

The Flesh Is Weak - Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013

Peter's Walk with Jesus

- Steve, over the past number of weeks, has been recounting events during Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem. His crucifixion and resurrection would be the culminating events of Jesus' earthly life.
- When Jesus said, on the cross as he took his last breath, "It is finished," he meant what he said – through his life and death he accomplished all that was necessary to fulfill what the prophet John the Baptist had said of Jesus "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)
- John the Baptist made this prophetic utterance at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry, 3 years earlier. A fellow named Simon was probably there. Simon's brother Andrew had already met Jesus, and he introduced Jesus to Simon. Jesus renamed him Peter (*Cephas* in Aramaic) which means rock or stone (John 1:29-42). We don't know all that transpired between Jesus and Peter at that time, but it's obvious that Peter's heart was knit to Jesus from that moment on. Giving someone another name, or a nickname is often a sign of affection...for example Jesus gave the brothers James and John the nicknames "Sons of Thunder."
- Over the next 3 years, Peter would be at Jesus' side, witnessing all that Jesus said and did. He was there when Jesus healed all who came to him, he walked on water with Jesus, and he was on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. Jesus often stayed at Peter's house, where Peter's wife and mother-in-law lived, and Jesus trusted Peter and the other disciples with the opportunity to minister at his right hand.

Jesus' Last Week and Peter's Denial

- Now, during the last week of Jesus' life Peter experienced the thrill of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem as the crowds cheered, he and the other disciples had a Passover meal with Jesus, they listened as he share some of his most intimate teachings and prayers with them, and they were troubled as he made ominous predictions about what was going to happen.
- But during those last few hours of Jesus life, Peter and the other disciples abandoned Jesus in fear as he was arrested and taken away to be tried before the authorities. Jesus had predicted earlier that evening this would happen, and he was very specific in Peter's situation:
 - *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." (Luke 22:31-34 ESV)*
 - In verses 54 through 62 we read about how this prediction was fulfilled precisely as Jesus predicted: *Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I*

am not.” And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54-62 ESV)

- Peter and the disciples scattered when Jesus was arrested. We don't know for sure if Peter witnessed the horrible torture of his friend Jesus as they beat him, spat on him, brutally tore his flesh with whips, pressed a crown of thorns on his head, and then crucified him on the cross.
- Most likely the only disciple who was there as Jesus hung on the cross was the disciple John. He was there with Jesus' mother and some of the women who were followers of Jesus.

He is Risen!

- But Peter was one of the first of Jesus' followers to go to the empty tomb on Sunday morning after getting a report from Mary Magdalene that she had seen the resurrected Lord. Peter and John ran to the tomb, saw that it was empty, and were perplexed but excited at the possibilities.
- Scripture says that Peter and the disciples returned to where they were staying because they were still afraid about what the Jewish authorities would do to them if they were found. Even so, they gathered together on Sunday evening for mutual support and to compare notes on the rumors that Jesus had appeared to Mary. Suddenly the resurrected Jesus appeared to them, and proved to them that he was indeed alive by showing them his hands, his feet, and his side. The disciples were filled with joy to see their beloved master again, but various accounts in the gospels indicate that they still went through some stages of confusion, fear, and even disbelief. Was this a ghost? Was someone playing a trick on them?
- Jesus, over the next days and weeks, continued to appear and disappear to the disciples. We can only imagine what Peter may have been experiencing. He had not yet had an encounter with Jesus since he had denied, with curses, that he even knew Jesus. Peter probably felt like a failure, a coward, and the most disloyal friend in the world. He had sworn that he was willing to defend Jesus to his death, but, only an hour or two later when things got intense Peter had run away in fear. He may have recalled Jesus' words from a speech he made when he commissioned his 12 apostles: *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33 ESV)*
- Have you ever felt like this? You have done something you deeply regretted, and you wished you could, somehow, go back in time and get a second chance? You have hurt someone deeply, and now, days later, you still worried about whether your relationship could ever be restored? And to make things even worse, this wasn't a typical person...it's becoming obvious to Peter that he had offended the risen Messiah, the very Son of God! During these apparitions we can imagine that Peter was happy Jesus was there, but he was probably terribly uncomfortable at the thought of having an individual conversation with Jesus. Perhaps Peter had promised himself "Next time Jesus shows up, I want to talk with him alone. I won't put this off any longer."

