

THE LIFE & LETTERS OF SIMON PETER

INTRODUCTION – IDENTITY IN CHRIST

John 1:40-42

- The first encounter of Simon with Jesus, who will become his closest friend
- Background – the setting for this story is the region of Galilee, part of the Roman province of Judea

Sea of Galilee – the setting for many of Peter's encounters with Jesus

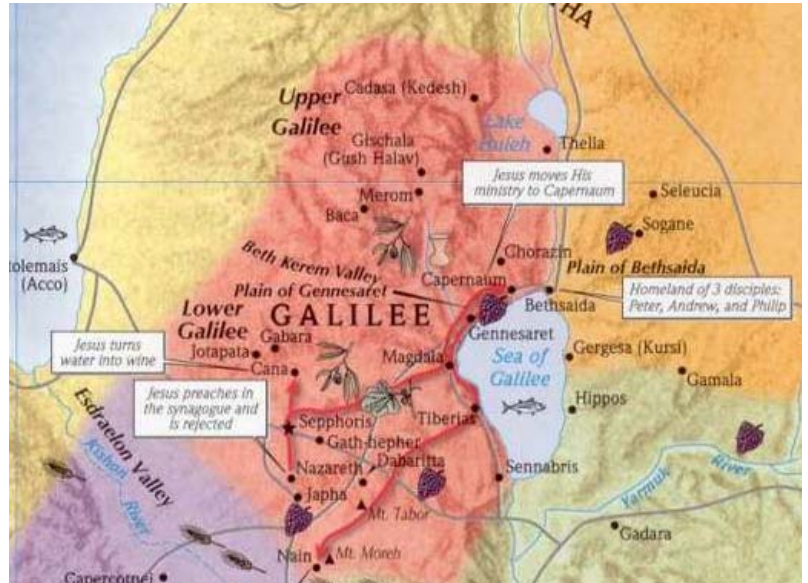
Bethsaida (Peter's home town),

Nazareth (Jesus' home town),

Capernaum (both lived here during Jesus' ministry),

Cana (site of Jesus' first miracle).

- The "quiet man" Andrew brings Peter to Jesus
 - Only 2 other occasions in Gospels where Andrew mentioned by name:
 - John 6:8 – brings little boy with his lunch to Jesus; result = feeding of 5000
 - John 12:22 – with Philip brings Greeks to see Jesus
 - i.e. his role was always to bring others to Jesus – here he brings his greatest catch, his brother Simon!
- V 42 – The word is "gazed intently" – what did Jesus see in Peter?
 - We have no physical description of Peter (or Jesus) in NT or other ancient texts [perhaps their society was less obsessed with image than ours & more concerned with the substance of a man's words and actions]
 - We can assume he was an ordinary Jewish man with dark hair & a beard
 - He was a fisherman (in partnership with Andrew / James & John), therefore he probably had rough hands and would have been muscular, probably smelling of a mixture of sweat and fish!
 - His name was Simon bar-Jonah – in modern English "Simon Johnston". His father's name was Jonah (we do not know his mother's name).
 - He was originally from Bethsaida (John 1:44) but later moved to Capernaum.
 - He had no formal education (Acts 4:13) but as a Jewish boy he would have studied the OT from age 5.
 - He was married (Mt 8:14 – his mother in law is healed by Jesus), & he took wife with him on some of his missionary trips (I Cor 9:15)
 - He had a distinct rural Galilee accent (Mark 14:70) easily recognisable in Jerusalem.
- Jesus gives Simon a new prophetic name – Cephas (Peter), meaning "a rock"
 - Simon was the most common name in 1st century Palestine
 - There is no previous record of the use of Cephas / Peter use as a name ("Cephas" is the Aramaic for the Greek "Peter")
 - There is a parallel with other people in Bible who were given new names – Abraham, Jacob, Paul – each of these received a new identity and a new role in God's plan with their new name.
 - Interestingly, Jesus never addresses Simon by this new name, but this is the first of 3 occasions when he gives this name to him:
 1. Here in **John 1:42** – it is future tense – "you will be called Peter" – i.e. prophetic.
 2. **Luke 6:12-14** – Simon is called to be an apostle as one of the 12 (who were chosen from among many disciples to be "authoritative representatives speaking His word and doing His work"). Peter would always be named 1st in lists of the apostles (Judas was always last). Here it is in the present tense, but simply to identify which Simon this is – "He also called him Peter".
 3. **Matt 16:17-19** – we will see this occasion in Lesson 2 – "Simon on Hope".
 - Only in Acts would the name "Simon" finally give way as he becomes known as "Peter".
 - The new name signifies a new identity – who he is becoming by God's grace (cf. Abraham in Is. 51:1&2 – he is described as the rock from which Israel was cut – Abraham was called, renamed and given a promise).
 - This prophecy is NOT based on Peter's merit or character, BUT on God's character and purpose.



