this in several ways. One of those ways was through His interactions with a man called Peter (also called Simon Peter and Simon son of John). In Matthew 4:18-20 (all scripture references are from the NIV), we read:

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Here we see Jesus calling Peter. What are the special qualifications that Peter had that merited his being called by Jesus? Well it says in the passage that he was a fisherman, and that he had a brother. Certainly nothing extraordinary. In a non-industrial society such as it was in Peter's day, fishing was a very common occupation. Furthermore, as is the case today, many people had brothers. Therefore, without any evidence otherwise we can assume that Peter was a regular community guy. Just like many of us. Beyond that, Peter was in another category that includes all of us. That is the "sinner" category. And that is the type of person Jesus said He came to call. In Luke 5:32, Jesus says:

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Therefore, since we are sinners, we can believe that Jesus has been calling and continues to call us, and that He has a mission for us to fulfill. His mission for Peter was "to fish for people". For Peter to accomplish this mission he had to undergo a period of training of about three years as a disciple of Jesus. The training involved taking oral examinations. In Matthew 16:13-16 we read:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Peter scored a hundred percent on this exam. After we answer the call to follow Jesus, and as we undergo His discipleship, we will get to know Jesus better. We will be able say with conviction that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God; that Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1: 29); that Jesus, the Word, was with God and the Word was God (John 1: 1); that Jesus became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1: 14). We will probably have no difficulty in making these declarations without any reservations when the going is good. There is no reason to doubt that Peter made the declaration, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*" with all sincerity. He was learning the fundamentals well, but the rubber had not yet hit the road.

Now a practical exercise. In Matthew 17:1-5 we read:

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

This was indeed a very special occasion to which only Peter, James and John were invited. Is it because these three disciples were in some way better than the others? I have no reason to believe this. What I do believe is that Jesus, the greatest teacher, invited Peter, James and John because He was convinced that this was an experience that would benefit them in their future missions.

How did Peter handle this practical exercise? He was clearly overwhelmed by the whole experience. “*Lord it is good for us to be here*” he said. His leadership personality sprang into play. “*I will put up three shelters*” he offered. But there was an obvious danger. Peter’s big “**I**” was surfacing as a problem. That “**I**” will have to surrender to God’s will. God’s will for Peter will involve death of the impetuous attitude. Peter must learn “*Not my will, but Yours be done*” (Luke 22: 42). While Peter “*was still speaking ... a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son ... Listen to him’*” This is the lesson for us too. We must subject our will to God’s, and the best place to start is to listen to Jesus.

The discipling of Peter and the others also involved the understanding of some deeper truths regarding Jesus. In Matthew 16:21-23 we read:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

How did that grab you Peter? “*Get behind me, Satan*” – a stumbling block to Jesus? I guess this must really have struck Peter like a powerful blow to his midsection. Knocked all the wind out of him. Maybe for a few seconds he thought this is the time for me to beat it, head back home. But thank God, he soaked it in and stuck around. He loved Jesus. He expressed loving human concern for Jesus, “*This shall never happen to you!*” he exclaimed when he heard Jesus speaking of His suffering and death. But Peter had to learn that there is a real spiritual realm. Human concerns are relevant on many occasions, but all our concerns must be filtered through the concerns of God. “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart ... in all your ways submit to Him*”. (Proverbs 3: 5, 6)

But Peter still had more to learn about himself and about his Lord, Jesus Christ. We read in John 13:33-38 where Jesus is again speaking to His disciples:

“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

In this passage we hear Peter making a strong, verbal commitment to lay down his life for Jesus. Peter meant it. This has been demonstrated by his martyrdom some years later. But Peter did not yet possess that depth of spiritual maturity to follow through in the very immediate future. A strong challenge to his declaration

of total commitment occurred after Jesus was arrested and brought before the Jewish religious authority for trial. The following passage (Matthew 26:69-75) tells us how Peter fared.

Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter falls from his strident language of commitment to Jesus to an emphatic and curse-filled denial of Jesus. He arrived abruptly, embarrassingly and sorrowfully at some new knowledge about himself. He failed this test miserably. He knew it, *"he went outside and wept bitterly"*.

Jesus knew that he was going to fail. Jesus had told him: *"Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."* Peter was deeply sorry, he was sincerely repentant. Jesus is full of grace and truth (John 1: 14). His desire was to pull Peter out of this pit of failure. We will fail too. Jesus knows it. His desire towards us is always to pull us out of that pit. After the resurrection of Jesus, He had a rendezvous with Peter and six other disciples. Peter and the others were completing their night of fishing and heading to the shore. To their surprise there was Jesus preparing breakfast for them. *"Come and have breakfast"*, He beckoned (John 21: 12). At the end of breakfast there was the following exchange, recorded in John 21: 15-17, between Jesus and Peter.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

It was a glorious session of restoration. Peter's failure had not disqualified him. Peter was forced to search his heart. I take the liberty to interpret Jesus' words in this way: Peter, are you willing to leave this fishing behind? Do you want to go back to your former lifestyle? How deep is your love for me? I have not dismissed you Peter. In fact Peter keep loving me with all you have, and minister to my followers (feed my lambs and my sheep), who will be joined to the fold as you and the other disciples guide them in (fish for them).

As we enter the book of The Acts of the Apostles and follow beyond the Bible to further historical accounts of Peter's life, we see clearly that Peter became a champion of the faith and demonstrated his deep love for Jesus. This ultimately resulted in his martyrdom which is believed to have occurred some thirty years after Jesus's resurrection. Therefore, we can say that Peter did well, he was a good and faithful servant (see Matthew 25: 23).

Peter understood failure, he experienced the humiliation of chastening and defeat, but he also experienced the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can close with the words of Peter himself:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5: 6-7)

Therefore, dear friends, ... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Peter 3: 17-18)