

Peter: An Example of Following Jesus

Fun facts about Simon:



1. Almost 200 references to him in New Testament compared to John 31 times.

2. Jesus gave him a new name "Cephas" (John 1: 42). A Syriac surname meaning "rock." The Greeks translated it by Petros, and the Latins by Petrus.

3. He has a brother named Andrew who ushered him the first time to Jesus (John 1: 40-42). Andrew himself is John the Baptist's disciple.

4. He is a fisherman (Luke 5: 3)

5. He has no formal education (Acts 4:13), but just like typical Jewish boys he must have been studying Scripture since 5.

6. He's married (Mat 8:14): he has a mother-in-law.

7. He's one of Jesus' inner circle along with John and James. Think of the story of Jesus's transfiguration where Moses and Elijah appeared (Mat 17:1); Jesus raised a dead girl daughter of Jairus (Mat 17:1); the Getssemane (Mark 14:33).

How does Simon meet Jesus?

Because of Andrew, Simon met Jesus. Andrew used to be John the Baptist's disciple. Andrew convinced Simon that he and his friends had found Messiah. This propels Simon to come and meet Jesus. As we know, when Jesus looked at Simon he said, "You're Simon, Son of John, you will be called Cephas." The bible doesn't record how Simon reacted upon this. But it's not difficult to imagine that Simon must have stunned finding the man he had just met know his background and give him a new name. The man whom Israel has been waiting for so long knows his name and even gives him a new name. I wonder what happens at the deepest of Simon's being?

Maybe Our Scripture for today will inform us about that.

#Lake of Gennesaret- A fisherman turned to be a fisherman of people (Luke 5: 1-11)

Verse 5: Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

Peter calls Jesus master. As a disciple, Peter shows his trust and obey to the one he called Master, though he has a legit reason not to ("We've worked hard all night; and caught nothing".) But we see here that it very matters to Peter who has commanded him although his experience of all night long has shown a different result. He still uttered, "Because you say so, I will let down the nets."

A few minutes later, Peter and friends caught a large number of fish that even their nets began to break. Now we can get a hint of what happens at the deepest of Simon's being. When he saw this miracle, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me Lord: I am a sinful man!"

I think this is what happens when we follow Jesus: we experience the Lord and cherish Him more than any gifts we receive. In Peter's case we see his relationship with the Lord is deepening. Now with a clear sight, he sees Jesus as He is (He is Lord, He is great, and He is kind). When he sees Jesus clearly, Peter starts to understand himself that he is a sinner and in need of mercy and grace. Nevertheless, Jesus "heals" Peter's identity. He raised him up and granted him a new identity and task to be a fisherman of people.

In our journey as followers of Jesus, very often we are tempted to let our self-autonomy lead our ways rather than to submit to Holy Spirit. Our favor to our own judgement over God's words informs us that we love to be in control rather than let God be in control. This is a big hindrance why we don't experience Jesus in a flesh level. It's even very hard for us in academic settings where we are taught to reason well. But actually, our love to God should empower us to order our whole being under Jesus's lordship.

I want to invite you to another story of Peter and Jesus to see how Peter picks up a lesson after a lesson in following Jesus his Lord.

Walking on the water (Mat 14:22-33)

Many of us might have been familiar with this story. Jesus was catching up his disciples on a boat after he prayed on a mountainside by himself. The boat was in the middle of the water when the disciples started to notice there was someone walking on the lake. They were terrified thinking it must have been a ghost. When Jesus said it was him who walked on the water, Simon said, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus said to Simon to come. As we know Simon stepped out of the boat, walked on water towards Jesus, yet he started to sink when he became afraid caused by the raging wind.

In her book *Salmon Swimmers*, Mary Lou Codman-Wilson writes a prayer reflecting on this account: "Thank you, Lord that you give us faith to step out in obedience to You. You pick us up when we fall, You forgive us when we falter, and You impart your strength and courage to follow You through the empowering Holy Spirit" (p.59).

From Simon, we see that as followers of Jesus, it is very easy for us to be distracted by circumstantial pressures. We strive, we fall, we rise, we strive again, we fall again, and we rise again... Yet we know, He's the one who called us is faithful. He'll hold our hands when we fall. Sometimes I wonder why a moment can't last forever. The peace and intimate moment we have with the Lord in the morning very often get dimmer and dimmer as we get tangled by things in our day to day life: chores, homeworks, hangouts, thinking, friendship, family, etc. We

know the answer that there are powers and principalities in this world relentlessly trying to snatch us away from the hands of the Lord. Maybe as Christians, *to borrow Celine Dion's song*, we should rather ask: "How does a moment last forever?"

