

Peter's Recovery

The Apostle Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus. Peter vehemently denied that he would be offended by Jesus. Look at the verse below:

Matthew:26:33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

Notice that Jesus did not treat Peter with coldness or sarcasm. Instead, he gave him an admonition that applies to us today:

Matthew:26:40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and *saieth unto Peter*, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?
Matthew:26:41 *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Did Peter therefore *watch and pray*? We have no record of it, but that doesn't mean that he didn't. With a full awareness that you and I would deny Him, Jesus loved and loves us. Our instruction is to pray that we *enter not into temptation*. To be sure, we are frequently tempted and by our actions and words, deny that we have been changed into a new creature in Christ Jesus. Apparently our safeguard is to be awake and pray that we not enter into the temptations when they arise. When we fail to do so, we often yield to the temptations. We can't judge Peter since we ourselves frequently talk and act in such a way that no one would imagine that we have an allegiance to God.

We need to look at this story from the book of Luke at this point. Jesus tells Peter that he has prayed on his behalf. *He tells Peter what to do when he has recovered and converted:*

Luke:22:32 *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

As surely as we live and breath we are prone to sin and invariably do. However important that is, it would seem that Jesus concerned himself with *faith that doesn't fail afterwards and action in helping the brethren as we bounce back from our failures*. Judas betrayed Jesus, went out and wept bitterly, but instead of exercising faith in the forgiveness of God; he abandoned his faith and hung himself. Peter, however, exercised his faith in the mercy of God and recovered. It would seem that exercising faith in the mercies of God is what separates winners from failures. It is faith in God that enabled Peter's recovery, not penance. Let's look at two verses in Matthew relating to this story:

Matthew:26:55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

Matthew:26:56 But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. *Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.*

We are prone to dwell upon Peter's denial but forget his courage and strength of character. Notice from the verse above that *all the disciples forsook him, and fled*. Peter was not a wimp. Notice that although the other disciples had fled he joined another disciple into the palace of the high priest:

John:18:15 And *Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple*: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.

John:18:16 *But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.*

John:18:17 Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.

John:18:18 And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

Now we have both Peter and another disciple apparently within the area where Jesus was on trial. The other disciple was known by the high priest and apparently no harm was coming to him. When Peter didn't come on in the other disciple told a lady who was the door keeper to bring Peter in. It would appear that he was fairly well identified by now. At this point notice how sin can confuse us and cloud our judgment. Peter was already obviously defined as a Jesus sympathizer or associate, and could have been there to *bear witness* if called upon, but was uncomfortable. I can identify with that also. When in the presence of persons adverse to Jesus I also feel uncomfortable and choose to warm myself by the fire from afar. Peter and I have a lot in common. Notice that even though the lady at the door apparently knew who he was, he denied it

John:18:25 And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not.

John:18:27 Peter then denied again....

Let's look at this drama as told in Matthew:

Matthew:26:70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

Matthew:26:71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

Matthew:26:72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

Matthew:26:73 And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee.

Matthew:26:74 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man....

Do you know what it is like to weep bitterly in remorse over having denied Jesus? I do. There is no more miserable experience to a Christian than to know that you have denied Jesus by your thoughts, actions, words, intentions, or actions. As I read this story about Peter I truly empathize because I have *been there..done that*.

The other disciple that was there was separate from Peter even though they were in the same house apparently. Peter knew he denied Jesus, but probably the other disciple didn't. The

other disciples didn't know about it because they weren't there either. The people in the courtyard probably couldn't have cared less one way or the other. Could Peter have gone into the assembly and boldly proclaim the wondrous works of Jesus and have defended him? We don't know if this would have been allowed. This may have been a court setting where one may speak only if asked to speak. We have no record of them asking the other disciple anything.

Peter and Jesus knew that he had denied Jesus. I don't believe we would have the record in the Bible today if Peter hadn't told the story afterwards. This was between he and Jesus. Reader, this happens to us all. We commit a sin of commission or omission and no one knows it but God and us. Well, that enough isn't it? To a born again Christian, a transgression that distances us God must be dealt with. I wonder if being closer to the presence of Jesus in the trial if possibly Peter would have acquired a boldness to speak out? We don't know. It is true, however, that as one chooses to be close in the presence of Jesus that courage is given to witness. That same level of courage is lessened when one is afar off.

