



Luke 22:31-34

One More Chance, Peter

The spiritual growth of Simeon Peter was not instant. It was slow and painful for both Peter and Jesus. Peter is one of the most fascinating men in the life of Christ. He was a close intimate companion and friend who eventually became a leader during the first century church.

The advantage of Peter's constant willingness to act as a spokesman of the twelve was his utter lack of sophistication, his inability to say anything but what was uppermost in his mind. When he spoke, he said what he thought. Another might have used words which masked his real thoughts from a desire not to hurt his Master's feelings; not so Peter (F. F. Bruce).

That is what makes Peter so interesting. He was honest, open, transparent and expressive-responsive. Therefore, we know a lot more about him. Since we know him best, it is easier for us to identify with him.

THE MAN SIMON PETER

Peter was intelligent

Peter asked more questions than any other person in the Gospels. If a person doesn't ask questions, it is because the mind is dull, or the person is timid. All experienced teachers know that no question is dumb. Questions reveal the learning process. Out of timidity, many people sit and hope someone else will ask their question. The kind of questions Peter asked is insightful. He had a way of asking the big questions. They might have seemed simple on the surface, but they proved to be at the center of Jesus' goal and His motives of ministry.

Peter was a man of intellectual capacity. We usually don't think of him as the intuitive deep thinker such as John and Paul. Peter, because of his high emotional energy is always asking rapid-fire questions almost never giving Christ time to answer.

To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.
How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?
Who is it that betrays You?
Why can't I follow You?

Peter was always thinking, contemplating, mulling over the teaching of Jesus, and when the opportunity arose, he was quick to respond to Jesus.

Peter was a man of deep feelings

Peter was a man of deep feelings

That is probably the first thing that comes to our minds when we think of Peter. He is full of expressed emotions. It was with great emotional outburst when he told Jesus, "I will lay down my life for you." Later, we see him in the darkness of the bitter night, sobbing his heart out because he did not follow Jesus when the opportunity came.

With bitterness of spirit Peter cried out to Jesus earlier in His ministry, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In repulsive anger he said to Jesus when our Lord was speaking of His death, "That be far from You." Jesus had to calm Peter down by forcefully telling him, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Peter was a loyal person

Peter exercised his volitional choice in following Jesus. He was a man of great will power when channeled in the right direction. He finally sold his boats and committed himself to Jesus. His loyalty is seen the night of Jesus' arrest when he pulled out his short sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest.

There were also times when he exercised poor judgment, just like we do. He went off in the wrong direction and made poor choices. However, we see Peter at the end of his life still serving Christ and tradition tells us he was crucified upside down because of his love for Christ.

Peter was a man of weakness

Like us, Peter had his strengths and his weaknesses. It is beautiful to see how Jesus took this man and molded him into a solid rock.

We love this man because he is so much like each of us. He does the same things we do only his mistakes and his emotional outbursts have all been written down for us to observe.

At the end of the day when he has failed miserably we hear him weeping his heart out and vowing never to do it again, only to find him repeating everyone one of them again. Peter drives perfectionists and legalists crazy. He breaks all the rules. How would you have liked to have him in your Monday morning 8:00 AM class?

THE MINISTRY TO SIMON PETER

What did Jesus see in Peter?

Andrew was Peter's brother. He was the first to respond to Jesus (John 1:40). He went to Peter and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (v. 41). In the Old Testament the Messiah was the "Anointed One." Kings, prophets and priests were anointed with a flask of oil. It denotes the king of Israel, "the LORD's anointed." Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah *par excellence*, in

LORD's anointed." Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah *par excellence*, in all the roles of prophet, priest and king. Andrew was saying we have found the Lord's anointed One.

He brought Peter to Jesus. Jesus looked at Peter and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (v. 42).

John tells us Jesus "looked at him." It was not a mere courteous glance, but a penetrating look. It was the look of an investigator. We could say, "He looked through him."

It is impossible for us to imagine what Jesus will make of a people like Peter when we bring them to Him. Our task is to be an Andrew and bring them to Jesus in a nonjudgmental way.

Simon Bar-Yohanan is the full name. Jesus changed his name to *Kepha*, an Aramaic word meaning, "rock." Paul called him Cephas, adding a final -s to adapt it to the Greek language. The Aramaic form was translated into Greek form, Peter (*Petros*).

Petros is a piece or fragment of rock, or stone. Jesus looked at Peter with a penetrating knowledge of him and saw what Peter would become.

