

Simon Peter

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Good evening, for those of you who do not know me, I am the saint, apostle, disciple, and sinner Simon Peter. Ever hear someone use the term ‘For Pete’s sake...’ when they get frustrated? Well, I’m that Pete that they are referring to. I’m also the Peter that wrote the letters included in your Bibles of first and second Peter. In many ways, the church has changed dramatically, but in more ways, it is just the same as when I was a leader of it. I love these new gadgets, though. For example, imagine a piece of papyrus that can contain an infinite amount of words (tablet PC)!

Tonight, I came to share a bit of my testimony and hopefully to leave you all with a bit of a challenge.

Many of you probably know much about me already. You know of my weaknesses like how I struggle with pride and being quick to speak, slow to listen, and quick to get angry; quite the opposite of what Jesus taught me to be. You also know that those weaknesses had a side to them that proved to be great strengths as I was a leader of the first church and how the Holy Spirit used my weakness of being outspoken as a strength as I boldly preached and proclaimed the truth of God’s word without apology.

To begin, I would like to go back to a day that I will never forget; the day that I met Jesus! Jesus was teaching a crowd of people the word of God as Andrew and I were washing our nets from a long, hard night of fishing that resulted in us catching absolutely nothing. Needless to say, I wasn’t in the best of moods and was definitely not in the mood to be preached at. As if though recognizing this, Jesus got into my boat and asked me to go out a bit from the shore. I wasn’t the most thrilled about this request of His, but did so anyways. Jesus then sat down and began preaching from my boat.

To finish off all of this, when He was finished preaching, He asked me to go out into the deep waters and put down my nets for a catch. I argued with Him for a moment because we had already been fishing all night and had caught nothing. However, I did as He asked just to prove to Him that there was no use in doing so. Shortly after lowering my nets, I caught such a large amount of fish that my nets began to break and I had to have my partners come out with another boat to assist me. We pulled in so many fish that both of our boats began to sink!

I was so humbled and overwhelmed at what was occurring that I asked Jesus to leave me because I was a sinful man. I was so ashamed and embarrassed by my attitude and behavior! Instead of rebuking me as I deserved, He asked me to follow Him. Jesus said that he would transform me from a fisherman to a fisher of man. Without hesitation, I joyfully dropped my fishing net and followed Jesus. (Luke 5:1-11/Matthew 4:18-22)

I watched as Jesus performed miracle after miracle. In fact, He even healed my mother-in-law from a fever at my home. He taught with authority and backed up what He preached with action; amazing miracles, signs, and wonders. He taught myself and eleven other disciples of His many mysteries about God and His kingdom in a way that we could understand. (Matthew 8:14-15)

I remember one day when Jesus received the sad news that John the Baptist, the Elijah who had prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus, had been murdered. He spent some time alone in a solitary place, but it wasn’t long before crowds came from the surrounding towns to the remote place where he was grieving. Driven by compassion, He healed them all and taught them many things. It was an evening filled with sorrow, but also great joy. It was that evening that we fed five thousand men (not including women and children) with only five loaves of bread and two fish. I didn’t realize just how significant this miracle was until later in my life, which I’ll get to in a few minutes.

That evening, Jesus sent us disciples off on a boat to go ahead of Him on the other side of the lake. As dawn approached, we saw one of the most amazing things that we had ever seen! Jesus approached us walking on the water of the lake! Perhaps it was great faith, or perhaps it was great doubt, but I blurted out, “If it is you, Lord, tell me to come to you on the water.”

Well, Jesus did and I jumped out of the boat and began to walk over to Jesus on the water. It was a feeling that words cannot describe. However, part way to Jesus, reality struck me and I began to look around me and noticed the great wind and waves. I was quickly overwhelmed by doubt and began to sink. As He always seemed to do, however, Jesus came to my rescue and saved me with His mighty right hand! (Matthew 14:22-33)

