

## From the Lake to the Prison and Beyond

Recently I shared with the residents of the Mt. Vernon House two events in the life of Peter of which I called "From the Lake to the Prison" Today I want to expand those thoughts a bit in our time together. Let's begin with some background on Peter.

There was a man named Simon along with his brother Andrew selected by Jesus to become followers. Both of these men fishermen by trade and no doubt had spent many hours out on the Sea of Galilee fishing. Jesus changed Simon's name to Cephas, which means "rock." ***John 1:42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.*** Cephas is a Chaldean word with the Greek equivalent being "Peter." The stone, or rock, is a symbol of firmness and steadiness of character - a trait in Peter's character, especially after the ascension of Jesus, but before the death of Jesus he was rash and impetuous. But Jesus saw in Peter a character that would be expressed appropriately by the word "stone" or "rock."

While Peter was a fisherman by trade, all scriptural references to him fishing was near the shore where they cast their nets. We really have no reference to them venturing out into the middle of the sea nor do we have any reference to them as fishermen crossing the sea. Likely they did, but there is no Biblical indication of them doing so before Jesus came along.

If you are familiar with scripture, you are aware that often Peter spoke before he thought. He was impetuous to say the least. There was the time when he was witness to Jesus being transfigured into a spiritual state and was talking with Moses and Elijah, men of the past. Once that conversation had ended, Peter didn't know what to say but was compelled to say something. ***Mark 9:5-6 And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. (6) For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.***

Then there was the time Peter tried to rebuke Jesus. ***Matthew 16:21-22 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. (22) Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.***

Then as you will remember it was Peter that boldly said he would never deny Jesus but did, not once, twice but three times. This is the man we are talking about. Peter had his moments. There were moments of doubt, moments of fear, moments of anger and even moments of swearing and cursing. But through all of these moments, it seems that Peter matured and was more determined to do better.

I want to now look at one of those moments. While following Jesus they crossed the sea several times. One time they entered the boat to cross over to the other side and while in the sea a storm arose. This was not just any storm but rather it is described as a great storm. Listen to how Matthew describes it.

***Matthew 8:23-27 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. (24) And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. (25) And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. (26) And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. (27) But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!***

This storm was so furious that the waves began to cover the ship and no doubt they were taking on water. The disciples, which would include Peter an experienced fisherman that made his living on the sea, were afraid and cried out, "***Lord save us!***"

While it is hard for us to comprehend, Jesus was sleeping through the tempest. The fearful disciples woke him up. Once awake, Jesus rebuked the disciples and then he rebuked the sea. He said to the disciples, **“Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?”** Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

These men learned a valuable lesson that day while out on the lake. For one thing they saw the power of Jesus was unlike anything they had ever seen before in that he had power over nature itself. Secondly, no doubt their faith in Jesus was strengthened, and it was this faith that would sustain them in later years. They cried out, Lord save us!” and the Lord did. But while in the lake, Peter’s faith was weak and he feared for his life.

Now about fifteen years later, we find Peter in the streets of Jerusalem with the longtime friend, fishing partner, and fellow apostle James. Herod was in opposition to Christianity and killed James with the sword. It is not clear whether he beheaded James or run him through with the sword, but the results were the same. James was killed and seeing this pleased the Jews, he decided to kill Peter also but because of the approaching Passover he had to imprison Peter with the plan to execute him after the Passover was past.

Knowing human emotions as we do, the death of James must have been devastated to Peter. They had been together for a long time. They lived in the same town and were partners in the fishing business. Now they were apostles together and were sharing in the ministry of Jesus; and suddenly Herod kills him. How disturbing this must have been but even more so, Herod now sets his sights on Peter.

Apparently it took a while to find Peter because by the time they apprehended him it was too late to kill him because of the Passover feast had begun. So they locked him in prison until the Passover was past and then they would kill him. **Acts 12:4-6 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. (5) Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. (6) And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.**

Now here is the point. Back on the lake, Peter was fearful for his life because of the storm. Here when it seemed certain that his life would be taken the next morning, rather than fretting about it, Peter was sleeping like a baby. Why on the lake he cried out “Lord save us lest we perish” and here while in prison he was sleeping, as was Jesus in the storm. Both instances were life threatening yet in one there was panic and in the other there was peace. What was the difference?

The difference was increased faith to the point that he realized that the Lord would care for him. Peter matured in his faith. While in the wake of the storm, Jesus could peacefully sleep, now in the face of death, Peter had become so Christ like that he too could sleep in the wake of death. What a marvelous example of one maturing in the faith.

We see a similar attitude with the apostle Paul. While in prison in Rome and not knowing if he would live or die, he would write to his fellow brethren in Philippi words of comfort. Maybe Lydia read these words or that Roman jailer that was converted at midnight. Perhaps they were comforted when they read, **Philippians 1:20-23 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. (21) For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (22) But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. (23) For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: (24) Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.**

**YEARS BEYOND.** Well Peter was rescued from the grips of Herod and lived on to be an effective leader in the church. We see his faith continuing to become stronger. In the latter years of his life he would pen these words. *1 Peter 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.* Through the battles of life, Peter learned to put trials in proper perspective. He recognized that some good can come from trials. *(v7) That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*

Listen to what this arrogant, presumptuous, hot head says about behavior. *1 Peter 2:1-3 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, (2) As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: (3) If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.* Somewhere between the lake to the prison and beyond we see a changed man. This is what happens when the word of the Lord gets inside of you. So he admonishes us to desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow.

There was a time when Peter drew a sword and was ready to take on the entire Roman army in the defense of Jesus. In fact he cut off the ear of Malchus. But now in a more mature faith listen to what he says. *1 Peter 2:13-15 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; (14) Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. (15) For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:*

The point is that as one matures in the faith, their thinking, attitudes, and behavior will change. So it should be with us. As the Christian becomes older, he should be able to look back on his life and see how the Lord cared for him through the storms of life and understand even in the face of death that the Lord will continue to care for him. For Peter, he no longer had a fear of dying. While in prison and at the brink of death, he was able to lie down and go to sleep. In fact, he was sleeping so soundly that the Angel of the Lord had to wake him up in order to rescue him from that prison cell. Later as he neared death he would pen these words,

*2 Peter 1:13-15 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; (14) Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. (15) Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.* After my death, remember the teachings of the Lord. Now one of the things to remember is found back up in v9 and that is remember you were purged from sin. *2 Peter 1:9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*

For those of you that have obeyed the gospel; don't forget where you were and where you are now. *1 Peter 1:22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:* You purify your soul by obeying the truth. Have you done that?