

**LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text Part eighteen - Sunday, June 16th, 2024
Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

PETER - Qualities Essential for Greatness in Christ's Kingdom

- 1) **SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION** - Peter is perhaps the most prominent character in the Gospels, apart from Jesus Himself. He is the *first one called to be Jesus' disciple* (Luke 5:1-11) and he immediately forsakes everything to follow Him. We also know that he was married and made his home in Capernaum - **Mark 1:29-30** - **“And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. [30] Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her.”**

Later in his life Peter would become one of the *great preachers in the early church*. He wrote two of the letters in the New Testament which bear his name. He died, as Jesus predicted, by being crucified for his faith in his Lord - **John 21:18-19** - **“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.” [19]** (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.”**

- 2) **PETER WAS PRONE TO BIG BLUNDERS** - If we're honest, this is why we love him so much. We feel he is not out of our reach like some of the other saints in Scripture. Peter frequently ***speaks and acts without thinking things through.***

He doesn't see the need for Jesus to be crucified (**Matthew 16:21-23** - **“From that time 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 on the third day be raised. [22] And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” [23] But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**).

He is slow to understand the nature of Jesus as the one who came to lay down the pattern for humble service and sacrifice (**John 13:5-8** - **“Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. [6] He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” [7] Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” [8] Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”**).

But perhaps his greatest fault is ***he doesn't know his own weaknesses and limitations until he has already stumbled.*** He never dreamed he could deny Jesus under pressure - **Matthew 26:31-35** - "Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' [32] But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." [33] Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." [34] Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." [35] Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same."

His gullibility extends even farther. He seems to actually think he can singlehandedly prevent Jesus' death by lopping off the soldiers' heads (**John 18:10-11** - "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) [11] So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

How like Peter we all are! Peter - ***a man who can't even stay awake praying with Jesus for one hour, is certain that he can stand faithful no matter what happens!*** This should make all of us more aware of our dependency on the Holy Spirit for our inward strength and consistency.

Jesus actually has to warn Peter about the power of temptation and the reality of the work of the enemy in his heart - **Luke 22:31** - **“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat....”** It's as though *Jesus saw that Peter wasn't taking this battle as seriously as he should.*

Few of us do. This lies at the root of prayerlessness. Certainly we seek the Lord for daily bread. We have our perceived needs and we Christians bring them to the Lord, surely. But the harder to define prayerful waiting and leaning on the Lord for spiritual strength - the **“drawing near”** to God that James talks about - that kind of prayer is rarely practiced by people who don't see anything more than their own temperament and character traits involved in their daily struggles.

How we need James' reminder that God only draws near to people who make the effort to draw near to Him - **James 4:7-8** - **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you....”**

It's no accident that James tucks in that mention of the devil when he calls upon us to draw near to God. More is going on than we often think.

- 3) **PETER HAD A WILLING HEART** - He may have been quick and impulsive, *but he was always willing*. He was the first one to ask questions, the first one to jump out of the boat into the water to meet Jesus (**Matthew 14:26-29**). He was the first one to proclaim the divine lordship of Jesus (**Matthew 16:13-17**). *These are all typical of Peter*. His zeal was frequently stronger than his faith. His love frequently outlasted his courage. He would bitterly deny Jesus, but he desperately wanted to follow Him faithfully.
- 4) **PETER HAD A TENDER CONSCIENCE** - In my opinion, this is what made room for Peter's future development. Peter would fail so many times, *but Jesus could always reach Peter's heart*. Peter never became hard or bitter in his failures. He was always pliable and tender to Jesus' correction and encouragement.

A *humble spirit* kept bubbling up inside Peter when he was with Jesus - Luke 5:1-8 - "On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, [2] and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. [3] Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. [4] And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." [5] And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." [6] And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. [7] They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. [8] But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

A look from Jesus after Peter had denied him the third time was enough to break Peter's heart - **Luke 22:56-62** - **“Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” [57] But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” [58] And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” [59] 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.” [60] But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. [61] 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.” [62] And he went out and wept bitterly.”**

Perhaps this is the most essential trait in any potential follower of Jesus. God says He ***searches*** for this kind of heart - **Isaiah 66:2** - **“All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”**

See also **Psalms 51:17** - **“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”**

And here again we should pause. When you offer your worship to the Lord, how shall we allow time for the **“sacrifice of a broken spirit?”** Where will that kind of mind-set come from? What is there in the modern, entertainment driven media to promote a broken spirit and contrite heart before the Lord?

The main point here is the contrite heart is inviting to the Holy Spirit. And this is where Peter was at his best. **He may have been full of blunders, but he never became hardened in his sin.** He was always quick to repent - to let his emotions spill out in sorrow before his Lord. And the worst thing about the present moral climate of our age isn't just its **sinfulness**. The worst thing about the way our culture is training all of us to think is the way it promotes **remorseless** sin. If Christians don't cultivate a broken spirit, there is nothing in the culture you daily breathe in that will encourage you to offer this **broken-hearted sacrifice** our God finds so precious.

- 5) **PETER KEPT A CORRECTABLE SPIRIT** - He seemed to remember some of his earlier lessons well. Paul had to correct him again in **Galatians 2:11-12** - **“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.”** Peter was rebuked by Paul **in front of the entire church** and his fellow Jews. It is to Peter's credit that he offered no argument or excuse. He could submit even though he himself was a strong and respected leader in the early church.

I used to think this was an account of Peter's **weakness**. It probably isn't. This is an account of Peter's incredible spiritual **strength**.

Perhaps he outlines his own philosophy of life in 2 Peter 1:5-11 -
“**For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. [8] For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. [10] Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. [11] For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**”

Underscore that telling phrase in **verse 10** - “.....**for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.**” *I wonder what went through Peter's mind as he penned those words.* His own denial of Jesus probably still brought tears to his eyes. But he learned by rugged experience the preciousness of his Lord's redeeming reach. How encouraging to see such a stable faith growing out of the average disciple - Peter.