

Lent 2- Disciple Peter's Experience



The Gospel accounts show Peter as a strong, impetuous character who is not afraid to speak his mind or say what he thinks needs to be said. He is often the voice for the disciples. Later Peter has a spokesman on the page, someone who could write in the style of Peter and who records the encounters with Jesus.

Q: Do you happen to know who Peter's writer was?

There is an incident where the disciples became afraid in a storm, and they wake Jesus saying, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' (Mk.4:38). Jesus commands wind and waves to be still and the disciples ask themselves, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!' (Mk.4:41 NIV)

Mark shares the disciples' perpetual question, 'who is this?' and invites us to ask the same question as we meet Jesus in each scene. Finally, there is a breakthrough, and it is Peter who famously declares an answer.

The Messiah?

Q: Can you find where Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah? (See Mark 8:27-30)

What do you think Peter meant? (there is a clue about the Messiah in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, see John 4:25)

Eugene Peterson comments that,

"when we are listening to and observing Jesus in conversation and action in first-century Palestine, we are dealing with God firsthand, God accurately and personally revealed in Jesus."ⁱ

Q: How do you imagine how Peter was feeling at that time?

Bible scholar, David Garland suggests that 'Peter wants to get out in front of Jesus to lead the way for him'ⁱⁱ but Jesus had told them to keep silent about being the Messiah.

Q: How do you think that made Peter feel?

Garland says that the 'secret is not that Jesus is the Christ but what he is destined to do as Messiah'.ⁱⁱⁱ **Read Mark 8:31-33.**

Peter's reaction revealed in 8:32 is to deny Jesus' destiny of God's purpose, that He must suffer.

In Mark's gospel, that scene is followed by Jesus calling a crowd to him saying, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' (Mk.8:34 NIV). These turn out to be words packed with meaning for the disciples, especially Peter as he is later tested.

Before we get to that, first let's be reminded about the next scene which boosts Peter's morale once again: **Read Mark 9:2-5**

In Luke's account of the Last Supper, Jesus tells the disciples he is conferring on them a Kingdom. He follows this up by saying, 'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat'; read **Luke 22:31-34.**

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Note, Jesus tells them that Satan has asked to sift *all* of them, and if you know the later events, you'll know they were all indeed tested, but Simon Peter is singled out.

Q: Note also that Jesus calls him Simon in his speech; Why?

Q: How do you think Peter reacted to this?

Let's turn our attention back to Mark's account; **Read Mk.14:27-31.**

I've imagined a letter from Peter:

Dear disciples,

I was so ready! Or at least I thought so.

Jesus was saying that Satan has been allowed to test me – well that sounds weird!

I just said, it's ok, I'm with you to the end; wherever you go Jesus, I'll go with you.

At the time I didn't think he'd heard me properly

He said, Peter, I tell you the cock will not crow this day until you have denied me three times.' 'Confused.Peter' That was me! What's a cock-crow got to do with anything?

Well; turns out he was right – again!

Come to think if it, he was never wrong even when I didn't understand him – but that was never a problem either. It's not like he Lorded it over me and I was never jealous or put off by him being right.

Guess that's why I said I'd follow him to the ends of the earth if necessary.

Anyhow, back to the point.

When Jesus was arrested I was true to my promise! I didn't run away but I got my trusty knife out – that's seen many a fish I can tell you. I slashed the ear off one of the guards who dared lay his hands onto Jesus.

Yeah, – Jesus told me off for that one – and healed the guy. Quick as a flash – the soldier had his ear back.

So off they went. I hadn't given up yet, so I followed them at a safe distance and saw them take Jesus to the high priest's house.

I joined the servants by the fire wondering what I should do, it was a very confusing time. A servant-girl suddenly spoke up and said I was with Jesus.

I didn't even think about it; 'whoa, not me!' I just needed to time to figure out what to do, I felt so out of my depth.

While I was figuring out what my next move should be – come and find some of you perhaps, someone else piped up: 'This man' (pointing at me) He was with Jesus too.

'No, I'm not' I said... well, I wasn't ready to be attacked by a lynch mob!

I could see Jesus over in the courtyard now. I felt paralysed with fear; I know I wasn't much help over by the wall, but I didn't want to leave him; so there I was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Should I leave him and come and find you guys? – but then I'd be breaking my word

Should I stay by the wall and watch? – and still I wasn't keeping my word because I wasn't really with him, just a spectator in the crowd. And yet, I was nailed to the spot - couldn't move.

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Do you know, another guy then speaks up, looking at me and says, yes, I'm sure man is a Galilean with Jesus'

'No, No' I protested and that's when it happened.

Just as I was saying that the cock-crowed and Jesus turned around and looked at me – square in the eyes.

I was like a rabbit caught in the torch light – transfixed on those deep, penetrating eyes. Then I knew. It just hit me.

I have to confess to you my friends that I just broke down; no fighting heroics this time; no best foot forwards; just utter shame, loss and collapse of both physical and spiritual strength... empty, really, really empty.

I've heard since that John went to the crucifixion; sorry I couldn't cope with that, but I've arranged to meet him back at Mary's place; John Mark's mother.

Why don't you all come over? We can spend the Sabbath day together.

Love, Peter

Q: There are times when we all struggle to live up to Jesus' commands and promises over us. As a time of personal reflection, can you think of times where you feel you've let Jesus down? In my imagined letter, Peter turns to the disciples for help. We too need a close spiritual friend or two that we can share disappointments with – are you in a small group of two or three to enable this? If not, spend some time thinking about who the other(s) could be.

An exercise (later in private) What tempts you the most in challenging your walk with Jesus? Use a bookmark size piece of paper and write the temptation. Look up a scripture that can help fight or overcome that temptation and write it on the opposite side. When you are being tempted, read both sides again.

The Final Episode:

Mark does not record us much about Peter after Jesus' death and resurrection, other than Peter being named by an angel who spoke to the women visiting the (now open) tomb: **Read Mk.16:4-7**

However, John does, **Read John 21:1-19**

Keep this assurance in mind; that like Peter, whenever we go through a wilderness experience, even where we lose courage in faith, know that Jesus is both willing and able to reconcile us. *Amen. (Offer prayers to The Lord...)*

ⁱ Eugene H. Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: Conversations in the Ways of God Formed by the Words of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2018), p.242.

ⁱⁱ David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the son of God* ed. by Andreas Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015) p.138.

ⁱⁱⁱ Garland, p.138.