

Peter Before

by John Follette

The sermon 'Peter Before' explores the story of Peter's boasting and Jesus' rebuke, teaching us about the importance of humility and faith in following Jesus.

Scripture: Psalm 138:6, Proverbs 11:2, Matthew 26:69, Luke 22:24, Luke 22:54, John 21:1, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Philippians 2:3, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Following Christ", "Humility And Faith"

Description

John Follette delves into the story of Jesus appearing to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias in John 21:1-18, emphasizing the profound wisdom and tact displayed by Jesus in His interactions. He explores the disciples' mindset of disappointment and confusion after Jesus' death and resurrection, revealing their struggle to understand the spiritual nature of His teachings amidst their Kingdom-focused expectations. The sermon highlights Peter's boastful declaration of loyalty to Jesus, illustrating the importance of genuine faith over extravagant prayers and the need for humility and self-denial in following Christ.

Transcript

This afternoon I want to talk to you about Jesus. I want you to see Him in action that you might see how He handles certain situations. He is unique in the way He deals with people because He has such wisdom and tact.

The story I want to take up is found in John 21:1-18. Let us read it over again to refresh our minds and to get a clear picture of the scene. It is a refreshing story because it does not involve any special doctrinal issue, neither is it complicated with too many characters. This is just an ordinary incident and yet is one of the most fascinating pictures of Jesus in His dealings with the human heart. How one can look at Him here and trace His thought and actions in behalf of a needy heart and not love and adore Him is quite beyond me! In this study I want Him to be unveiled, as it were, and to stand before you.

Before we can appreciate this story we must go back a bit and get a clear idea of the background, which is suggested by the first phrase in the story, "after these things Jesus showed Himself," etc. To view the drama, hearing the conversations and watching the actions will not mean very much to us unless we know what has happened to call forth the story. Suppose you should receive a letter starting off, "After all these things had happened," etc., and then following with some interesting doings of your friends, you would doubtless say, "How strange! I do not know what my friends have been doing so how can I get any connection to make this letter mean something to me?" It is the same with this story. If we fail to know

some of these things, it reduces itself to merely a passing incident. As a rule that is about all that many get out of it. They find here a miracle (which, after all, is about the last thing to be considered) and they also find Peter being reinstated after his failure. Both are here but if that is all, why introduce the story by, after these things? Well, many things had happened as you know. I want to call your attention to one thing which influenced the disciples to take the attitude they did. Then let us refer to two incidents in the life of Peter which, if known in connection here, make the story alive and radiant. Here is a brilliancy of heart life and light captivating in its subtle suggestion. Here we must not only hear words but keep our eyes open to see the seemingly artless action of the characters.

First of all, what is the heart mood of these disciples as they take this fishing trip? Of course, they are disciples of the Lord and we would naturally expect them to be strong in faith since they have been with Him for three years, heard His messages and seen His miracles--and then, too, there is nothing like a personal contact and fellow-ship to make us understand. They were privileged people. And certainly, after He has accomplished His death and resurrection, their hearts ought to be buoyed up and bounding with faith and great hope. But what is the real situation? These disciples had suffered a terrific blow; their hearts were sorely disappointed; their vision had faded and the hope which they had entertained had been dashed to the ground and they knew no way out of their difficulty. Not having understood His message, from its truly spiritual side, they were at a loss to adjust themselves to the present seeming failure.

Let us remember that Jesus had been continually preaching to them about the Kingdom. This Kingdom idea (of course always to them a physical matter) was most welcome. They were weary and tired of foreign tyranny and longed for Israel's national life to be restored and the privilege of showing to the other nations her power and glory. They were Kingdom conscious, as it were, and interpreted His visitation, message, and miracles in the light of a manifest Kingdom soon to be set up. This is evidenced by such incidents as the ambitious mother seeking a place for her sons; the desire among themselves to be great in the kingdom; the wish to make Him a King by force; and other occasions when they asked Him if He would not then restore the Kingdom.

Since this was the mental attitude and general conception, much of Jesus' teaching about the character of the subjects of the Kingdom, and motives, and the Kingdom being within you did not please them. They had to listen to His words about suffering and death but they did not like it and even rebuked Him for speaking thus. They lived daily in the hope that He would inaugurate the Kingdom and place them in positions of authority and power.

Finally He dies. What a shock! But He is resurrected from the dead and appears to them. Hope faintly stirs and once more they look to Him to fulfill His promise. But His visitations were not so very satisfactory, for He disappears almost as soon as He comes. Thus He leaves them again wondering. This is the third time He shows Himself. So let us not be too harsh in our judgment of them. Shall we not learn the lesson of tolerance? Let us put ourselves where they were and erase all we know of the glorious history of Christ and think if perhaps we would not have done as they did. In heart they wanted to love and trust the Lord but they could not figure out this seeming failure. Did you never have your mind in confusion over something you had all the time hoped was of the Lord? We must be patient with them. Now comes a perfectly natural and logical reaction. They are human and the whole procedure is what one would naturally expect. They have not the faith to wait or to pray it through so they do the next thing--they try to think it through. There are many things in life we shall never be able to think through, but we may pray them through.

