

DATE: March 16, 2008

TEXT: Matthew 26:31-35; 69-75

TITLE: "Following the Final Footsteps of Christ III: A Look at Peter"



Throughout this Lenten Season we have studied the 26th chapter of Matthew and seen the final footsteps of Christ before the cross. The last few years on Palm Sunday I have preached on the Triumphant Entry of Christ. Today I am going to continue my series on Matthew 26. This morning we are going to look at Peter and his role in this final week.

Upon occasion I enjoy reading biographies of famous Christian men. A couple years ago I was reading a biography on Wesley. It was written by one of the grandchildren of John Wesley. I thought to myself "who better to write a biography than a family member". I discovered I was wrong. John Wesley was a great man of God; he was not perfect. The grandson saw his grandfather through eyes of love and not total honesty. It was not a good biography.

The Good news is this: Scripture does not make that mistake. There are heroes in the Bible, but they are far from perfect. We see the sins of Moses. We certainly see the sins of David. And possibly the greatest hero of the New Testament, Peter, is portrayed in very honest terms. I love

Peter. He is possibly my favorite person in scripture. The mistakes of Peter do not diminish my opinion. On the contrary, for me this makes him a much richer person. This morning we are going to look at Peter. Let me begin by giving a brief introduction to my friend, Peter.

Peter was born with the name Simon; Jesus gave him his new name. His father was Jonah.

He had one brother named Andrew. Peter was married, we do not know his wife's name.

Peter grew up in Bethsaida but moved, because of his business, to Capernaum. With his father and brother he owned a fishing business. He was in partnership with the Zebedee family. Peter was in the inner circle of disciples. He was very close to Jesus. But he was not perfect. Let us look at our text for this morning and see the strengths and the weaknesses of Peter. I will share five lessons on Peter.

Lesson # 1 See the determination of Peter. READ *Matthew 26: 33 & 35*

33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."
35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Peter was absolutely determined to stand up for his Lord no matter what happened.

Remember this conversation took place on the walk to the Garden of Gethesemane. Let me say I do not believe this determination is a bad thing. Making resolutions is not bad. Even when resolutions fall by the wayside, they point to the desires of the heart. Let me share two illustrations.

In working with young people I stress the need to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. I often go to camp and one of the last activities at camp is a "say-so" around a campfire. This is an opportunity for young people to share what they discovered at camp. I often hear testimonies like this: "This is my fourth year at camp... I have accepted Christ this year again for the fourth year. When I go home I intend to stand up for my faith." Let me say, I believe that is good. That is determination. I am sure the young person will continue to have times of failure, but the determination is good.

The same thing happens to me. I often have strong resolutions: "I will faithfully spend a half hour in prayer and scripture every day." I will uphold this resolution for a few weeks and then the business of life pushes it away one or two days a week. And before I know it my devotions will be inconsistent. I will then, once again, resolve to have a daily Quiet Time and begin the process anew.

We see in Peter a determination of faithfulness and that is good.

Lesson # 2 We see the faithfulness of Peter. Peter tried to stand by Christ. *John 18:10*

identifies Peter as the man who took a sword and tried to defend Jesus in the Garden.

10Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) 11Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Peter could have been arrested and executed for this attempt. We also read in our text that

Peter was in the courtyard outside the palace of Pilate. All the other disciples were in hiding. Only

Peter tried to stay close to Jesus. Peter tried to be faithful.

I took a course at seminary a number of years ago on Church Planting. I know a number of people who have started new churches. About half the churches that are planted fail. For a variety of reasons the church after two to three years just does not get started. Let me say I never think negatively of the man who tried to plant the church. Our Lord never promised success. Our Lord demands faithfulness. The fear of failure can be a far greater sin than the failure itself. Mother Theresa once stated, **"When people say bad things about you, don't be upset...think what they could say if they really knew you."**

Do you know who is the strike-out king of baseball? This man struck out 1330 times in his career. He also hit 714 Home Runs. Most people remember Babe Ruth for his home runs. Do you know who had 511 loses in his career? His name was Cy Young. The point is this. We are called to be faithful to Christ. At times we will fail. At times we will be ridiculed. At times we will be blessed. Regardless of the outcome let us strive to be faithful. Peter was trying to be faithful.

Lesson # 3 Note the failure of Peter. READ *Matthew 26:73-74*

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." 74Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!"

Possibly the greatest sin you can commit is the arrogant presumption that you will not sin.

Paul recognizes this truth when in *1 Corinthians 10:12* he writes..

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall."

Luke tells us that upon his third denial, Peter heard the rooster crow and he caught the eye of Jesus. I believe the lesson is this: Peter caught the eye of Jesus too late. We see this in Peter again and again. He makes a bold declaration of faith. He fully intends to uphold this declaration, but then he relies on his own strength, takes his eye off Jesus and fails. We saw this a few weeks ago when

Peter was walking on water. We saw this in his declaration of faith in Caesarea when Jesus had to then command Satan to get out of his life. And we see this in our text.

But I also see this in myself. Again and again I fail because my focus is shifted off Christ and onto something else. Often my focus is shifted onto worthwhile pursuits, but they fail because it is not on Christ. I see this at times in my ministry. I desire renewal and revival in this church. I pray for this daily. The problem arises when I place my goals and my steps ahead of Christ, when I focus my attention on the Church instead of on Christ.

I see the same thing happened as I was raising my children. I wanted my children to be good loving children. When I focus on that goal I discover I am constantly losing my patience and yelling at my kids. When I focus on Christ, I discover the patience He gives me.

Lesson # 4 Notice the remorse of Peter. READ *Matthew 26: 75*.

75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly

2 Corinthian 7:10 states

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret." REPEAT.

Peter was truly sorrowful for his sin. This is the first step to repentance. When we sin, do we

truly feel remorse? One of the great dangers we face is a hardening of our heart to sin. If a person commits a sin enough, soon rationalization takes place and remorse is lost. When this happens, forgiveness is very difficult. A man loses his temper once.... twice... a hundred times. Soon the man thinks to himself.... I am just standing up for myself; the other person was wrong. That is a hardening of a heart. For me the problem is patience, for others it is jealousy, for others bitterness, for others something else. It is so easy to fall into sin, to rationalize our actions and to harden our hearts. Peter was immediately remorseful and this was the first step to healing and forgiveness.

Lesson # 5 Note the restoration of Peter. This is not found in our text. As a matter of fact it is not found in Matthew. It is found in John. *John 21:15 states...*

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

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

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." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Jesus encounters Peter on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he

would feed the lambs of the new kingdom. Three times Peter declares his faith in Christ and his desire to serve. He is restored and becomes a powerful man of God in the new Church. A few days later, on the day of Pentecost, he boldly declares his faith to all of Jerusalem. Again risking arrest and execution he stands up for his faith and ministers in the name of Christ. Peter was not perfect. Paul tells us of a number of times Peter loses his focus on Christ. He still fails... but again and again he has remorse, he repents and takes new steps of ministry for Christ.

We see in Peter a model for ourselves. We must stand for Christ. We will certainly have times of failure. We will certainly have times of denial, but we must seek forgiveness and once again stand up for Christ. That is our call to service.

AMEN.