I will assume you are familiar with the story of how Jesus was convicted, crucified, and rose from the grave so we will leap forward to a scene at the empty tomb:

Mark:16:6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

Mark:16:7 But go your way, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

Notice that the angel stressed the importance that Peter gets the word of Jesus resurrection. **Glory!** *Here is a marvelous example of God being the seeker and the healer.* God was most cognizant of Peter's remorse and was reaching out to comfort Peter. God works through causing us to *remember* that he loved us prior to our error. He gets word to us that He hasn't moved from his posture of loving us. He lets us know that we can resume our fellowship and pick up where we left off. Once we are rescued and rehabilitated, he would have us join him and be his instrument in the rehabilitation of others. No time for penance or crying over spilt milk. None is required or expected. Rather, there is work to be done. Believe me, Peter took note that his name had been mentioned especially. Notice in the verses below the energy Peter had from the realization that God hadn't given up on him!

John:20:1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

John:20:2 Then she runneth, and **cometh to Simon Peter**, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

John:20:3 **Peter therefore went forth**, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

John:20:4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

John:20:5 And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; **yet went he not in.**

John:20:6 **Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,**

John:20:7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

John:20:8 **Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre**, and he saw, and believed.

John:20:9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

Mary Magdalene ran and finds Peter to tell him of the empty sepulchre. Peter and the other disciple both *run* to the sepulchre. The other disciple stops at the entranceway and looks in. Peter recovers his boldness and actually enters into the sepulchre and then the other disciple came in. I see hopeful faith working here. Peter, who chose to not enter in the trial area, now chooses to boldly enter in the sepulchre. I find verse 20 interesting where it says, "For as yet they know not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." We know Jesus had told them, but they just didn't get it. Boy, I can identify with that. I read a lot of scripture many times and maybe 20 years later read it again and have an "*Aha! Now I see it*" type of moment.

One of the issues in Peter's life that he had to deal with was his appraisal of himself. Earlier in the Gospels we have the instance of the disciples having no luck with their fishing but Jesus telling them the following:

Luke:5:4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

They let down their nets and caught so many fish it put the boat in danger of sinking. Peter immediately said the following:

Luke:5:8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

And what was Jesus response to that statement by Peter?

Luke:5:9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

Luke:5:10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, *Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*

Jesus did not deny that Peter was a sinful man but didn't dwell upon that assessment. Instead he pointed out the role they were to play. Let us learn from that. Okay, you are a sinful person. So what's new? That is no reason to not get on with the business of catching men. The whole kingdom of God is made up of saved sinners.

Later, Jesus calls the disciples ashore and invites them to dine on bread and fish with him. Jesus begins a narrative with Peter that is void of any condemnation, accusations, or belittling remarks. The narrative essentially glosses over the past and addresses the future:

John:21:15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.**

John:21:16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**

John:21:17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**

Jesus' narrative to Peter in essence was to quit looking back but instead prove his love by feeding the message of God's love to others. All of us have been rescued from error and our proper response is to now be used of God as he ever "seeks to save that which was lost". Men are instructed to judge not and yet they violate that commandment as they judge themselves to be unfit to serve. *Who can better announce the goodness and rehabilitation of God than he who has been forgiven and rehabilitated?* We can all identify with Peter. We all have moments when we are braver than at other times. We all have messed up and decided if we are going to wallow in our remorse or shake it off, exercise our faith, and move on. Jesus sought Peter out, and put him back to work, leaving the past behind. He does the same to you and I if we will let him.

Romans:2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing *that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*

One should note that throughout all of the passages given above that Peter was operating using only the natural love which every man has. At Pentecost Peter and the other disciples were in prayer and earnest soul longings and the Holy Spirit filled their soul's with the love of God. This was the workings of the Holy Spirit as shown in the verse below:

Romans:5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because **the love of God** is shed abroad in our hearts **by** the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Let us learn from the story of Peter to put the past behind us, accept the love of God into our hearts, and move forward into using that love in loving others.

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