I remember one day when Jesus asked us who people say that He is. I proclaimed that He is the Messiah, the son of the living God. I'll never forget how Jesus responded. It was another one of those emotional roller coaster type of evenings. At first, I was overwhelmed with great joy and honor as Jesus said that I was the rock that He would build the church on, that hell would not be able to overcome it; that whatever I bind or loose on earth would be also bound or loosed in heaven. Wow! To have Jesus, the son of the living God declare this prophetic word about me and my life; what an honor and responsibility! I suppose that what came next may have been for my own good so that I would not become arrogant and prideful... (Matthew 16:13-20)

Jesus then went on and explained to us that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things by the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law; that He would be killed, but raise again on the third day. I rebuked Jesus demanding that this would never happen to Him. Jesus put me right back in my place, even calling me Satan, and explained that I had in mind the things of man and not the things of God. Needless to say, my great honor and joy came to an abrupt end after this. (Matthew 16:21-23)

Oh yes, I can't forget to mention another amazing thing that I had the honor of witnessing firsthand. I would have to say that this event was right up there with Jesus walking on the water. Jesus took James, John, and I onto a high mountain. There, I watched as the face and clothing of Jesus transformed like light before us and I also saw Moses and Elijah appear and speak with Jesus. I offered to put up shelters for the three of them. Jesus asked that we not tell anyone about this until after His death. It was an amazing glimpse into eternity, though, I didn't fully realize it at that moment. (Matthew 17:1-9)

Similar to myself, it seemed that conflict would often follow Jesus. The Pharisees, Saducees, elders, and teachers of the law were often trying to trip up Jesus and lay snares for Him. One time, I almost got caught in one myself as the tax collector asked me why Jesus did not pay the temple tax. I was certain that He did, but found out that I had spoke to soon... Jesus explained that the children of the kings do not pay taxes and therefore He was exempt being the son of God. However, as to not cause offense, Jesus sent me on an unusual fishing outing as I caught a fish that had a four drachma coin in its mouth to pay our temple tax. I have to admit, that there were quite a few times after that fishing trip that I hoped to have the same experience, but it never happened again... (Matthew 17:24-27)

On one occasion, I asked Jesus how many times I had to forgive someone when they sin against me. I figured that it would be seven times, the number of completion. I also thought that after the seventh time that they sin against me, I could let them have it and never have to deal with them again. However, Jesus surprised me and told me not seven times, but seven times seventy times. He taught us that we are to forgive others as God forgives us. He taught us that it is so critical for us to forgive other people that if we did not forgive others, that God would not forgive us.

I know that I've caused many to sin because of my arrogance and outspokenness, often seeing other's responses as being them sinning against me, but I realized that I had actually first sinned against them. This teaching on forgiveness was a hard one for me to live out. After all, I was often right and that person sinning against me was wrong. However, I learned that forgiving unconditionally as God forgives us is so freeing! I learned that being a great leader in the body of Christ meant being great in humility; and I often learned this the hard way... (Matthew 18:21-22)

In fact, Jesus taught this servant leadership concept in a way that I will never forget! One time after our evening meal, Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist and began to wash our feet. When He came to wash my feet, He told me that I didn't realize now what He was doing, but that later, I would understand. I told Jesus not to wash my feet. Jesus said that unless Jesus washes me, that I had no part of Him. After hearing this, I asked Him then not only to wash my feet then, but all of me! (John 13:4-9)

I loved being with Jesus. It was never boring watching a miracle after miracle and seeing God's kingdom come here on earth like it is in heaven. I never regretted the decision to leave my nets behind and to follow Jesus. I was certain that I would follow Him for the rest of my life and to willingly give it fully to Him.

There were plenty of great times that the disciples and I spent with Jesus, however, there was one time that I will never, ever forget. It was an evening of great sorrow, trouble, and confusion. Jesus told us that on that night that we would all fall away from Him. I assured Him that though all others might fall away and even if facing death, that I would certainly not. He told me that on that very night before the rooster crowed three times that I would deny Him. (Matthew 26:31-35)

That night, when Judas came with a large crowd of armed men and they arrested Jesus. I took out my sword and cut off the ear of one of the men. Jesus demanded that I put my sword away and allow God's will to be accomplished. At that time, all of the other disciples fled. I, however, was faithful and followed at a distance. (John 18:10-11/Matthew 26:47-75)