Scriptures give us practical commands to follow:

1. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)
2. And let us consider how we may spur one another toward love and good deed, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another -and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10: 24-25)

We see there are two aspects in following Jesus: vertical aspect (prayer, reflection) and horizontal aspect (community).

If we continue through the Gospel, we will find more stories of Peter and Jesus.

- His experience with James and John during the Jesus transfiguration on a mountain where Moses and Elijah appeared along. "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matt 17:5)
- When Jesus washed disciples' feet.
"Then Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well" (John 13:9).
- When Jesus predicts his betrayal
"Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." (John 13:37)
- Peter's denial three times not long long after he promised Jesus that he would lay down his life for Jesus.
"I don't know what you're talking about... I don't know the man" (Mat 26: 70,72).

So, this is Simon. A weak man to whom Jesus trusted to build his church, an "impulsive" guy who would do anything for the Lord, yet at the same time who have learned along the way to trust and love the Lord. I am readily able to relate to Simon. To me, Peter represents our complete humanity before the Lord as we strive to follow Him. We say we love the Lord, yet we fall short in loving Him.

Feed My Sheep

We just celebrated Easter last week. To piggy back the story of resurrection, it's very important to remember stories of Jesus revealing himself to his disciples. One of those stories that personally had touched my heart so deeply is the story of Jesus reveals himself by Tiberias lake (John 21). Now Jesus called out the disciples, asking for food, and because they don't have some he tells them to throw their net on the right of the boat. Soon they catch large number of fish. Now one of the disciples who's very familiar with similar experience tells Peter that the man is the Lord, Jesus. As soon as Peter heard that, he wrapped his outer garment around him and jumped into the water swimming toward Jesus.

After they had breakfast together, Jesus asked Peter: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" We know what Peter said to Jesus, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you". Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." As many as Peter being asked at Jesus court and denied him, Jesus asked this question three times to Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" I could only imagine what had happened in Peter's inner being when Jesus was asking that question for the third time. Maybe Peter was remorseful yet full of repentance as he said again, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

If we trace the Bible, we will see how Peter kept his words to Jesus. Peter emerged as a leader among other apostles.

- He initiated Judas replacement (Acts 1:15-26)
- He preached at the very first time of Pentecost (Acts 2)
- He's the first apostle post-Jesus to heal the sick. (Act 3:6)
- He gave apologetic of the Gospel before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4: 8-12)
- He settled down case of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5: 1-11)
- He was the first acquaintance of Paul in Jerusalem (Gal 1:18)
- Upon a dispute about circumcision required among converted Gentiles, he addressed the council in Jerusalem that only through the grace of Lord Jesus that they are saved (Acts 15:5-11)

And in one of his letters to early church, his conversation with Jesus by the Tiberias lake informs us how that moment lasts eternally for Peter. He wrote, "*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God you to be...*" (1 Peter 5:2)

Quo Vadis, Domine?

Although he has been a great apostle, Peter still has a tendency toward his old habit. When Christians were persecuted and burned down to death under Nero in first century, Peter fled Rome to hide. But in one vision, as he was trying to escape Nero, he met Jesus carrying a cross and walking to the other opposite of Peter. Peter asked the Lord, "Quo Vadis Domine? Which means *where are you going, Lord?*" And Jesus replied, "I'm going to Rome to be crucified again."

According to the church tradition, Peter died upside down on the cross under the emperor of Nero. He rejected to be crucified with his head right side-up because for him he didn't deserve to die like Jesus did.

What we learned from Peter?

Peter shows us that following Jesus is a matter of love as we trust, obey and follow Him. It's a journey of rise and fall; a journey of self-denial; a journey of carrying the cross; and a journey of grace in community held by the everlasting arms of God.

JESUS, I MY CROSS HAVE TAKEN

Jesus, I my cross have taken
 All to leave and follow Thee
 Destitute, despised, forsaken,
 Thou from hence my all shall be.
 Perish every fond ambition,
 All I've sought or hoped or known.
 Yet how rich is my condition,
 God and heaven are still my own.

Let the world despise and leave me;
 They have left my Savior too.
 Human hearts and looks deceive me;
 Thou art not, like them, untrue,
 And while Thou shalt smile upon me,
 God of wisdom, love, and might,
 Foes may hate and friends disown me;
 Show Thy face and all is bright

Go then earthly fame and treasure,
 Come disaster, scorn, and pain.
 In Thy service pain is pleasure,
 With Thy favor loss is gain.
 I have called the Abba Father,
 I have stayed my heart on Thee.
 Storms may howl and clouds may gather,
 All must work for good to me.

Haste then on from grace to glory,
 Armed by faith and winged by prayer.
 Heavn's eternal day before thee,
 God's own hand shall guide thee there.
 Soon shall close thy earthly mission;
 Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days,
 Hope soon change to glad fruition,
 Faith to sight and prayer to praise.

