

# Simon Peter

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Resurrection gave Simon Peter the power of the Holy Spirit, which enabled him to overcome his weaknesses and become a strong leader in the Church.*

**Scripture:** Mark 16:7, Luke 22:31-32, John 21:15-17, Acts 2:14-41, Acts 10:34-48, Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:5, Ephesians 1:19-20, Philippians 3:10, 2 Peter 1:3-4

**Topics:** "Transformation", "Power of the Resurrection"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the life of Simon Peter, emphasizing his relatable human flaws and his significant role among the disciples. He highlights Peter's impulsiveness and superficiality, which often led to both great enthusiasm and deep despair. The sermon illustrates how the Resurrection of Jesus transformed Peter, providing him with the depth and strength necessary to fulfill his calling. Through this transformation, Peter became a powerful leader, embodying the resilience and potential that comes from a true union with Christ. Ultimately, the message conveys that the Resurrection offers new life and capabilities to all believers, enabling them to overcome their weaknesses.

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## Transcript

"Go tell his disciples, and Peter" (Mark 16:7).

"He appeared to Cephas" (1 Corinthians 15:5)

In our consideration of what the Resurrection of Jesus meant in representative cases, we come next to

Simon Peter

There are two things that meet us immediately we think of Peter. One is, how very human he is; so like many ordinary people. The other is, his unquestioned primacy amongst the Twelve. It is helpful and encouraging to put these two things together, or to see them as together in this man. Sometimes either one or the other side has been violated with disastrous consequences. On the human side Peter has often been 'played down' with a cheap epithet - 'Impulsive Peter'; just as Thomas is dismissed with - 'Doubting Thomas'. Many people have taken cover for their weakness by making "impulsive Peter" their patron saint. This, as we shall see, will not do, for to do that is to dismiss the meaning of the Resurrection.

On the other hand, Peter has been so elevated as to be near infallible, the figurehead of the Church; even the 'Rock' on which the Church is built. Resurrection, when rightly understood as to its meaning and effect,

will correct both of these errors and extremes, and bring Peter into his true place. To reach this understanding we have to do with Peter what we have done with Mary Magdalene and Thomas, and shall do with others; that is, see his category and analyse his constitution to see what was necessary and then how it happened.

### The Human Category of Peter

It is unnecessary to say that the kind of people to which Simon Peter naturally belonged is a very likeable kind. Sometimes you may smile at their blustering and fussy ways; you may, at other times, blush for their foolhardy claims for themselves; and there are times when you feel that their impulsiveness creates uncertainty and reserve of confidence. But, withal, they win your affection because they are so transparent, free from inhibitions, and so well-meaning. They have a surface gift of pleasing, although they often get themselves into a terrible mess.

Anyone who is familiar with the works of Charles Dickens will see Mr. Micawber as a good example of this type and he has provided the English language with an adjective, so that an over-confident person is described as being very 'Micawber'.

These are the irrepressible people. They face life blithely. Optimistic to a fault, they have swift reactions to any rebuke or set-back. Almost always hopeful and happy, they effuse sunshine. The party is dull and sluggish until one of this kind arrives, and then it really begins. They just cannot be hidden or suppressed. These people are excellent advertisers and they can make an attractive show even of limited goods. Yes, they blunder, but they are most irresistible when they have covered themselves with confusion and are effusively apologetic. Their passions are quick and they may blaze up in apparent fury, but it does not last long; indeed, in a short time you would think from their manner that nothing had ever happened.

These are the people who do all the nicest things, especially after a lapse into the disagreeable. They never mean one-hundredth part of the things said by them in such lapses. They always make the best of things and circumstances. Their favourite hymn - or sentiment - is "Count your blessings". Introspection never beclouds their spirits, and from the most pressing assaults upon their sincerity they will instantly forget themselves and say, "And this man, what...?" or "And what shall this (the other) man do?"

If you want help in a forlorn hope you will get it from these people, although it may be more in word or spirit than in its solidarity. But when we have said this and much more there is another aspect. It is true that the type under consideration can rise to great heights of enjoyment of life, they can drop into deep depression and even despair of themselves. "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man" shows how Simon Peter, the otherwise self-confident and self-assured, can suffer reactions. So, from great heights of assurance they can plunge to deep depths of depression. Their self-assurance makes them the people who take big risks without counting the cost. This is why the epithet 'impulsive' has been attached to Peter and his kind. He, and they, will take on liabilities in their good nature which will almost drown them later. Heedless risks are characteristic of these, and they will therefore often be found to be in debt, but altogether free from vice. To their ventures they will sacrifice the security and comfort of those they love most. How good-natured they are! They live to please, and yet they get themselves and their dependants into troubled waters.