This is always true in the matter of spiritual truth and revelation. Mysteries are not discerned with the mind but with the heart. Faith reaches out by the Spirit of revelation and thereby touches the invisible until it becomes more real to us than the ground we tread upon. Through the spirit of revelation we can touch the mysteries of God until they feed and refresh our hearts. These poor men were sick, sore, and disappointed in heart. The thing had not worked out as they had hoped it would. Have you ever been disappointed? Have you, too, been shocked to find what all the time you thought was His way, was some personal idea and desire of your own heart? How many times we put our own interpretation on some word He has given, to please ourselves in the realm of our own desires! Then when it does not come to pass, if we are not careful, everyone else is to blame. The disciples were all the time interpreting the spiritual and heavenly things in terms of bread and butter, in terms of a material kingdom. Of course, they will not go to the pit for this; but had they learned their lesson sooner they might have been spared much heartache.

Now what else had happened? We find in this story that Jesus deals with one person, Peter. He is the star actor in the little drama. Let us make a brief study of Peter. Why do we find introduced in the story such factors as fish nets, a fire and coals, and the conversation just as it is? What has after these things to do with Peter?

Let us look at Luke 22:24-34. There had been a strife as to power and position, a bit of politics, only of course the Bible does not call it that. But nevertheless there had been a discussion about position and relationship in the Kingdom. Jesus discerned it. They were not lovingly saying, "I prefer you to have the highest honor. Since I have been with our Lord and Master His spirit of love and sacrifice have become a part of me. When He sets up His Kingdom I want to show you how much I am like Him so I want you to have all the honor He can give you. Even that which He may offer me." Then Jesus teaches them a lesson as to what greatness is in His sight. Quite a rebuke to the popular and material idea, I am sure.

Then He speaks to Peter. The force of verse 31 is better understood from a translation by Weymouth. It is nearer the thought as given in the original Greek. "Simon, Simon, I tell you that Satan has obtained permission to have all of you to sift as wheat is sifted; but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and you, when at last you have come back to your true self, must strengthen your brethren." So you see from this reading that all were to have their siftings. But we are privileged to get a glimpse of Peter only in his. And we, too, are to have our siftings. Surely we are no better than they. I am very conscious of the need of it, are you not? Here we find Jesus so tender in His dealings. But note the effect upon Peter. Now standing in the sufficiency of his own flesh and what he thinks is devotion and love, he dares to declare it: "Master, with you I am ready to go both to prison and to death." This is what I call a boastful and extravagant confession. Here he makes death the measure of his love.

How many today have made extravagant prayers? How marvelous they sound! How easy to say some things when the Spirit is upon us! What about all this extravagant praying, great desires and high ambitions for God? After all, these fantastic prayers all have to, in the last analysis, pass through the censorship of God's will. God has often dealt with me in my prayer life until it has been recast, remodeled and toned down many times. Don't be afraid to let the Lord deal with you in this matter. He may reduce them as He has mine. He likes short prayers and long faith rather than long prayers and short faith.

This idea of big prayers brings to my mind a student we once had in school. He was a fine fellow and of a strong nature and will. He had received a definite experience (but not the Baptism) and was quite a fine worker even before he came to school. In teaching we were emphasizing such truths as death to self, self-effacement, the place of the Spirit over against nature, humility, etc. But he was full of natural zeal and

did not like it. I loved the lad and knew there were rich possibilities there if ever the Lord could get at him. I prayed much for him (and I am afraid he would not have liked what I prayed had he known). What a time we had! I knew the lessons ground him all the time but the Lord would not let me change my message to suit his flesh or ideas. I kept right on. One morning when we were praying for the missionaries he became very interested and very much in earnest. Soon he was praying in a loud tone of voice, and by way of emphasis, pounding on a chair bottom, "O God, make us martyrs. Give us the spirit of a martyr. Give us the grace of a martyr."

It all sounded very wonderful; but I knew the dear lad. I knew he perfectly hated to do the dishes when it came his turn on duty. Every time it was his turn to help in the kitchen one would almost think the world was coming to an end. He simply could not get the victory over a dishpan. When I heard him praying so intensely that morning I felt like poking him and saying, "Never mind, dear, you do not need to pray to be a martyr, for God never makes one out of your kind of material. If you can not get victory over a dishpan you will never need victory to be a martyr." But I kept still. I wonder sometimes if the matter of getting victory over a dishpan is not as great in God's sight as some more spectacular thing which wins the applause of men.

Finally this boy went out into the work and learned some hard lessons. The Lord was not through with him, for he was a choice vessel, and as you know, choice instruments have to suffer much sometimes. All the time I was teaching I could feel a resentment in his spirit although we never had a word. He was kind and polite and obedient but I knew he did not like the truth. He thought he didn't like one and felt (what he thought was) my personality grinding on him. I knew it was not my personality but the truth. He did not see a very important thing for all of us to see in this matter, namely, the difference between personality and truth. I will show you what I mean in a moment.

Never confuse the truth with the instrument. Sometimes people do and are converted to a person and not to Christ or Truth. So when the person fails, the poor dear soul is swept off his feet. After several years in the school of the Spirit, this boy met me. The very first thing he did was to grab me and give me a most terrific bear hug. And as he did so he was crying and saying,

"Oh, Follette, I love you now! I love you and know what you were saying. Oh, Follette, isn't it all wonderful?"

Today he is a strong, fine worker and God's seal is upon him in marked fashion. I am sure, too, that he is not praying about martyrdom--but something very much nearer where he is living. Thank God! So let us not pray extravagant prayers. Don't bother asking God for grace for such things when you can't get victory over a dishpan or something less. To get a victory over as small a thing as that, is often a test of real character and faith. So Peter had been making some very bold and extreme statements about his love and devotion to his Lord.

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