

Preacher's Pen Points

A Lesson from the Life of Simon Peter



Did you ever feel like a failure? Make a promise to serve the Lord faithfully and then fall on your face? For such people the gospel sends forth a message of hope in the story of Simon Peter.

A Great Start!

In reading the gospel, we come to admire Peter as a man of eagerness and interest. From his first exposure to Christ at the invitation of Andrew, we see his simple honesty in believing on the Lord. Sometime later Jesus gave Peter a masterful demonstration of His complete power over his domain of work in a miraculous catch of fish. Peter's eyes were opened to the glory of Jesus' divinity and in his impression of the Lord's greatness he realized his own sinfulness. The Lord insisted that Peter embark upon a new mission, "fishing for men". Leaving a lucrative business and a family, Peter joined Jesus for a time as a traveling evangelist! In the following months, Peter's own faith in and loyalty to the Lord increased. He witnessed astounding works of power. He saw and felt the animosity of Jesus' enemies. He was troubled by their offense at Jesus' teaching. When the masses left in disgust Peter purposed to stay with the Master. And when the Jerusalem authorities threatened the very life of the Savior, Peter was still convinced that He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God".

Danger on the Horizon!

And yet in the midst of these encouraging deeds there loomed an uncorrected ignorance on Peter's part concerning the nature of the kingdom and how it would come into being. Peter along with the rest of the apostles had not unshackled themselves from the ongoing Jewish misconception of an earthly political kingdom. Sure of its hasty arrival, Peter almost patronizingly rebuked the Lord for predicting His death. Later in a similar vein we hear Peter ad-

vocating more than once his rights to a high place in the kingdom and boasting over-confidently to fight to the death for Jesus' cause! In short, Peter was not listening closely enough to the Lord's efforts to teach the disciples and prepare them for his impending capture and crucifixion. At the Passover Jesus plainly warned Peter, "Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times". "Me? Peter thought, "Impossible!"

Disaster!

And so on that unforgettable night, Peter's faith failed him repeatedly. First in the garden, Peter neglected watchfulness and prayer to sleep. Then when the officers came for the Lord, he yielded to carnal impulses of survival in drawing the sword. Unnerved by Jesus' rebuke and seeing the other disciples flee, Peter also lost courage and ran! Following from afar off, he gained access to the outer court of Caiphas' palace where Jesus was tried. One by one harmless servants would peer in the darkness at his face as the fire light exposed it and say, "I know who you are! You were with Jesus". Not once, but three times and with increasing fervor, Peter denied that he knew the one he had called the Son of God! He failed his Master. He wept in bitterness, a defeated man.

Restoration!

Now, a few days later, Peter says to his fellow-disciples, "I am going fishing". Though now persuaded that the Lord is alive, Peter appears to doubt whether he has any usefulness to the Lord. Standing by the lake where he had called them over two years before, Jesus reveals Himself by performing the same miracle that had convinced Peter to leave his work to "fish for men". And then the Lord lovingly but firmly confronts Peter's denials. "Do you love me more than these, Peter?" Jesus asked. In the pres-

ence of those before whom he had once boasted superior courage Peter is called upon to give an honest confession of his love, three times, with increasing fervor just like his denials. Jesus was offering Peter forgiveness and restoration to His work. In effect, Jesus was saying, "Peter, you failed me; but I forgive you. I have not lost faith in your ability to strengthen my people. Now you know how to help them. Feed my sheep." This was Peter's renewed call to "fish for men", a task that he would faithfully pursue until his martyr's death.

A Lesson for Us!

Peter's story is a living demonstration of the mercy and love of our Savior. Perhaps you too, like Peter, have been a disciple whose faith unraveled in temptation. Perhaps you've fallen on your face and need His forgiveness. He is willing to give us another chance to do with our lives what is right, just like He did Peter, if we will repent. I hope you are ready to do that! And I hope that all of us will remember that we too have been the recipient of His mercy as well!

—Johnny Felker