

From Simon to Peter #05 - 1st Impressions Confirmed #2

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the transformative power of Jesus in changing individuals from their sinful state to fulfill God's intended purpose for their lives.

Duration: 31:36

Scripture: John 2:13

Topics: "Simon to Peter"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes Jesus' unique perception of the need for change in people's lives. He highlights how Jesus not only sees what is wrong in the world, but also knows what is right and desires to bring about that change. The speaker uses the example of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well to illustrate this point. Despite her social outcast status, Jesus offers her living water and transforms her life. The speaker concludes by emphasizing that Jesus is not just a human being, but the Son of God who has the power to bring about salvation and change in people's lives.

Transcript

We continue this morning with our subject, From Simon to Peter, and with the aspect of the subject that we began last Lord's Day morning, when we were dealing with some of the early confirmations of the Saviour's claims to Simon Peter. Now we are not directly on the theme of Christmas, but our subject is Christocentric, Christ is at the heart of it. And therefore we feel justified in continuing with this theme this morning and trust that it will honour Him, whose name is uppermost in our minds and in our hearts at the present time.

To make a promise is one thing, to deliver the goods is quite another. However, when Simon heard Jesus address him by name and affirmed so confidently that this man Simon would be in due course another man, requiring a new name, Petros, Peter, a rock, a rock. One wonders what really went on in Simon's mind and heart.

He doubtless questioned, it would seem to me, the right of this stranger to address him in this way. What right has he to say this? And assuming that he has the right to talk like this to us, what does he know about me anyway? And assuming that he knows me and knows that I need such a radical change as to take me from being the Simon I am to this new character whose name is Petros, what is he able to do

about it? The journey from Simon to Peter would be a long uphill climb, involving the most radical change in character and in conduct and in spirit. Did the Nazarene know his man? If he did, what recreative resources does he command to bring about the kind of transformation that he speaks about without qualification? Now, we saw last Lord's Day morning that Jesus knew his man all right, for he knew all men.

We don't propose going back over the same territory this morning, but let us repeat this. Jesus knows his man. He knows you, and he knows me, and he knows every other man, and he knows every woman, and every boy, and every girl, and every creature.

And this is part of the glory of his Saviorhood. He knows men. He knows me.

You and I may be hiding in some tucked away corner this morning, thinking that we are separate from everyone, and no one really knows us. My friend, you've made a terrible blunder. He does.

He knew Nathanael. He knew Nicodemus. He knew the woman of Samaria.

We've seen this, and the evidence of his knowledge of them--intimate and real, knowledge of their hearts, knowledge of their thinking, knowledge of their behavior and history. He knew them. We now propose looking at that same narrative, John 1 to 4, looking at this narrative and seeing with equal clarity the truth brought out, that he not only understands us, not only knows us through and through, but he has the power to make us into the kind of people he would have us be.

And this, of course, is what rounds the whole message of Christmas into one whole. What's the use of having someone who has unique diagnostic powers to tell us what's wrong with us, if he cannot prescribe? What's the value of the physician that comes along our bed and says, look man, you're dying, but can do nothing about it? Here is a but with a power to bring Simon to Peter, to bring a sinner to sainthood, to bring a child of Adam, to bear again the image of a child of God. And this is salvation.

Now the first four chapters of John's Gospel serve most forcibly to portray these facts, and I want to turn to them now. Two main things I shall be dwelling on this morning, and the first is this. It is Jesus's outstanding perception of the need for change.

Not only did he know man, not only does he know me and know you, he is impassioned with a blazing concern that we should be changed. And not simply changed, but changed so that we become precisely what God meant us to be. His perception of the need for change, and of the change that we need.

Have you not noticed that whereas no one else appeared to be concerned about the condition of things and people, as described in these first four chapters, he was. Everyone else seems to be taking things so much for granted, there's nothing very much wrong, but when he comes everything is wrong. And he sees what is wrong, but not only that, he knows what is right.

And his concern is not simply to change things from what they are, but to change things so that they become what they ought to be. He knew what was right, therefore he could not tolerate what was wrong, he would make the wrong right. There are people who simply want to change things.

It's the love of novelty that characterizes their lives. And if only they can change things, well they're happy. That's not Jesus Christ.

The change that he wanted was a change that corresponded to the perfect will of God. He knew what God meant the world to be. He knew what God meant Simon to be.