Jesus did not look at Peter and see a failure. He did not look at Peter and say, not him. I do not want him on my team. He is a failure. Jesus looked at Peter and said here is a piece of rock. Here is a stone that can be polished into something strong and beautiful.

It is as if Peter's life begins all over again and he becomes a new man. Therefore, he needs a new name. Jesus sees what a man can become. Jesus sees his potentials and possibilities. That is not to say Jesus did not see the every day failures or shortcomings of Peter. Jesus was coming and going out on trips with Peter, teaching him, encouraging him to reach his potential. Jesus was creating stable leadership in Peter. Jesus knew Peter better than any man had known him, and was committed to him.

G. Campbell Morgan observes that Peter did not say a word. He is not prone to silence, remember. Was Peter in "utter astonishment"? Did it sound "incredible" to Peter? Perhaps the silence said more than any word could have on the occasion. "Me, Lord? You're kidding."

Jesus was saying to Peter, I am going to make you into something you are not. Perhaps in the rough Peter was the most undependable of all the men Jesus called. But when Jesus was through with him he was stable as a rock.

Jesus comes our way and looks at us and sees a rough stone. He sees our strengths and weakness, vulnerabilities and our possibilities. Jesus believes in us. Even when no one else sees any potential, and when we probably don't believe in ourselves, Jesus comes along and illumines our hearts to see what He sees. Christ never gave up on Peter. He doesn't give up on us, either. Jesus kept Peter near to Himself. I know someone who believes in you because He is able to make you exactly what you are not.

A Time of Crisis in Ministry of Christ

The apostle John tells us about a time in the ministry of Jesus when the disciples were dropping out like flies. They didn't like what they heard. Jesus' teaching came across as dried, rough, harsh, difficult statements (John

6:60). "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (v. 66). Jesus was no longer the popular teacher. When Jesus was alive on the earth you couldn't twist His saying into what ever you wanted Him to say. You couldn't make Him into your cultic Christ. Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" (v. 67).

Simon Peter comes to the rescue, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed [and still believe] and have come [by experience, and still know] that You are the Holy One of God" [Pounds' paraphrase in brackets] (v. 68-69).

Because of Peter's expressive-responsiveness, our hearts are strengthened. We can identify with his testimony. He expresses our thoughts perfectly. That must have been the feeling of the other disciples.

Then Jesus revealed to Peter the heart breaking sad fact, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" (v. 70). John tells us He was referring to Judas.

Who is Jesus?

Matthew records for us one of the greatest moments in the life of Peter. Jesus was busy teaching the twelve. As part of His discipleship program, He had sent them out to towns and villages on various preaching and teaching trips. When they returned Jesus was asking the disciples, "Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?"

They began to respond to Jesus, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14).

Then Jesus asked the disciples the important question, "But who do you say that I am?" In a flash, Peter responds with all of his intellectual and emotional acumen. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). You are the Messiah, the Anointed of the LORD, and You are the Son of the Living God.

A-plus, Peter. Right on! Jesus answered him and said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (v. 17). As my mother would have said, you out did yourself, Peter. That was one of those great moments in the disciple's life. I think Peter meant those words with all his heart and soul. He had the answer, but was he clear in his understanding of who Jesus is?

Peter is headed in the right direction. He is a good student, but there was more that Peter needed to understand.

God's eternal purpose in Jesus' death

Immediately following this great affirmation of the deity of Jesus, Peter is brought face to face with something utterly beyond his willingness to accept. Jesus brought him near the cross with all of its ugliness.

Matthew tells us as part of the training program Jesus, "began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day" (v. 21). The words of Jesus were clear as a bell. Peter and the others heard Him, but they didn't hear Him. From the first announcement of this great fact, Peter and the rest of the disciples refused to believe their ears. They did not want to hear Jesus talk about His death.

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"And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You'" (v. 22). You can see the emotional response of Peter to the very idea because he "took Him aside," i.e. he in a protecting manner grabbed Jesus' arm as if holding someone back from suicide. That was Peter's reaction. It blew his mind. He could not and would not grasp the idea that Jesus, the Son of God, had to go to the cross and die. Only after Jesus rose from the dead did Peter understand the reason why.

Peter was so angry and upset Jesus "turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'" (v. 23).

We love Peter because he always tells us what he is thinking. One moment he is so in tune to the will of God that he loudly proclaims, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" Then he misses the whole point. He is an instrument of Satan, who would have done anything to keep Jesus from going to the cross. Peter had good intentions, but deadly wrong. Peter was "minding the things of men," not literally, "the things of God."