Questions: What about you? What is your identity? Who are you?

Our identity is NOT our name / family / nationality / race / job – in Christ, it is who we are becoming in God's grace!

KEY LESSON:

Christ sees who we will become in Him – our sense of our own identity and purpose must be based on His assessment of us. Through Peter's eyes we will learn what this purpose and identity are!

LESSON 1 – SIMON ON FAITH

A FISHER OF MEN – Luke 5:1-11

The scene: Beside the Sea of Galilee around 1 year after Simon first met Jesus.

Over the past year Simon has been combining his business with following Jesus.

Jesus has just healed Simon's mother in law (Luke 4:38-39).

He has spent all night trying to catch fish – usually the best time for fishing in deep waters is at night (as there is no shadow from the boat to disturb the fish) – but they have caught nothing (v5)

Now they are cleaning their nets (v2) as Jesus preaches.

Jesus asks Simon to take Him out on the water in his boat (he will use the boat as a floating pulpit).

In v4 He makes an unusual request – that they should let down their nets!

Imagine Simon's thinking – "What does a carpenter know about fishing? I'm the expert at this!"

BUT he doesn't say this – instead he obeys, saying, "because YOU say so, I will let down the nets" (v5).

The result is a catch they can hardly manage – vv 6&7

This is the first of 2 miraculous catches in the gospels (both are for Simon's benefit). We will see the 2nd in lesson 3, "Simon on Love".

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"...

Simon's response in light of Christ's miraculous catch of fish is to be humbled as he becomes aware of his own sin – he had doubted that Christ could do it even though he had obeyed.

Peter cannot cope with being in the presence of Christ, so he asks Him to leave. It is as if he is the fish caught in Christ's net, thrashing to get away!

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."

The reply of Christ is the most common command from God in Bible and from the lips of Christ – do NOT be afraid. Despite our sinfulness Christ invites us into His presence and He calls us to belong to Him – to be His friend, to learn from Him.

Peter will become a fisher of men – Christ has demonstrated to Peter how to do this (He is the master fisherman both of fish and men!!!) With Him what seems impossible becomes possible.

So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him.

This is the call to full time service with Christ. They leave behind their boats and nets, and even the most profitable catch of fish they have ever made to follow Christ.

Peter, afraid and uncertain of himself takes this first step of faith in Jesus – because **HE** calls Simon will follow even though he knows his own sinfulness.

We too may be terrified by this call and uncertain, but He stands beside us and says, "Do not be afraid."

Simon is beginning to learn that Jesus can be taken at His word at all times and about all things.

KEY LESSON:

Faith is to take God at His word (believing) and put it into action in our lives (trusting).

WALKING ON WATER – Matthew 14:22-33

The scene: Again they are on the Sea of Galilee. Christ has just fed the 5000.

Christ commands them to go out in the boat, and they obey (v22). They are following Christ in faith.

BUT they soon get into trouble in a strong wind (v24).

This is the 2nd time they have been caught in a storm (see Luke 8:22-25), and on the previous occasion Jesus calmed the storm.

BUT there is one big difference here – on that occasion Jesus had been sleeping in the boat as they struggled and when they woke Him He calmed the storm – now He is not with them!

Then, through the storm they see something even more terrifying than the storm – a ghost!

They cried out in fear (v26). At least they knew something about how to manage storms, but they had no idea how to manage a ghost!

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Again the familiar response of the Lord – do not be afraid!

Author Brennan Manning wrote, *"If you don't have to be afraid of God, you don't have to be afraid of anything."*

Little do they realise that the thing they fear most is the answer to their fear!

Christ does not promise those who follow Him that they will have an easy life – sometimes obedience to Him leads us into storms, and we cannot always understand why. It is NOT true to say that if we have faith we can expect to have NO problems (for example no illness or difficulties!)

Have you ever experienced the same thing – when things are difficult something even worse happens? And in the storm you can't see Jesus with you?

Perhaps, as in Simon's case, God may be coming near to you to speak to you even in the difficult times. We need to learn to recognise Him in the storm and in the ghost.

In the storms of life the question we ask should not be "Why", but "How can I know you and glorify You in this storm?"

"Lord, if it's You," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.

Peter, who by this stage has become the leader of the disciples, demonstrates his typical impetuous nature.

Notice the doubt in his question – "if it is You" – but the faith he displays in stepping out of the boat.

