

### Simon Peter - Cowardice to Courage

Today we are finishing up our series on Simon Peter. If Jesus is the star of the gospels, Peter is the costar. His name is mentioned over 200 times in the gospels while all the other disciples combined are mentioned about 50. Peter's story emerges as the one we are to focus on because God wants us to know that his story is our story. He was a faithful and yet flawed follower of Jesus. Peter was filled with a desire to follow Jesus no matter what, but failed often and yet Jesus still loved him and used him for God's purpose.

Peter failed to keep his eyes on Jesus when he was walking on water. He failed to understand what it was going to mean for Jesus to be the Messiah. He didn't want Jesus to suffer or die because he didn't want to suffer or die. And last week we heard how when Jesus needed Peter to be faithful and stand with Him during His arrest and trial, Peter denied Him three times and fled.

This is where we left Peter last week. While Jesus was being questioned by the most powerful religious leader in Jerusalem, the High Priest, Peter was being questioned by some lowly servant girls. Jesus stood firm in His faith, but Peter failed. He denied that he knew Jesus 3 times and then ran away in sorrow and shame.

If this was the end of the story and Jesus' death on the cross had been the final word, this would be a tragic story of denial and defeat. Peter would not have been the Rock Jesus said he would be and there would be no church to build and no community of Jesus to keep moving forward. It would be a sad and hopeless ending, but it wasn't the end of the story for Jesus and because it wasn't the end for Jesus there was hope for Peter.

We know what happened to Jesus after his arrest and trial. He was sentenced to die and then carried a cross to a place called Golgotha where He was crucified. Peter wasn't in the crowd as Jesus made His way to the cross, he wasn't there when Jesus passed by so he wasn't the one to pick up the cross when Jesus needed it. Peter wasn't there when they nailed Him to the cross and he wasn't there when Jesus died.

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Peter wasn't the one who claimed Jesus' body and he wasn't the one who laid Him in a tomb. Peter, the right-hand man of Jesus, the man who was hailed as a leader and mentioned more than anyone else was nowhere to be found. The truth is that Peter was hiding in fear. He was afraid that as a follower of Jesus he would also be arrested and crucified. Peter was afraid, humiliated, ashamed, and hopeless, but it is not the end of his story.

There are three things that happened that completely turned around Peter's life. Three things that took Peter from cowardice to courage. These are also the three things that make all the difference in our lives. These things always remind us that defeat and denial, failure and flaws are never the end of our story.

The first thing that happened is that after three days in the tomb, there was a resurrection. On the third day after Jesus' death, women went to the tomb and found it empty. Then they heard a message that Jesus had risen from the dead and that they needed to go and tell the disciples. But we also hear that Jesus specifically wanted Peter to know what was going on.

***Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"***

***But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.***

***"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"*** **Mark 16:2-7**

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Why single out Peter for this good news? It's because while the resurrection of Jesus was going to mean something to all the disciples, it was going to mean something very personal for Peter. This message was going to open the door for Peter to find forgiveness and restoration. After Peter's failure, forgiveness was now possible. For Peter, after three days there is hope.

The resurrection brings hope that failure and sin is never the end of the story. Peter did see Jesus on that resurrection day and Jesus didn't come with anger seeking retribution for them all falling away, He came offering peace. Jesus appeared on several other occasions but the most detailed story of Peter and Jesus being together after the resurrection comes a few weeks later when 7 of the disciples had returned to Galilee and were fishing.

We believe this story takes place at Tabgha along the Sea of Galilee. (Map then pic) It is a beautiful and quiet place with a very rocky shoreline. One reason we think this is where the story takes place is because there is an ancient church on the site that is dedicated to Peter. (pic 2) While we often want to honor special sites by keeping them as they originally looked, the early church often built church buildings on holy sites. This is an ancient stone church right along the sea of Galilee named The Primacy of Peter.

It was early in the morning and the disciples had been fishing all night without catching anything when Jesus appeared on the shore. He called out and asked if they had any fish and they said no. They don't know it is Jesus at this point, but He tells them to cast their net off the right side of the boat and they will catch some fish. They do what He says and they haul in a huge catch of fish.

***Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore,***

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***about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. John 21:7-9***

A closer look at this story tells us that this encounter with Jesus isn't going to be for all the disciples, it is going to be for Peter. We know this because in the first week of this series Jesus called Peter along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples had been fishing all night and they were cleaning their nets in the morning when Jesus asked to use their boat as a kind of floating stage so He could preach to the crowds. After a little while, Jesus told Peter to throw their nets out, but Peter said, *Master, we have been fishing all night and have caught nothing, but because you say so, we will do it.* They throw their nets out and bring in a huge catch of fish.

So here it is, morning again along the Sea of Galilee and Peter and the rest haven't caught anything all night. Once again Jesus asked them to throw their nets out; they did and brought in a huge catch of fish. The scene is so familiar that they suddenly realize it is Jesus along the shore and just like before, Peter leaves his boat and fish and goes to Jesus.