I watched as Jesus was questioned by the Sanhedrin and chief priests and badly mistreated and persecuted. I went to a crowd that had gathered around a fire made in the courtyard, and a servant girl accused me of being with Jesus. I denied it. I withdrew back to the gateway and another girl saw me and accused me of being with Jesus. I denied it again with an oath. After a little while, those standing with me of being with Jesus because of my accent. I denied Jesus again for the third time and at that very instant, a rooster crowed. (Luke 22:54-62/Matthew 26:47-75)

I can't even begin to describe the feeling that overcame me as that rooster crowed. I was immediately and completely broken. I ran away and wept bitterly, overwhelmed with sorrow as I recalled the words that Jesus spoke to me just earlier that day. Indeed He spoke truth, but this truth hurt me deeper than any wound that I had ever encountered before.

To know that I denied even knowing Jesus, the very one who gave His life for me, during His darkest hour and greatest time of need. Oh, the agony!

Jesus was crucified and laid to rest. I had left behind everything to follow Him and now it all came suddenly to an end. I wasn't sure what to do or how to respond to everything. I was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, but now He lies dead...

Early one morning, Mary came running to John and I and told us that the body of Jesus was gone. John ran ahead of me, and I ran behind as quickly as I could. Sure enough, when we arrived at the tomb, only the strips of linen were left remaining and Jesus' body was gone. We just didn't understand and were unable to make sense of it all, so we went back to our homes.

I told the other disciples that I was going fishing. I just needed to get away to something familiar to clear my mind and try and make sense of it all. They agreed and decided to come with me. Perhaps they were a bit concerned about me being alone in the midst of my grief.

That night was just like the night where this all started; I fished all night and caught nothing. This was not a mere coincidence!

Early in the morning, a man called to me from the shore and asked if I had caught anything. I replied, "No.". The man told us to cast our net on the right side of the boat and that we would find some. We did so and were unable to haul in our net because of the large number of fish! I realized that it was Jesus and jumped into the water and swam as fast as I could to shore to meet Him. I couldn't wait! After all, the last time that we were together, I denied having even known Him. The other disciples towed in the great catch.

Jesus had a small fire going on the shore with some bread and fish, that same small meal that fed thousands not so very long ago. He cooked up some of the fish that I had just caught and we all ate.

When we had finished eating, Jesus looked at me and asked, "Do you love me?" I replied, "You know all things and you know that I love you!"

He said, "Feed my lambs."

He asked again and I responded again that I did love Him.

He said, "Take care of my sheep."

He asked a third time, which hurt me so deeply.

He said, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:1-19)

He then said those two words once again that drove away all of my doubts and concerns about what I was to do when Jesus died. "Follow me." I then knew that my decision to spend the rest of my life committed to following and serving Jesus was still valid and still the plan and purpose for my life. Jesus was not dead, but is now alive forever!

I can't believe that Jesus would still want me, me of all people, after denying Him so foolishly.

This time, I was determined never to deny Christ again. This time, it wasn't a determination made in arrogant pride that I was better than the other disciples, but it was one made

in full humility and motivated by love for Jesus who forgave my sin and still had a destiny for me to be the rock upon which He built His church. After being filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the promise of Christ began to come to pass. God enabled me to be a great preacher and strong leader in the church. He enabled me to keep my promise that, though death may be certain, I would never leave nor deny Jesus.

This evening, I want to challenge you in this same way that Christ has challenged me.

Are you denying Christ? Maybe you live your life completely for yourself and deny Christ altogether.

However, maybe you might be a bit more like me. You made the decision to follow Christ, you go to church every week, and you boldly tell Jesus that you would never deny him.

However, when the pressure is on and the decision is hard, do you deny Christ with your words or actions? Do you silently try to blend in with the crowd laughing at what they do and agreeing with their attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors? Do you cave under the pressure of the crowd as I did?

No matter where you are at this morning, just as was the case for me, Christ's forgiveness is available and He is still calling out to each of you with those two simple, but life-changing words, "Follow me."

I encourage you tonight to pray with me and accept His call. It is a decision that you will never regret and is the beginning of an adventure filled life full of eternal rewards!