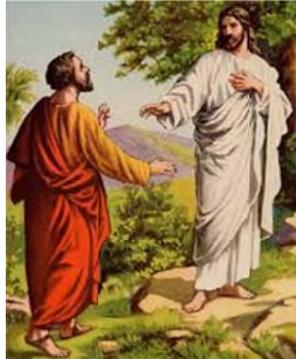


Peter Encounters Jesus

“Volatile Fisherman Turned Into Great Leader of the Early Church”



Background

The transformation of Simon, a impulsive man with a strong will and character, from Galilean fisherman to Peter, a loving leader of the early church, is a story of enduring power and has provided hope and inspiration for Christians throughout the ages.

Some encounters Peter had with Jesus:

1) A Call To Follow Jesus (Matthew 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-18; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-42)

Jesus sees the brothers Andrew and Simon, calls them to follow Him and they obey. The gospel writers clearly intend to portray Jesus’ authority as the one who calls and the appropriate response to this call. The content of the call that is important; it is first and foremost a call to follow Jesus, to be in relationship with him. This is the foundation of all the other aspects of the relationship between Jesus and Peter. In fact the call to follow Jesus is so important that Jesus’ last words to Peter, recorded this time in John’s gospel, are also ‘Follow me.’

Jesus calls Peter to a new way of life and living as a fisher of men. To this end, Jesus renames Simon. Peter is one of the ‘inner circle’ with James and John. They are singled out to spend extra time with Jesus and are given the privilege of seeing the raising of the Synagogue Ruler’s daughter from the dead, witnessing the transfiguration, and keeping watch with Jesus in Gethsemane. They receive teaching along with Andrew about the end of the age. Peter also has a one-to-one question-and-answer session with Jesus about the Temple Tax and has the privilege, apparently unique among the disciples, of hosting Jesus.

2) Peter Walking on Water (Matthew 14:22-33)

Peter’s strength of character was an asset and on occasion we see Jesus seeking to channel it towards a deeper faith. In this incident, Peter and the other disciples have spent a busy period of ministry with Jesus. They have tried to take rest together in a solitary place, but the crowds have continued to pursue them. Jesus then involves the disciples in an amazing miracle when he feeds over 5,000 people, before dismissing them to cross the lake in a boat.

The disciples have encountered a storm and have been battling the weather for many hours. When Jesus approaches them it is between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. They must have been physically exhausted, not only from their ministry, but also from their fight with the storm. They possibly feel abandoned by Jesus. However, their principal emotion when they see what they believe to be a ghost approaching is fear. In Peter this emotion is quickly reversed when he sees that it is Jesus. His instinct is to get to where Jesus is. We might consider his behavior is just another example of typically impulsive Peter, and the request to walk with Jesus on such rough and stormy water an ill-considered gesture, but Jesus does not condemn but seeks to encourage his faith.

Peter's question 'Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water' assumes that it is Jesus and should be read as a statement of faith, rather than an identity check. Jesus' response of 'Come' is entirely consistent with his initial call for Peter to follow him. Peter, inconsistent with this calling at other moments, wants to obey now in this unusual situation. This 'getting-out-of-the-boat' faith that he displays is precisely the kind he will need later on. Jesus' response to Peter's subsequent failure is not to condemn his initial faith, but the inconsistency and double-mindedness that he displays in sustaining it. Jesus wants more of this kind of faith from Peter.

3) Peter's Confession of Christ (Matthew 16:13-19; Mark 8:22-29; Luke 9:18-20)

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah was a strategically important milestone in Peter's life and in the Christian church. There are multiple interpretations of what the confession means. It seems like the confession underscores the importance of Jesus being the Son of God and Messiah, and the truth about Jesus and our faith in Him is the foundation upon which the church is built. Peter also is likely in mind in Ephesians 2:19-20 where Paul refers to God's household being built on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

4) Peter Rebuked by Jesus (Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-9:1)

Peter's strength of character requires a sustained molding process. We are not told why Peter is so opposed to the idea of Jesus dying, it seems possible that he is expecting Jesus to be some kind of political Messiah, and that Jesus' exaltation to the throne of Israel will also mean glory for Peter, reinforcing the need for Jesus' strong correction. We can also see the extent of the change that takes place in Peter for he eventually submits to Jesus' will and no longer seeks his own glory.