Jesus first called Peter in the morning, along the sea of Galilee and He asked him to throw his nets out to fish when no fish seemed likely. They brought in a huge catch of fish and Peter followed Jesus. Here Jesus called Peter in the morning, along the Sea of Galilee and asked him to throw out his nets when no fish seemed likely. They brought in a huge catch of fish and Peter left everything to follow Jesus. Some people have called this the second call of Peter.

But there is more here that tells us something is up with Peter. When we find an interesting and unexpected detail in a story, it usually means something, and John tells us that when they get to shore, they see Jesus and a fire of burning coals. It was a charcoal fire and the word is anthraxian, where we get the word anthracite.

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Anthracite is charcoal used in building a fire. The word is used only one other time in John's gospel. It was used to describe the fire Peter stood around in the courtyard the night he denied Jesus.

*It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. John 18:18*

This is not a coincidence. John didn't have to tell us what kind of fire it was in both places, but he does because this is going to be a story about Peter. Around a charcoal fire Peter denied Jesus and now, around a charcoal fire, Peter would have a second chance.

*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. John 21:15-17*

Three times around a charcoal fire Peter had denied Jesus and now three times around a charcoal fire Peter has expressed his love and devotion to Jesus. This is a moment of forgiveness and restoration for Peter, but it comes only through humility.

This is the second thing that happens to Peter that turns his life around, he is humbled. For Peter to go from cowardice to courage not only took the resurrection of Jesus but it took Peter being humbled. I have often pictured this story taking place with Jesus and Peter going off by themselves to be alone and at some point, in

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the conversation that may have happened, but it doesn't say that at first. It says after eating Jesus said to Simon *do you love me more than these* and here, Jesus was pointing to the rest of the disciples. Do you love me more than these men love me?

This had to be difficult for Peter. Remember, he had said in front of all of them that even if they fell away, he never would, but then he did. Peter alone is being singled out for his lack of love and faithfulness in front of the rest of the disciples because he alone had made such a bold prediction and then failed so completely. It's a moment of humility for Peter and this humility was important.

Jesus wasn't humiliating Peter, he was helping him realize that true faithfulness only comes when we humble ourselves. There is no walking on water or being the Rock or carrying a cross in our own strength and power, it comes when we are willing to humble ourselves and trust in Jesus Christ alone. True courage and faithfulness isn't going to be found looking deep in ourselves, it will come when we humble ourselves and trust in Jesus. The bible says *Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up.*

Peter humbles himself and three times expresses his love to Jesus. Three times he had denied Him and now three times he has said how much he loves Him and three times Jesus sends Peter back out to work by saying, *feed my lambs, tend my sheep.*

Jesus, as the good shepherd, was calling Peter to go out and be a good shepherd. Shepherds are humble workers who are willing to lay down their lives for the sheep. Shepherds aren't cowboys who ride high above the herds, they walk along in the mud and lead the sheep from within. Sometimes they get in front and call the sheep by name. Sometimes they have to push from behind and sometimes they have to leave the 99 and go find the 1 that got lost. Jesus has humbled Peter and now calls him to be a humble servant.

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The resurrection gave Peter hope that his failure was not final. He has now been humbled, forgiven and restored as a servant leader but one more thing is needed for Peter to become truly courageous.

If we jump ahead a few weeks, we find the disciples back in Jerusalem where they had been told to go and wait. It is the festival of Pentecost which is celebrated 50 days after the Passover. Peter and the rest of the disciples aren't very courageous at this point because they have gathered in the upper room behind closed doors. They are still afraid of the religious leaders who arrested and killed Jesus just a few weeks ago, but then something happens.

***Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.***

***Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Acts 2:2-6***

The last thing Peter needed to go from cowardice to courage was the strength and power of the Holy Spirit! Every time I read this story of the Holy Spirit filling the disciples, the thing that strikes me isn't that they felt a mighty wind or saw tongues of fire, and it isn't that they started speaking in other languages. What amazes me is that they were moved by the Holy Spirit to leave the safety of the upper room and enter into the world. They had the courage to enter the city of Jerusalem knowing that they could be arrested, tried and sentenced to die as a follower of Jesus.

It shouldn't surprise us that it is Peter who emerges as the Rock. ***Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: Acts 2:14***

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Peter then preaches a sermon so powerful and so full of the Holy Spirit that 3,000 people turn their hearts to God and trust Jesus as the Messiah. The church had grown from 120 to over 3,000 in a single day and it was built on Peter's faith, passion and courage, a courage that came from the second chance he was given through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

All through this series we have said that Peter's story is our story, which means that this part of Peter's story is also our story. We have available to us the power of God's Holy Spirit. We have the potential to overcome any failure, find courage in any situation, and become living stones that can change our world if we do three things. Believe in the resurrection of Jesus, humble ourselves before God, and then ask for and receive the power of God's Holy Spirit. These three things turned Peter's life around and they can turn our lives around as well.