Faith is taking Christ at His word, and that is what Peter is prepared to do! He waits for Christ's command BEFORE he steps out of the boat.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Simon is distracted by the storm and fear grips him. He takes his eyes off Jesus and suddenly begins to sink. So he cries out to Jesus to save him.

We are also so often distracted by the circumstances of life and take our eyes off Jesus.

Peter loses sight of the only one who can make him do the impossible and so begins to sink.

The question for us is who or what are we placing our faith in. ***It is not how much faith we have but who our faith is in that makes the difference.***

There are many people of faith in the world with many different beliefs, but it is not faith that saves us but rather Christ. Just because we believe in something does not make it true.

What is the object of your faith? Is it something or someone who has power to do the impossible or something empty and powerless?

Reality is we all walk by faith all the time – e.g. sitting on seat – based on our experience we know it is safe to sit on a seat without questioning it first. However, if a seat collapsed under us once we would take a while to rebuild our confidence in seats again!

In reality the things we often depend on are little more trustworthy than water – our own health, financial security, career etc. – but we hold on to them like the disciples trusting in their boat!

Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," He said, "why did you doubt?"

I love the word here "immediately." There is no delay in Jesus' response to Simon's cry – as soon as Simon cries out to Him, Jesus is there! ***Simon found that once he placed his faith in Jesus He would never let him fall beyond His reach.***

Jesus rebukes Simon for his little faith, but recognises that he has some faith (cf. Luke 8:25 where He says to the 12, "Where is your faith?") – as he has some faith Christ saves him

The amount of our faith affects our emotional life and reaction to circumstances. It does not affect our salvation or our security in Christ, which depend on His power, not the strength of our faith.

The great preacher and Pastor CH Spurgeon once said:

"My brethren, little faith will bring your soul to Heaven, but great faith will bring Heaven to your soul"

KEY LESSON:

Faith depends on the object. and the amount of our faith depends on how much we know Him.

Faith need only fear what is more powerful than its object!

THE SHIELD OF FAITH – I Peter 1:3-9

"you, who through faith are shielded by God's power." (v5)

We have not seen Jesus, just as those Peter is writing to had not, but here Peter, the eye witness and closest friend of Jesus commends Him to us as the One who can be trusted above all and through it all!

Through faith we have a joy that does not depend on circumstances as we walk on the water [this world = water – it cannot hold us up – it not a firm foundation, even if we act as if it is!].

Yet many Christians seem to have so little joy and we seem to try to make excuses for joy as if it isn't really such a powerful, great thing. Why? – because our faith is weak, and we sink beneath the waves!

Q. Would they be shielded if they didn't believe it?

It is NOT by our faith we are shielded, but by God's power! Faith is simply the key that opens our lives to allow God's grace and power into our lives to be effective.

Often we say, "I don't feel God's presence, I don't feel joy, I don't feel God's love", but where does this focus on "feelings" come from? From 18th Century Romanticism, which says that the goal of life = feeling!

We need to order our thinking after the truth of God's word, and our emotions will follow (cf. Peter with his fear).

KEY LESSON:

Faith makes God's power effectual in our lives, first in salvation and then in our emotional lives.

THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH – II Peter 1:5

"make every effort to add to your faith ..."

- **True faith is NOT unproductive head knowledge BUT genuine experience – it increases with experience**

Peter calls us to a progressing relationship with God through Christ –growing into His likeness.

- **It is on the foundation of faith that we continue to build in our lives – it is an "action word".**

Faith is the principle on which we continue in Christian life.

Are we prepared to step out of the boat, to keep on walking in faith?

- **We must avoid "spiritual myopia" (v9) [myopia = short-sightedness]**

It is possible, even as a Christian, to become forgetful. To lose sight of Jesus (much as Peter did when he began to sink) and forget the price that has been paid to wash is from our sins.

The myopic Christian cannot see past his own sin and weakness or his circumstances (the storms of life).

KEY LESSON:

Faith is the foundational principle of the Christian life, and we must continue to build on it.

We must avoid spiritual myopia!

LESSON 2 – SIMON ON HOPE

The “Ladder of Growth” in II Peter 1:5-7

This ladder, with faith as its foundation leads to “perseverance”, the fifth virtue. John Stott describes perseverance as the “child of hope” (John Stott)

GOOD LUCK? BAD LUCK? WHO KNOWS?

There is an ancient Chinese story:

A farmer had one old horse that he used for tilling his fields. One day the horse escaped into the hills and when the farmer's neighbours heard about it, they sympathised with the old man over his bad luck. “Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?” said the farmer.

A week later, the horse returned with a herd of wild horses from the hills and this time the neighbours congratulated the farmer on his good luck. “Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?” said the farmer.