He knew what God meant the woman of Samaria to be. He knew what God meant you to be, and me to be. And that is the mainspring of his passion for change.

It's not simply to change things superficially. It is so to change men and circumstances that they become what God meant them to be. Now let's just look at this briefly.

Why change Simon? Simon must be changed to Peter because the man as he is, is not the man as God meant him to be. As Simon he was alienated from God. Sin has made his life abnormal from the point of view of his maker.

He was meant to be different. It is something so simple about it that one tends to miss it. Jesus saw not only the Simon before him, but he had the image of the man he was meant to be, in God's plan.

His concern, let me repeat, is not for novelty but for normality. Normality according to the divine purpose. And nothing else is normal in the life of Jesus.

Normality is not doing what other people are doing. Normality is being what God meant me to be. As Jesus looked at that disorganized, disintegrated life of Simon, he saw the lostness.

What we can only see in retrospect, he perceived in prospect. He foresaw the tragedy of Simon's powers of leadership, his vast energies of soul and of body being used simply to shuffle around on a fisherman's boat, bossing this man and bruising that character, being just the kind of impetuous sinner he's always been. Oh, the tragedy, the lostness of it, especially when he could see what God meant him to be, the fisher of men, the pillar of the church, the apostle of the reigning Lord, the builder of the churches, the strategic apostle of the New Testament, and the shepherd of souls.

Not that fishing fish is in any wise unworthy. It certainly is not. But God had something bigger, something greater in comparison with which Simon's life at the present time was totally lost, apart from the fact that as a sinner he was under the condemnation of God.

That's why Simon needs to be changed. He needs to be changed because he's not what God meant him to be. And my friend, that's why you and I need to be changed.

It doesn't matter how much we are like other people or unlike other people. The one thing that matters is this, are we what God meant us to be? And if the Christian religion is anything, it is this. And if it is not this, then for God's sake, let's get rid of it.

There are plenty of religions in the world that talk about change, but have not the capacity to bring forth the goods. Christianity claims to be able to remake and renew men and people. Simon needed to be changed, not for change's sake, but to become the normal man in God's sight.

Why change the temple? John 2, 13-22. You remember the story, Jesus Christ goes into the temple, and he ends up driving out the money changers and those who sold doves and animals in the temple prison. Why change the temple? Now isn't this ridiculous, someone might say.

Here is a man of Nazareth, he's come up from the backwoods of society, he comes into the city, he's overwhelmed with the things he sees, and he begins to get cross and angry. That's how people talk. And

of course, just as there was a natural and human justification for Simon's present mode of living, so was there a kind of justification for everything that went on in the temple prison.

People sold doves and animals because it was useful for those that were sacrificing them. And so you can rationalize the whole thing. The exchange of money was necessary in order to pay the temple shekel in the coinage of the temple.

And so you can rationalize that. There was, humanly speaking, a reason for almost everything that went on. But when Jesus came in, his soul blazed within him with a holy zeal and a passion for change.

Why change? Why not see what's good here? See the glory of the sanctuary. See the people coming, and they want to worship and they want to sacrifice. Why not let things be as they are? Let me come back and repeat.

The concern of Jesus for change was not for change's sake. His was not a love for novelty. He knew what the temple was meant to be.

And it was as one who knew what the temple of God was meant to be, he looked into the faces of those men that traded on other people's religion and said, Look, Jesus, you have made my father's house a den of thieves. What was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations has become a den of religious thieves. You see the point? It's not simply that he knew men.

It's not simply that he wanted change. He wanted such a change as to bring the whole temple life into harmony with the will of God. Behind the stench of the cattle and the noise of the money changers, and the evident greed of the multitudes that came, he was devoured with a zeal for the will of God.

Move along. Why change Nicodemus? It's the same principle. He's not simply concerned to see Nicodemus a slightly different man from the man he is.

He was religious enough already, perhaps a little too religious, in one sense. Why was Jesus concerned to change Nicodemus? Well, here he is, sophisticated, theologically minded, one of the great men of his society, the teacher in Israel, not a teacher, a ruler of the Jews, and having a hand in organizing the life of the temple and what went on in the temple presence. A most influential man.