Jesus Restores Peter

- Well, John, in Chapter 21 of his gospel, tells us how Peter finally got his chance. We are not sure when this happened, but it was at least 8 days after the resurrection:
 - Vs. 3 - Peter, perhaps in a discouraged state, declared "I am going fishing." Several others went with him, they fished all night, and they had caught nothing.
 - In the morning, a man on the shore (it was Jesus but they didn't know it) asked if they had any food, and they replied that they had none. He told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and when they did, their nets were full! John said "It is the Lord!" Peter puts on his cloak, dives in, and swims as hard as he can to shore. He's probably reflecting on the time this same thing had happened 3 years earlier. It's when Jesus had told Peter he would no longer fish for people, but from that time on he'd be fishing for men. This whole encounter had terrified Peter because he knew he was in the presence of someone with immense power. Now, as he swam toward Jesus, he was probably full of apprehension again. How would Jesus treat him?
 - John tells us that Jesus cooked them some fish over the fire and they ate together. This was no ghost! Jesus was patiently proving to them that he had truly risen from the dead.
 - Then Jesus initiated the encounter that Peter had been both dreading and anticipating:

- Vs. 15: *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"*

Peter probably thought about how, on the night Jesus was arrested almost 2 weeks earlier, he had denied even knowing Jesus. He remembered how Jesus had warned Peter he would deny him 3 times before the rooster crowed, and how Jesus had looked at Peter at the moment of his 3rd denial even as they heard the rooster crowing off in the distance. This is why Jesus was asking. *He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."*

- Vs 16: *He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"*
Why is Jesus asking again?

Maybe Peter recalled when Jesus was praying in the garden just before he was arrested how hard it was for Peter and the other disciples to stay awake. Jesus was in terrible agony as he was talking with his Heavenly Father about the events that would soon transpire. Three times Jesus went to Peter and disciples for support, and 3 times they had fallen asleep. At that time Jesus had said to Peter "Could you not watch with me one hour? The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!" Peter had again let Jesus down, his flesh really was weak, and so this is why Jesus was now asking Peter if he loved him a second time. *He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."*

- Vs 17: *He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?"*

This was painful. Jesus keeps asking. Perhaps Peter recalled the time a year or so earlier when Jesus had asked the disciples what the people were saying about him. Who did the people, and his disciples, think Jesus was? Peter boldly stated that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God. Jesus commended him and said something about Peter being the rock upon which Jesus would build his church. Peter didn't know what that meant, but it sounded important! But that was then, and this is now.

*...and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."*

- Vs. 18-19: *Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."*
- Maybe then things began to dawn on Peter.
 - When Jesus first has called him to be his disciple, he said "Follow me." Peter had not disqualified himself by his actions.
 - Jesus asked him 3 times if Peter loved him because Peter had denied him 3 times. Jesus was giving him a chance to "repent" 3 times for the 3 times Peter had denied him!
 - Jesus said, 3 times, for Peter to tend and feed his sheep. He still trusted Peter! He was still expecting Peter to be the rock upon which the church would be built! He had not disqualified Peter!
 - Satan had, indeed, sifted Peter like wheat, but the Lord's prayers for Peter saw him through his fiery ordeal. It's as if Peter had experienced his own resurrection!
 - He was coming to realize the truth Paul later taught in his letter to the Romans where he said that Jesus *was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Romans 4:25 ESV)*. How real this was becoming for Peter!
- Peter's ministry as recorded in the book of Acts and in the two letters he wrote was definitely one where he was the rock, or foundation of the church. He preached the first sermon in church history, and under his leadership thousands of Jews turned to Jesus in the months following the resurrection. His letters (1st and 2nd Peter) reveal a man of compassion who did, indeed, "tend the sheep" until the very end.
- Legend and church tradition indicates that Peter, indeed, stretched out his hands at his martyrdom. He was crucified, but he did not consider himself worthy to be crucified like Jesus. He insisted that he be crucified upside down. This was not the same Peter who had denied his Lord years earlier.

- Let's close with the words of Peter from his first letter, 1 Peter 5: 6-11:
 - *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Other Resources:

- An article in "Bible History Daily" about the archaeological remains of what was probably Peter's home in Capernaum:
<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/the-house-of-peter-the-home-of-jesus-in-capernaum/>
- A free download of the excellent book *Peter: Fisherman, Disciple, Apostle* by F. B. Meyer: http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24155003M/Peter_fisherman_disciple_apostle
- YouTube video of Peter's denial from the movie "The Passion of the Christ."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm_-kNaPsp4
- "The Denial of Peter" – article in Wikipedia:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denial_of_Peter
- The Resurrection of Jesus by John Piper:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6nNApf3kaU>
- "The Resurrection of Christ - The Best-Proved Fact in History" by Henry M. Morris, Ph.D:
<http://www.icr.org/ChristResurrection/>