Then, when the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses, he fell off its back and broke his leg. Everyone agreed that this was very bad luck. Not the farmer, who replied, “Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?”

Some weeks later, the army marched into the village and forced every able-bodied young man to go fight in a bloody war. When they saw that the farmer's son had a broken leg, they let him stay. Everyone was very happy at the farmer's good luck. “Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?”

Many people, even many Christians, live life this way – never knowing if things will turn out bad or good, and never daring to hope.

GORDON WILSON

Gordon Wilson was a father whose 21-year-old daughter, Marie (a nurse in RVH) was one of 11 people killed in an IRA bomb in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, on Remembrance Day 1987. He was a Christian man, and he was interviewed shortly after the bomb. He said the following powerful words:

“I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet and she is dead. She is in Heaven, and we will meet again. Don't ask me please for a purpose. I don't have an answer. But I know that there has to be a plan. If I didn't think that, I would commit suicide. It is part of a greater plan and God is good. And we shall meet again.”

CONTRAST his hope with the last story! This is the hope of the Christian! There is a purpose for living, even when the world seems to be turned upside down! How can this be? Hope leads to purpose, and purpose leads to perseverance.

HOPE is having something worth living for and something to keep on persevering for!

So, how can we have this kind of hope? Let us pick up the story of Simon Peter again and learn from his experience.

A CONFESSION & A CALL – Matthew 16:13-26

The scene: Outside Galilee – near the coastal town of Caesarea Philippi, the Roman capital of the province of Judea.

Caesarea is perhaps the most multicultural city in the region, and therefore a centre for various religions.

We are at a pivotal point in Jesus' ministry – he has been rejected in home town (Capernaum); John the Baptist has been beheaded by Herod; His family think He is mad; and opposition from Jewish religious leaders is growing as they begin to plot His death.

It is against this background that He asks his disciples who people say He is (v13).

They answer with 3 possibilities the people have been suggesting (John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or another prophet) (v14).

He then increases the intensity of His question (we can feel the dramatic tension rising):

He asked, “Who do you say I am?”

It is, characteristically, Simon who replies on behalf of the 12.

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

This is a remarkable statement of faith – Simon has realised that Jesus is the Christ (the One the OT had promised), and, even more, that He is the Son of God.

This is the first time that anyone has said that Jesus is God. Simon has been convinced by the words and actions of Jesus.

This is the central question of the Bible – who do you say Jesus is? If He is, as He claimed to be, and as Simon realised, the Son of God, then He cannot be ignored. The question comes to each of us today, “Who do **YOU** say that I am?”

“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.”

Jesus commends Simon highly – it is God who has revealed this truth to him. He does not try to correct Peter – in other words He does not deny that He is God – He accepts this identity for Himself!

He then makes an amazing promise – that starting with this first rock, Peter, He will build His church. Peter would later write that God is building us into His church as “living stones” (I Peter 2:5). Here Jesus is laying the first of these stones – Peter, the rock. Together with the other apostles he will become the foundation of Christ's church (Ephesians 2:20).

He is the first to make this amazing statement of Christ's identity. All those who will follow in making the same confession of faith will also become living stones – the church includes all true Christians. Christ will build all those who trust in Him into His plan, and into a new community of His people characterised by faith, hope and love!

Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and ... be killed.

Christ now begins to prepare His disciples for His coming death. He also foretells His resurrection, although the disciples do not seem to hear this (in fact they did not understand what he meant by this).

From this point on Christ will often speak of His death as the momentum in the Gospels gathers towards the cross.

Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. “Never, Lord!” he said, “This shall never happen to You!”

Peter’s response is clear. He cannot accept the possibility that the Christ should suffer or die. He has realised **who** Jesus is, but he does not understand **what** He must do. In His mind the Messiah must be a triumphant king, NOT a suffering servant.

Simon is not alone in this – this was the common understanding of the Jews in those days. The OT passages prophesying the death of the Christ (e.g. Isaiah 53, Psalm 22) were explained away to refer to the religious leaders.

But before the Christ could become the promised King He must first go to the cross.

Simon cannot see that he has been influenced by a force much more dangerous and serious than the occupying Romans – his own sin, which has given Satan a foothold – and he must first be set free from it!

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me”

Simon, who had just before spoken the words of God, is now speaking the words of Satan.

The rock has become a stumbling block! Christ must rebuke Simon sharply as He knows that He must die for the very sins that Simon had confessed to Him before (Luke 5). Simon would later understand, but for now he cannot.

But Christ knows this, and He also knows that it is Satan’s desire that He would never go to the cross, because once He goes to the cross all is lost for Satan.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Now Christ makes this extraordinary call. The ONLY way to follow Him is by the way that He Himself will take – the way of the cross. Anyone who wants to follow Him must deny themselves and take up a cross – this means to die!