Here he is. Why change him? Why change him? One for his own salvation. He's only once born, born of the flesh, born of the will of man, and no man can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

Why change him? Perhaps also that he should in turn lend a hand to the changing and transformation of the temple, that it should once again be the kind of place that God meant it to be. But he must be changed to become the man God meant him to be. And I'll ask the same question about the woman of Samaria.

Why change the woman of Samaria? This thrills me, I must say. She was quite a different character from Nicodemus, morally and otherwise. Do you know God had a purpose for her? Hallelujah.

The Son of God came to the life of the morally derelict and looked at them and spoke to them, and saw that God had a plan for such. Why change the woman of Samaria? Well, it would be a good thing simply to change her mode of living, that's true. And yet that was not the ultimate in our Lord's purpose.

He would make her the kind of woman God meant her to be, and God had a plan for her. And you see, at the end of the story, we're given to understand something of that purpose of God for her. Let me read to

you again, in this context, verses 39 to 42.

Many Samaritans from the city believed in him, that is in Jesus, because of the woman's testimony. That's part of the divine plan for her. Her testimony was, he told me all things that ever I did.

So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, it's no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard him ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.

Can you see what's happened? This dear woman, who was first of all bearing not bad tidings, but bad habits and a carrier of moral corruption all around, in the mind and purpose of God she was to open the gateway into the city of Samaria for the incoming of the Savior of the world. And there she is at the moment, in her sin, lost. God had a plan for her.

Jesus' astonishing powers of perception. He knew the human heart, and not only knew what was there, but knew what was there in relation to what ought to be there, in relation to the will of God. Now that brings me to the other matter.

Our Lord's astonishing power to effect such changes as were necessary to bring people and society into the proper and complete alignment with the will of God. Now this is the other thread woven into the pattern of these opening episodes in our Lord's public ministry. He knows all men, knows what we are, knows what we ought to be, but he carries in his word and in his heart and in his being the authority and the power to bring us to that very place in the divine purpose.

Now having already seen this power reflected in some of the passages to which we've referred, I propose now to confine my remarks to three illustrations of this power, and three only. I deliberately choose these three illustrations from John 1 to 4 because they serve to show our Lord's power, one, over material things, two, over the moral and spiritual, three, over physical affairs. First of all, Jesus' power over things material.

In John 2, 1 to 11, he turned water into wine. What a delightful episode that was. And what a remarkable indication of the kind of thing he was able to do.

Here in this first sign of his deity and of his messiahship, our Lord Jesus Christ manifests himself as the Lord of Nature, the Lord of Nature. This appointment was not the least, was probably the least consequence, I should say, of the failure of wine on such an occasion in a wedding in the Near East of our Lord's day. That there was disappointment is evident.

I don't need to stress that. It's evident to anyone that knows the narrative. Disappointment there must have been.

But according to J.D.M. Dirrott, such a thing meant much more than ordinary embarrassment for the hosts. They may well be involved in a pecuniary liability. Now this is something quite new to us, Westerners.

They might even be involved in a court case. There was an element of reciprocity about everything that took place in a wedding. For example, you would invite all your neighbors.

And just because one neighbor would present a son or daughter of his neighbor in a certain way, so you were expected to do the same. Just because one neighbor laid the table in a certain way, you would be able, you would be expected to do something similar. There was this element of reciprocity.

And therefore, according to this authority at any rate, it was very possible, if not probable, that those who had failed to make provision for the wedding festivities, the wine running out, would be required to answer for it even in the court of law of the day. Failure to provide what was customary would be tantamount to breaking a kind of unwritten social contract. Against such a background of rich national custom, we see that there was a deep social stigma involved in all this, as well as a purely domestic dimension to the premature failure of the supply of wine.

Thus, the Lord steps in. Mary, his mother, tells him about it and asks him to do something. And what he does in every orchard, every year, by means of a natural process, a process involved in viticulture, he now does in one pregnant moment by his sovereign word, he causes the water to become wine.

Now, that the event had a primary message to the newly married couple is evident. That is obvious. It spoke to them of a friend who could change water into wine, who could save them from disappointments galore if they kept in touch with him throughout their married life.

Oh, it told them no end of things. It was a message for them, as well as saving them out of the very difficult situation that had emerged. But it also bore a special message for Simon and for ourselves.

We need to know that the Lord who comes to us and promises to change us into different people is not just a little babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, making a mother cry. The Son of Mary is more than Mary's son. He's the Son of God.