What does all this say as to their real need?

For the purpose of our present consideration of Resurrection meaning, it says very much, and leads on to the tremendous thing that Resurrection effected in Simon Peter.

It requires very little perception to recognize that, with all the delightful and attractive features of this category the fatal flaw is in their lack of

#### The Dimension of Depth

They are - let us be frank - superficial both in their exhilarations and in their depressions; their heights and their depths (?). Their confidence has a shallow foundation. Their boasting will not bear the strain. Their optimism will have to be fed by social occasions. Their cheerfulness will not survive an atmosphere of depression or lack of appreciation. Their fundamental need is of spiritual rigidity and stamina. Their enthusiasms so often being short-lived need the strengthening "supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". Their rapidity of change demands a deepening of their foundations. John Bunyan has given their classic example in Mr. Pliable who, in the hour of real testing, fell into the slough of despond and climbed out of the mire on that side which was nearest to his own house.

This then is the kind which has many more beginnings than completions. They often commit themselves to a course which they cannot sustain, and from which, in more mature consideration they would fain escape.

Simon Peter was an excellent example of this type, and the end of his career before the Resurrection shows to what lengths he will go to evade the consequences of his own impulsive commitments or protestations.

We have said far less than could be said on both sides of this makeup, its good and its weakness, but we have said enough to make it clear that, to bear the strain and the responsibility, the honour and the glory that Peter came to inherit, something very real had to be done in him.

While the Cross was the occasion and the means of exposing Simon, especially to himself, and of bringing him to the depths of self-despair, it was the Resurrection that saved him and supplied his lack.

#### Simon Peter's 'Conversion'

From the words of the Lord to Simon in which He told him of what was going to happen we gather two things:

1. That there was a much deeper meaning in Simon's defection and breakdown than just the natural outworking of his temperament. It lies in that mysterious realm mentioned not infrequently in the Bible and notably at the beginning of the Book of Job. Satan is represented as having a peculiar interest in the downfall of servants of God. Moreover, he is represented as having some kind of access to God with that interest. Further, he is represented as having a measure of success in his quest, and obtaining a limited permission to affect such servants. So we read of Jesus saying to Simon, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath obtained thee by asking that he may sift thee as wheat." That is the first phase. In some mysterious way the terrible collapse of Simon in the denial of Christ was a working of Satan, and it was to sift Simon as wheat. It was similar to the experience of wheat when the flail gets to work and it is relentlessly beaten out. What a shaking! What a ruthless ordeal! But what is the effect? It is first to expose, to make manifest and evident what is false and worthless, and what is true and real. Then it is to put each into its category, the one to go, the other to stay. But this ordeal is like the ordeal of death, devastating and desolating.

2. Jesus had, however, in the same mystery, known this quest of Satan and its partial or controlled consent; but, said He, "I have made intercession for thee that thy faith fail not". In other words, "I have made a counter quest and asking, and mine has prevailed. Simon, you will turn again (be 'converted') and when thou art turned again, strengthen thy brethren". For the strengthening of brethren it required something much more than was in the old and natural Simon Peter.

The type which we have considered, with all its social and human values, needs something added to make the Peter of Pentecost of the subsequent court of the murderous rulers; of the house of Cornelius; of the tranquil sleeper in prison on the night before execution; of the Council of Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem; and of the Letters which go by his name. Something mighty had happened in Simon Peter. What was it?

In His resurrection Jesus had not only thrown out that other one of the quest against Simon; this He had done: He, through His Cross, had released the very life that was in Himself; that life with all its potentialities of endurance and victory, and, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had taken that life to impart to such as the restored Simon Peter, so that he came to know what Paul was so fond of speaking about - "the power of his resurrection".

Thus, Resurrection became the horizon of new potentialities for men who so ignominiously failed on the ground of their own makeup. The depth, the stamina, the ability to go through the once-dreaded death, all of which things were so conspicuously absent from the pre-resurrection man, were added by union with Christ in resurrection, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This union and its mighty virtues are - so the New Testament teaches - the inheritance of every born-again child of God, to be claimed and appropriated by faith.

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