This is the meaning of repentance – to die to our own way of living so that we can live for God under His control.

In this passage we see a battle for Simon’s will – whether he will follow Christ, or his own idea of how God should work.

KEY LESSON:

Living in God’s purpose involves denial of self & obedience to Him – Submit your will to Him

AN EYEWITNESS OF HIS MAJESTY – Matthew 17:1-8

Christ now takes Peter, James and John (His 3 closest friends) up a mountain and He begins to pray (Luke 9).

There He was transfigured before them.

This was an amazing revelation. It was NOT a transformation but a revelation of the glory that was Christ’s and was only veiled in His human body. Imagine yourself in Simon’s position!

This event was so striking that it is the ONLY event in the life of Christ other than the cross that Peter makes a specific reference to in His letters (II Peter 1:16-18, “*we were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory saying ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.*”)

It is a unique revelation of Christ in His glory, the only time before His return in glory.

Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

The 2 men (Moses & Elijah) are significant – they represent the Old Testament – both prophets and the Law. They stand with Christ, bearing testimony that He is the fulfilment of the whole OT. Also these 2 are connected with the prophecies about the Christ who would come.

Luke tells us their topic of conversation is the cross (Christ’s Exodus)! The cross was no accident – it was in the plan of God!

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish I will put up three shelters ...”

Peter, as usual, speaks out. He wants to immortalise the moment. He sees the 2 men leaving (Luke tells us), and he wants them to stay.

The tents possibly show that he is afraid of the glory and wants it to be veiled, OR they might refer to OT prophecy about the kingdom of the Messiah (Zechariah 14:16-19). Whichever, Peter obviously believes that this is the moment he has been waiting for, when the kingdom will finally come. All his hopes will now be fulfilled. Christ has been revealed in His glory – now all Israel will accept Him, surely!

BUT again Peter has not understood the need for the cross. This moment cannot be immortalised because Jesus must first accomplish His departure. The cloud then descends, providing the veiling that the disciples wanted!

A voice from the cloud, said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!”

This time it is not Christ who responds to Peter’s mistake, but God the Father Himself. The voice simply identifies Christ as the One Peter has already realised He is – the beloved Son of God.

The voice singles out Christ as the only one to be honoured – He is unique and greater than Moses or Elijah!

The Father then commands that we listen and obey. **Peter has not yet fully learnt to listen to Christ** – the truth of His death and resurrection are still too much for him to accept. From this point on though the momentum picks up and the gospels become a relentless march towards Jerusalem and the cross.

Our expectations need to be lined up with God’s plan – that is the key to endurance in peace.

The battle here is for the mind of Simon – will he listen to the voice of Christ or of Satan?

KEY LESSON:

Living in God’s purpose involves listening to His voice. Submit your mind to Him

THE COCK CROWS – John 18:12-27

The scene: Christ has celebrated the Jewish Passover meal with His disciples. Since Simon’s confession and the transfiguration many people have deserted Jesus as the opposition mounts. His teaching has been increasingly challenging too, and those who followed just out of interest or for their own needs have turned away. At one point Jesus even turned to the 12 and

asked would they leave to, but Simon said, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68).

Simon has come to believe that if there is no hope in Jesus then there is no hope at all.

At the Passover meal Peter had made a promise that he would follow Christ even to death (Luke 22:33), which he sincerely meant, but Christ had predicted that Peter would deny Him 3 times before the cock crowed the following dawn.

After the meal Jesus went with His disciples to a garden to pray. While He was there Judas came with a group of soldiers to arrest Him. Peter was the only disciple who tried to resist – he drew a sword and chopped off the ear of the servant of the High Priest (Malchus). It is Doctor Luke who tells us it was actually the earlobe he sliced off (indicating a sideways stroke intended to take off his head).

To Peter's amazement Christ told him to stop and healed the wounded man and then willingly allowed the soldiers to take Him to His trial. **Peter is bewildered. He cannot comprehend. He has almost lost all hope in Christ and is in despair.**

Together with John he follows after the soldiers as they lead Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest's home. He is struggling to understand what is happening – He had seen the glory of Christ on the mountain – he cannot reconcile it with this man who has effectively surrendered.

Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

Peter is identified first by his accent (Galilean).

But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said

Three times Peter denies Jesus just as Christ had foretold.

Just as he was speaking the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.

This is the second time Jesus gazes intently at Peter (the first was right back on the first time they met).

Peter suddenly realises that this is the fulfilment of Jesus' prediction. **In that gaze he is exposed.**

What kind of gaze was it? Surely not one of bitterness or condemnation, but one of love and forgiveness.