He's the Lord of the universe. He holds the whole wide world in his hand. This is my Savior.

Who is he in yonder stall, asks the writer of the hymn, at whose feet the shepherds fall? And he answers, "'Tis the Lord, the King of glory. "'Tis the Lord, O wondrous story. And if he's not the Lord, then to worship him is idolatry.

But if he is, then to worship him is obligatory. His power is the power of one who rules the course of nature. And that is the Jesus that is introduced to us in these remarkable words in John's Gospel.

His power over things, material, is, however, matched by his power over moral and spiritual factors in the lives of men. He changed the moral and spiritual corruptor of that Samaritan city into a spiritual benefactor of the whole community. The very worst Samaritan in that Samaritan city, he transformed into a good Samaritan, who blazed forth not words of lust nor deeds of lust from now on, but words of grace and healing.

I don't know how you feel as you read this story. I think it is true to say that generally we shudder a little. We shudder with an almost instinctive sense of horror as Jesus Christ opens a little window into the woman's heart.

There she is standing so near to him. We know him. He's the peerless, pure Son of God.

The very epitome, the very embodiment of holiness and purity. And there she is right by his side. And then he opens the gateway, he opens the window into her heart a little, and he lets us see the private life of that

talkative and religious woman who stood there by Sica's well.

And it makes such a contrast. We all must ponder for a moment and fear in our ignorance that something of her impurity will pass over to him. Beneath that friendly exterior of a smile and a welcome and a little wit, beneath that friendly exterior is a foul condition of heart.

Behind that controlled reticence lies a ravenously menacing passion that has already impinged detrimentally upon six men and broken not only six men's lives, but possibly six men's homes. It is no wonder that she has to come alone in the heat of the midday sun to get her water from the well. Probably none of the decent women of that Samaritan village would walk with her or talk with her.

But see the end of the story. See the end of the story. Will you don't stop there? If you stop there, there is nothing but heartbreak.

See the end of the story, men and women. And you see what happens here. That mongrel community, backward and poor as they were, experienced a new tide of holy influences moving into their town, casting its healing light on all hands, bringing salvation, so that the town testifies, we've heard him ourselves, and now we know he is the savior of the world.

How did they come to know? Through this woman. Changed. A witness.

Simple, but profound. Radical. Her testimony to the village opened the door to the coming of the savior himself.

They invited him because they heard and saw her. And when he came, something of an altogether supernatural dimension took place. All because of her.

All the power of Jesus to change people. And the kind of heartaches that accompanied this situation. And the man is gone in posthaste because he's heard something, perhaps seen something with his own eyes in Jerusalem over the recent festive season.

He's seen the Lord perhaps doing something that caused others to believe in him. I don't know, but a denier actually knows about him and he's on foot or on horseback or what have you. I don't know, but away he goes.

You notice he's got no time for introduction because his son, he said, was at the point of death when he left home. And he's won, please come down and do something ere my child die. You sense the urgency.

And Jesus turns to him and says, he says, you people are always seeking a sign. And if you don't see signs, you don't believe. You notice the man doesn't pause to explain himself or apologize or anything at all.

He just gets right on to the matter in hand and he says, please come down quickly ere my child die. There's no time for an explanation. My boy's dying.

And Jesus looked at him. Think of the intervening miles between the north and the south. Jesus, son of Mary, did not take one mile south to lessen the distance between him and the boy that was dying.

And he stood where he was. And with his sovereign power, he turns to the Father, putting his character in the word and the promise. And he says, look man, he says, go home, your boy will live.

What a risk. Ha ha. A risk for me to say that.

And a risk for you to say that. But not for him. He had power.

He was the Lord of glory. And the New Testament only makes sense on the basis of the fact that Jesus was the person he believed he was. And the New Testament declares he was.

He had power to heal in the realm of the body as he had power to change water into wine and to forgive sin. And change the human heart. Without moving from where he was, he had the power to utter the word.

And the event followed. Oh what sovereign power that. Let not any sentimentalizing about gentle Jesus, meek and mild, hide the glorious fact of his mighty power.

And it is with this thought that I conclude this morning. If the New Testament is true, as we believe it most certainly is. And if the Christ of Bethlehem is the Son of God, the only Savior God has ever anointed and sent into this world.

If he is that.

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