Then Jesus revealed to the disciples and Peter that not only must He take up the cross, and suffer and die, but also His disciples are cross-bearers. "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (16:24-25).

Like Peter and his friends, Christianity in our day wants a Christ who is meek and mild, sweet and convenient to worship. Jesus demands that we take up our cross daily, come, and follow Him. He will have it no other way.

Like any good teacher, Jesus let the disciples have some time to ponder these great moments of revelation. Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. It was time to reinforce the great truths of last week.

Jesus patiently reinforces the fact of the cross

Jesus "was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with Him" (Matthew 17:2-3).

This is Moses first visit to the Promised Land. Remember that he was buried on the other side of Jordan because of his sin. Here are the great representatives of Judaism, Moses the giver of the Law, and Elijah the representative of the great prophets of God. Moses has been dead fifteen centuries and Elijah has been dead nine centuries. Keep in mind these men are alive talking to Jesus on a mountainside!

What were they discussing? They were talking about the very things Peter was shunning, the "exodus" of Jesus. Luke 9:31 tells us Moses and Elijah "who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." They were talking about His "departure," His "exodus," or journeying. They were discussing with Jesus His going away. It is the same word that is always used of Israel going out of Egypt, going through the desert to the Promised Land.

The heavenly Father said, "Shut up and listen Peter!" Peter doesn't know what to do when he sees the ancient patriarch and prophet alive with Jesus. Peter starts talking out of his head about building brush huts. "Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let's build tabernacles for You, and Moses and Elijah." It may be as Morgan suggests that Peter was saying it is better for us to be in glory and speak of heavenly things, rather than the ugliness of a death by crucifixion.

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However, it was a subject that Peter had to learn. Peter would have to go through the fires before he could enjoy glory with his Savior.

It was later, after the resurrection and ascension that Peter would fully comprehend the lesson. He wrote in 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

A trying moment for Peter

The night before the crucifixion was the most horrible night in the life of Peter. He told his Lord, "I will die for you." Luke tells us Jesus again is preparing Peter and the others for His death the very next day. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

The Lord was storing up in Peter's mind words that He would use in the days to come for his restoration. Those are pregnant words. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has obtained by asking permission to sift you like wheat."

How would you have responded to those words if you were Peter? Peter couldn't believe his words. "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" (v. 33). I really think Peter meant it with all his heart. I am willing to die for you. Have you ever told the Lord that? I have. And I have meant every word of it. And like Peter I have found myself on occasion feeling the sting of it.

Jesus told Peter He had prayed for him, "that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." You are going to fail Peter. That is part of the learning process. When I have restored you Peter and you have learned from it, strengthen your brothers.

Is this not the same process the Lord uses with us today? He is constantly removing the false securities from our lives so we are forced to trust Him, and not in ourselves. Have you quit warming yourself at the world's fires?

"Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"

Jesus said to him, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me" (v.34). We know the story all too well. For the rest of his life every time a rooster crowed it was a reminder of that fateful night.

After Jesus rose from the dead He had a special word for Peter. To the first women who arrived at the empty tomb the angel said, "He is risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter . . ." (Mark 16:7). Don't forget to tell Peter! Jesus and the angels knew Peter's temperament. They knew how he was responding to the death of Jesus. They knew his volatile emotional life. "Go, tell . . . Peter." The idea is and make sure you be sure and tell Peter. Peter had denied Him, and Jesus wanted Peter to hear the good news that He had risen from the dead. Jesus was restoring Peter. He was strengthening Peter's faith in Him. Make sure Peter gets the word.

God had Peter in the refiner's fire purging his impulsiveness, focusing him on God's eternal purpose. God was at work in Peter.

If the hour of darkness and difficulty the true attitude of those who believe in God is that of waiting for Him. The only strength sufficient to enable men to wait for God is that of love to Him, for love is the

Him. The only strength sufficient to enable men to wait for God is that of love to Him, for love is the capacity for receiving the interpretation of the things which He is doing (G. Campbell Morgan).

On the day of His resurrection in the late evening or at night, the disciples have gathered. Two men have met Jesus on the road to Emmaus and returned to Jerusalem to tell the disciples. When the disciples opened the door they said, "The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon." Why, Simon is one of the first whom Jesus visited that day. They began to relate the experiences of the day, and "how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:34-35).