Then Peter ... went outside and wept bitterly.

Now Peter is given over completely to despair. So recently he had seen the glory of Christ in the transfiguration and even more recently he had heard the crowds proclaiming Jesus as the one who came in the name of the Lord as He entered Jerusalem.

Now the dream seemed to be over – the mission had failed. There didn't seem to be any hope for the kingdom that he had expected Christ to bring.

Even more painfully now, he had lost all hope in himself. He was confronted with his own weakness once more.

The battle here is for Simon's emotions – he succumbs to his feelings of fear, self-despair and hopelessness!

KEY LESSON:

Living in God's purpose involves control of our emotions. Submit your emotions to Him

THE BASIS FOR OUR HOPE – I Peter 1:3&4

"In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Christ." (v3)

On the third day after Jesus' death something truly amazing happened. The women had gone to anoint the body with spices, and came running back to the disciples with amazing news – the body was not there. Peter & John ran to the tomb. Peter looked in and saw the body was not there. Peter began to hope again!

Later that day Jesus Himself appeared to Peter personally.

Now hope was alive again – an eternal, unshakable hope. Christ had conquered death.

Peter began to understand that the cross had to happen! The resurrection is the greatest proof of the truth of Christianity. It is the greatest of all miracles and has never been disproved or explained away. The implications are immense! The rest (founders of other religions) speculate about what lies beyond the grave – He has gone there and returned to tell the story!

The risen Christ was the basis for Peter's hope. **Because He is alive, hope is alive and there is something worth living for!**

It was this that transformed Peter from a man who was afraid and prepared to deny Christ to one who could stand publicly and proclaim that Jesus was the only Saviour to crowds of thousands.

He would even be prepared to be imprisoned (at least 3 times) for this faith and eventually to die for it! The result of our hope is an eternal inheritance that cannot be corrupted or lost (v4). We have eternal security in Christ.

"... and into an inheritance that ... (is) kept in Heaven for you." (v4)

Our inheritance as God's children can never be lost. This rests on the continued life of Christ.

HOPE IN ACTION – II Peter 1:13-19

"set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed"

Peter's hope was centred on the promise of Christ that He would return again one day. He will return as He promised, and in the light of it Peter challenges how we live our lives.

- **Mind prepared for action (v13)**

How can we do this? Fill our minds with God's word! Study so we can answer the questions people have. Allow God to transform our minds by His Holy Spirit so that our way of thinking is in keeping with God's will. This is not something many Christians take seriously. Peter was uneducated yet he knew the Scriptures (he quotes them frequently in his writings). There are many influences that try to make us conform with the world around us, and we must learn to set limits (music, TV, movies etc.).

- **Emotions controlled (v13)**

Let our minds “preach” to our emotions. We must allow the truth of Christ and our confession of Him dictate to our feelings. When we feel depression / fear / hopelessness / self-rejection (like Peter in the gaze of Jesus) we need to focus our minds on the truth of God’s promises and let our emotions follow in line with our mind.

Will obedient to God not our own sinful desires (v14)

The centre of our Christian lives is an ongoing relationship with God as Father. We need to obey His will, as He knows best for us! As we walk by faith He keeps us and we know Him. Our sinful desires clamour for us to give in, stop struggling and just fulfil them – live for the moment – indulge self – focus on this world – find security in possessions. We must resolve that we will live lives that are completely, wholly given to Christ. This is an act of the will!

Intentional holiness (v15)

The ultimate goal of our lives is that we might be holy – like Christ, with no sin! This is not a fashionable concept in this age of permissiveness, but this is the call of Christ on our lives. Holiness is NOT the outward things, but an attitude of heart. It means to be different and set apart for God. This world isn’t the final story – when He comes we will be made holy, so why live any other way now? We will be holy when our minds are prepared, our emotions are controlled and our wills are resolved.

We are strangers in this world (v 17) – belonging to the Father and living according to His principles. Do you really live your life this way – distinctively different? If we take it seriously we will be hungering for His word, longing to spend more time in His presence, letting His Spirit control us completely, rejoicing in the hope that He has brought us into. Do not believe the lie and settle for something less than the full riches of Christ!

“live your life as strangers here in reverent fear” (v17)

The contrast in vv17 &18 is between corruptible things – our possessions here on earth – and Christ’s blood. In II Peter 3:1-18 we learn the reality about our earthly possessions – they are all “for the fire”! We must live as strangers in this world – living for Heaven, fearing only God, and determined to honour Him with intentional holiness.

**What is your purpose – are you building your own little kingdom on this earth, or building into God’s eternalkingdom?
How determined are you to persevere whatever may come?**

LESSON 3 – SIMON ON LOVE

THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE – II Peter 1:5-7

“and to brotherly kindness, love.”