5) Peter Denies Jesus 3 Times (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 13:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27)

While all of Jesus' interactions with Peter can be understood as being loving and motivated by Peter's best interests, a few insights noted by the gospel writers show us the depth of his concern. Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial is one example of this. At the time it was given, it clearly dispirited and concerned Peter and the other disciples. In retrospect, however, Peter would have been reassured that although Jesus knew in advance of his betrayal, it did not disqualify him from a relationship with Jesus, or a position as his disciple.

Luke's account gives us particular insight. Jesus begins his prediction with the words 'Simon, Simon'. The repetition demonstrates a sense of grief, of kindness and of love; Luke uses it to highlight moments of particular emotion that Jesus experiences. Here, Jesus is particularly moved by the trial that he knows Peter will undergo and his use of Simon, rather than Peter, underlines this. All of Simon's progress towards becoming Peter will be knocked back in this one incident.

Satan has asked to sift all the disciples (Greek 'you' is plural), but Jesus has prayed for Simon that his faith will not fail. Jesus wants to guard his relationship with Peter, which, at the moment of his testing and in the future, will be based upon faith. Luke is clear: Peter will survive the ordeal because Jesus has prayed for him. It displays one of the ways in which his relationship with Peter and his relationship with the Father interact. Jesus has particular concern for Peter in his trial as he will be the only disciple to betray Jesus in such a public fashion. He is also concerned that Peter will come through his ordeal and become the rock he should be. Jesus expects Peter to eventually strengthen the other disciples.

6) Jesus Reinstates Peter (John 21: 15-19)

Jesus' concern and love for Peter is also shown in his post-resurrection conversation in John 21. He takes the time aside (although possibly not out of earshot of the other disciples) to reinstate Peter and demonstrate his forgiveness. Although Peter is hurt by Jesus' third repetition of his question 'Do you love me?', Jesus is gently forcing a threefold declaration of his love that mirrors his threefold denial.

Furthermore, the repetition requires Peter to declare 'Lord you know all things...' and throw himself in reliance back on Jesus. Rather than the previous episodes where Peter has demonstrated a penchant for extravagant claims of loyalty, here he keeps the declaration simple and appeals to Jesus to weigh his words. There has been progress in Peter's relationship with Jesus as Peter responds in a more appropriate manner than he has on previous occasions.

Thus, even in this brief exchange, we can see how his relationship with Jesus brought about a dramatic change in Simon Peter.

Rest of the Story

Peter becomes a key leader of the early church, and thousands come to faith through his ministry. And his teachings inspired Christians in his time and us today 2,000 years later. Experts say Peter was crucified during the persecution of Christians by Nero, and likely Peter asked to be hung on a cross upside down as a final act of devotion to Jesus (see Acts; First and Second Peter).

Some Lessons Learned from Peter's Life

- 1) When Jesus calls us to do something, we should immediately obey.
- 2) We should tell others that we found Jesus (the Messiah; Son of God)
- 3) God can use people of all personality types, including strong willed, impulsive people
- 4) God loves and uses imperfect people to accomplish His purposes
- 5) God forgives us and gives us second (and many more!) chances
- 6) When we stay focused on Jesus we can accomplish amazing things
- 7) We can unknowingly be used by Satan if we are not careful
- 8) Jesus builds His church and nothing will be able to stop it
- 9) Being humble trumps being boastful and proud
- 10) Jesus is always there for us, and prays (intercedes) for us when needed (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; I John 2:1)**