"And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst" (v. 36).

Jesus loved the disciple and understood him. Jesus believed in Peter. One man alone with God. What an experience that must have been.

A fishing trip

You would think that Peter would be stable as a rock after seeing Jesus alive. But there is still room for growth.

Some time during those forty days after Jesus' resurrection and before His ascension we find Peter and the disciples fishing down on the Sea of Tiberias. Peter said to the other disciples, "I am going fishing" (John 21:3). Was Peter abandoning his call to preach? Perhaps economic reasons dictated the fishing trip. On the other hand, perhaps it was to keep body and soul together because Peter couldn't stand all of this appearing and disappearing of Jesus in His post resurrection appearances. Scholars tell us the statement "I go fishing" implies permanent return to his old profession of a commercial fisherman.

They fish all night and don't catch a single fish. Jesus stood on the beach and called out to them to cast the net on the right hand side of the boat and they would find a catch. They did and the catch was so great they could not haul it in because of the number of fish. Simon Peter drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of the biggest fish in the lake.

It was one more of the lessons Jesus needed to teach Peter. After they ate the breakfast Jesus had prepared for them, He drew Peter out. Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Jesus could have been saying one of three things: "Do you love me more than these disciples?" Or, "Do you love Me more than these disciples love Me?" He could even mean, "Simon, do you love Me more than these fish?"

Simon, "Tend My lambs." Simon "Shepherd My sheep." Simon, "Tend My sheep."

Simon, keep your eye on the task. Keep focused. "Follow Me!" Keep on following Me! Follow steadfastly, continually. Join Me in the way.

It is like Jesus gathers up all the lessons in Peter's experiences with Him and says remember your lessons, Peter. Now that you have been restored, remember you have been restored for a purpose, feed my sheep.

Peter's finest sermon

Perhaps it is ten days later when we next meet up with Peter. The day of Pentecost comes and Peter and the 120 disciples are gathered in a room at the Temple worshipping God. The Spirit of God filled them, the church

120 disciples are gathered in a room at the Temple worshipping God. The Spirit of God filled them, the church was born, and Peter preaches his finest sermon.

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know ~~this~~ Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:22-24).

Three thousand people were saved that day and added to the church. It grew from 120 to 3,000 in one message by a man Jesus had prepared to be used of God. But it didn't happen over night. Jesus had been preparing Peter for that day. He was the instrument God chose to deliver the message. Peter was used of God because God had prepared him for the hour.

THE METHOD JESUS USES WITH US TODAY

Let's examine some abiding principles and practical applications in the life of Peter. What does he say to me today?

When Jesus sees a person He sees what we cannot or will not see.

Jesus sees what we can become in His grace and power. We tend to see only the ugly and the negative because of our sin and depravity. However, Jesus sees what we can not see. He sees what we can become in His grace.

When Jesus calls a person He is committed to that person's spiritual growth.

Jesus works with a piece of clay until He makes it into an instrument He can use in His kingdom. Spiritual growth is slow, and not always steady. Nevertheless, Jesus is patient with us. With spiritual comprehension and assimilation comes another great truth. How tragic when we halt with God. How tragic when believers will not take God at His word and apply it to their lives and grow. Am I responding to His word and growing in His grace? Am I willing to walk by faith?

"When Jesus bids us come and follow He bids us come and die."

Discipleship involves the cross. It demands that we die to ourselves, and dying to self is never easy. However, there is never growth in the spiritual life until we accept that principle in our lives. We don't just die once, we die again and again. It is a daily dying to self-interests and selfishness and following Christ.

When Jesus comes our way He demands we wait on Him.

We tend to run ahead of God, or lag behind Him. One of the important things Peter had to learn was to wait on God. He was always jumping ahead of Him, doing it his own way, in his own strength and in his independence. Jesus took Peter and taught him the patience of waiting on God. Jesus focused Peter on the sovereignty of God instead of his impetuous running here and there. Jesus believed in Peter. He saw that which He wanted to polish in Peter and made him exactly what he was not –a solid rock.

Christ comes our way and He strips away one by one all of our false securities, until He can teach us to wait

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Christ comes our way and He strips away one by one all of our false securities, until He can teach us to wait on Him and trust Him for that which we can not do for ourselves. I have often heard it said, "God helps those who help themselves." No, He does not. God helps those who wait upon Him and trust in Him. We don't need God if we can do it ourselves. That is the problem. We cannot help ourselves.

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