- **Love is the end product of the progression of our faith**

True Christian love is more than just brotherly kindness. It is the mark of maturity in our faith.

The chain here is like a biochemical pathway. A breakdown at any point along the way will mean no end product. So if you lack love, look back over this ladder and ask where the error is.

In my experience the break is usually in either faith, knowledge or self-control.

- **True love develops in our lives with increasing Christ-likeness [the goal of our faith is to be just like Jesus]**

By His Spirit God is making something new in us. He will not give up until He has finished – until we are just like Jesus. This process will be painful at times, but He would not love us if He left us in our sin and ignorance. So what are the characteristics of this love that only comes from God?

LOVE IS ALL AROUND

“All you need is love” The Beatles (shortly before they fell out and broke up)

DEFINING LOVE

“the cognitive-affective state characterised by intrusive and obsessive fantasising concerning reciprocity of amorous feelings by the object of the amorance” 1977 conference of sociologists in USA

THE BASIN AND TOWEL – John 13:1-17

The scene: Just before the Passover meal with the disciples. John is sitting at Jesus’ right hand and laying his head on the Master’s breast, and Judas is sitting on His left – the position of the trusted friend. Perhaps Simon feels “put out” that he does not have one of these special positions?

On the way to Jerusalem the disciples had been talking a lot, and one of the main themes of their conversation had been who would be greatest in the Kingdom they expect Jesus to set up in Jerusalem.

But Christ wants to teach them that His Kingdom will not be based on hierarchy and rivalry, but on love.

Now He will define what love is in the only way love can be defined – in action.

Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love.

The love of Christ is active love – for love to be real it must be displayed.

Illustration from marriage (the man who made breakfast in bed on first morning of his honeymoon – so that is wife will know how to do it for him every other morning for the rest of their lives!).

He poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet.

The feet were filthy and this is the job reserved for the slave!

“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Peter is the only disciple ever to say “No” to Jesus! He is affronted that His Master should stoop to take the place of a slave.

This goes against everything he expected the Messiah to be! A King should not serve.

He had missed the point that Christ is a servant King, and, with the other disciples, had missed the reality that to be great in God’s kingdom means to be the least of all!

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

The washing Jesus is referring to here is more than just washing of feet – it refers to the washing away of sins through the cross of Christ. Peter must learn that Christ has come to serve and to lay down His life.

The cross will be the final part of this definition when God’s love is revealed in all its fullness.

“Then Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my feet as well!”

Peter still doesn’t understand fully, but he knows he has been wrong, so with his characteristic passion he goes from one extreme to the other!

“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another’s feet.”

Jesus now explains the purpose in this demonstration – that they should follow in His example. This kind of love is to be the trademark of His kingdom and of His followers.

No longer should they argue about who will be greatest, but they should pour out their lives in service just as He has!

KEY LESSON: Love is defined in action – in humble servanthood

BY HOOK & BY CROOK – John 21:1-23

We have moved forward to a point after the resurrection. The disciples are back in familiar Galilee, fishing again, and again without much success (encouraging for all you housemen who struggle with venflons – even pros get it wrong sometimes). Then a stranger on the shore shouts to them to tell them that they must cast their net on the other side of the boat. They do it, and they have another miraculous catch of fish. John realises that the stranger is Jesus.

This is the second miraculous catch, and it takes Peter back to the first one when he had first responded to the call to follow Christ. ***The 2 miraculous catches are like bookends around Peter’s experiences with Jesus in the gospels.***

Peter cannot wait to see Jesus. This time he doesn’t even wait to see if he can walk on the water to Him – he just jumps out of the boat and swims to shore.

Jesus is cooking a meal of fish for them – the first meal they will eat together after the Passover meal.

Memories flood back to Peter of his previous promises to follow and painfully of his denial of Christ. Perhaps he is wondering if he can ever serve Jesus again – has he blown it once for all?

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

Jesus knows that Peter still has pride in his heart.

Simon knows that although his faith has failed him in the past, his love for the Lord has remained steady:

Singer and author, Michael Card, writes, *“Notice that Peter’s position of leadership is based not on faith but on love. His faith has failed him more times than either of them can count, but his love has been constant, powerful, even if occasionally misguided.”*

In his heart he feels “At least I love Jesus more than the other disciples do!” So he replies:

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “You know that I love You.”

The word Jesus uses is “agape” while Peter replies with a weaker word “phileo.” Is he, perhaps, afraid to commit fully? Is he afraid that his love will fail? Simon knows Jesus well enough by now to know he cannot hide anything from Him – “You know, Lord” he says.

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Jesus gives this new commission to Peter. ***No longer will he just be a fisherman working with the hook, now he must also be a shepherd working with the crook.***

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”

Do you LOVE me? Why this question? BECAUSE in God’s service it is love that is of greatest importance – it is the key principle of His kingdom – devotion to Him and through this to our fellow man. The principle is this: ***if we are to love others we must first love God with all our hearts!*** This is what John teaches when he says “We love because He first loves us.”

God is the only source of this new agape love!

He answered, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

Again Jesus commissions Peter. Now it is to care for the sheep. These are the 2 roles of the pastor – to feed the sheep (teaching) and to care for the sheep (love).

In medical terms you could translate it to say that ***to be a good doctor you need good knowledge to heal your patient, but you also need genuine love to care for them!***

The third time He said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

KEY LESSON = If we are to love others we must first love Christ above all

BY HOOK & BY CROOK – John 21:1-23

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord You know all things; You know that I love You.”

Why is Peter hurt? Is it that the three-fold questions of Christ make His intention clear to Peter – three times He will restore Peter as three times Peter had denied Him.

In this encounter Jesus is drawing out the remaining pride in Peter’s heart, and gently He is restoring Peter. ***He is showing that though Peter had lost faith in Him, Christ never lost faith in Peter!*** He still has a great plan for Peter to use him to feed and care for His sheep.

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when ... you are old you will stretch out your hands ...” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Jesus shares this prophecy with Peter about his death. Peter is reminded again that to follow Jesus means to take the path of the cross. The words “stretch out your hands” refer to crucifixion. Tradition has it that Peter ended his days being crucified upside down because he refused to die in exactly the same way as his Lord – he was not worthy. But that was only after another 30 years of service for His Lord.

Then He said to Him, “Follow me!”

The simple call of the Lord is a powerful reminder to Peter of that time at the shores of this same lake after that first miraculous catch when Jesus had spoken the same words. It is as if the failings of the past 3 years do not matter any more. All that matters is Peter's loving relationship with His Lord. This is truly a new beginning – we are right back to a fresh slate!

Peter will become the first preacher and a foundation rock of the church. He will remain a fisher of men – travelling widely to preach the gospel, but he will also be the shepherd of the flock – feeding and caring for them until his dying day.

After all is said and done, all he must do is to follow his Master faithfully!

KEY LESSON = Love seeks to restore, and gives the second and third etc. chance

THE SOURCE OF LOVE – I Peter 1:22-23

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart. For you have been born again ... through the living and enduring word of God.”

Sincere means literally “without wax”. It was originally used by a sculptor in the days when flaws in a statue were covered over with wax. Sincere love does not have to hide anything – it is what it seems!

Sincere love flows out from our new relationship with our Father God. We are “born again” as God's children.

KEY LESSON = To love from the heart we must have a heart full of love

THE HARMONY OF LOVE – I Peter 3:8

“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

SINCERE LOVE has 3 great qualities:

1. **Sympathetic** = drawing alongside the other person to understand and to listen. Not thinking that we know best but seeking to understand the other person's perspective.
2. **Compassion** = feeling along with the other person their pains and fears.
3. **Humility** = does NOT seek its own end but is selfless. It does not seek anything in return but gives freely for the good of the other person. It does not hold grudges BUT wipes a clean slate.

This love is most powerfully demonstrated in **the cross**, as Christ (who had no sin) bore our sins in His body on the tree. It is through the cross that we understand what love is, and it is after the pattern of the cross that we must love others in sympathy, compassion and humility.

KEY LESSON = Love is focused on the needs of others

LOVE IN ACTION – I Peter 4:8-11

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others ...”

Love is active in:

1. **Forgiveness** – “covers a multitude of sin” – forgiving ourselves and others – very powerful thing!
2. **Hospitality** – sharing our time, homes, lives with one another
3. **Service** – whatever gift we have! – “administering God's grace” – we are stewards of it!

KEY LESSON = Love is an act of the will shown in forgiveness, hospitality and service

WHAT WOULD PETER SAY TO US TODAY?

I Peter 5:6&7, 10&11

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He might lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you... And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever, Amen.

Peter calls us respond to God's calling to His eternal glory, and never to settle for anything less than His will for our lives. He was Simon, the ordinary fisherman from Bethsaida on the shores of Galilee – in God's grace he became Peter, the rock, the fisher of men and the shepherd of the flock.

Who are you? And who will you become in God's plan? Where will He lead you, how will He use you?

Your life is a voyage of discovery in His plan – **a voyage informed by faith, inspired by hope, empowered by love.**

Don't become spiritually myopic, keep humbling yourself under His hand!