

## Chapter 1

### A Sensitive Saint Named Simon Peter

#### Luke 6:12-19

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*“His body was slender and of a middle size, inclining to tallness. His complexion was pale and almost white. His beard was curled and thick but short. His eyes were black but flecked with red due to frequent weeping. Eyebrows, thin or none at all.”* This is the description from the ancient world of the man that is honored as St. Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ. By way of introduction to the Chief of the Master’s Men several general facts should be noted.

When we are first introduced to Peter, he is called *Simon* (Mark 1:16; John 1:40,41), a very popular name in the Jewish culture. We read of no less than nine Israelites in the *Scriptures* that bear this name.

- ◆ Simon Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Simon the Zealot, another of the original Twelve Apostles (Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).
- ◆ Simon, a brother of James and Jude and Jesus—according to the flesh (Matt. 13:55; John 12:1-8).
- ◆ Simon the Leper, a resident of Bethany (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).
- ◆ Simon of Cyrene, a Hellenistic Jew who was born on the N coast of Africa and was present at Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion (Acts 2:10).
- ◆ Simon the Pharisee in whose home a penitent woman washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and anointed them with oil (Luke 7:40, 43-44).
- ◆ Simon, the father of Judas Iscariot (John 6:71; 13:2, 26).
- ◆ Simon, the Samaritan magician, better known as Simon Magnus (Acts 8:5).

- ◆ Simon the Tanner, a Christian who lived in Joppa by the seashore (Acts 9:43; 10:6,17,32).

In honor of Simeon (lit. *hearing*), the second son of Jacob, devout Hebrew parents named their children.

Matthew records that one-day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He saw two men fishing. They were brothers by birth and partners in trade by choice. One was named Simon and the other was Andrew. As Jesus watched the rugged fishermen, He noticed their serious faces and sturdy backs. Fishing for a living was no easy work. It required strong individuals with physical strength and mental stamina. Jesus needed such individuals to build His kingdom. Suddenly the Lord called out to the men who were dripping with water while laboring over their nets. “*Simon, Andrew, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*”. That is all the Lord said for the moment, but it was enough. There was divine authority in that voice. The Sovereign Son of God had issued forth a personal summons and it was compelling enough to be obeyed. Immediately Simon dropped his work and he followed Christ.

A series of questions soon emerged, no doubt, for Simon was a thinker as well as a talker. He wanted to know for his curiosity and enthusiasm was unbounded. “*What did Jesus mean by becoming fishers of men?*” “*What did it involve?*” “*When would the work begin?*” “*What kind of bait was to be used?*” Simon had so many questions but he would have to be patient. All of his questions would be answered, but it would take time. For the moment, all that mattered was that Simon had entered into the greatest adventure of his life when he met Jesus. The Lord would change his heart and then, through him, the Lord would change the world.

The first change had already taken place as Christ changed Simon’s occupation. From fishing for food that perishes, Simon would fish for the souls of men and do a spiritual work that was to last forever. Then, as the Lord changed His occupation, so He changed the Fisherman’s name. John tells us how it happened (John 1:42). One day Jesus gazed upon the strong disciple and said to him, “*Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas (Aramaic), which is by interpretation, “a stone”*”.

From being the son of a “*fluttering, timorous dove*”— for such is the meaning of the name Jona, Simon would be a “*solid rock*”, which is the meaning of the name Peter. But it would not be an easy transition; change never is. To fundamentally convert what a person is by nature requires a dramatic—and often traumatic—inner revolution. Peter would undergo such a revolution. He had to because by nature he was impulsive, which means that he often talked and acted first and thought about the consequences later. This is not a criticism as much as an observation of comfort.

Dr. F.B. Myer comments, “*Peter comes nearer to us than any of his brother apostles. We revere James, the brother of our Lord for his austere saintliness. We strain our eyes in the effort to follow John to the serene heights, whither his eagle wing bore him. But Peter is so human, so like ourselves in his down-sittings and uprisings, so compassed with infirmity, that we are encouraged to hope that perhaps the Great Potter may be able to make something even of our common clay.*” “Despite his volatile personality there are some great events associated with Peter.

First, there was the Moment of Illumination whereby Peter realized that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. The *Bible* tells us precisely when this discovery was made. It was the third day after Peter met the Master. There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples to the marriage. (John 2:1- 11; 6:66-69; Matt. 16:18)

The wedding feast ran low on wine. Mary appealed to her son to help her out of a socially embarrassing situation. The Lord helped His mother by turning water into wine. Then, the *Bible* says, “*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and his disciples believed on Him*” (John 2:11). In a moment of time Peter learned that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and the Messiah that was to come. It was a Great Discovery.

Second, there was the Great Covenant whereby Peter was told that, in a specialized way, he would be the foundation of the church. The words of Jesus are very plain in Matthew 16:18. “*Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church.*” It is customary for conservative *Bible* commentators to be dogmatic in trying to stress a play on words in this verse by appealing to the original language so that the second word for rock (*petra*; a mass of rock) refers to Christ and not Peter (*petros*; a large piece of rock like a detached boulder). While anyone can be sympathetic to every effort to protect the honor of the Lord and His relationship to the Church, it is not necessary to reword the biblical terminology—or church history.

As Jesus had promised, so it was. The earliest records indicate that Jesus did build His church upon Peter. The Lord honored His commitment. Even a casual reading of the Book of Acts will see that it happened as the Lord predicted.

- ◆ It was Peter who preached on the Day of Pentecost and three thousand souls were saved (Acts 2:42).
- ◆ It was Peter who suggested the selection of Matthias to take the place of Judas as an apostle (Acts 1:15-22). And while the outworking of that suggestion has a lot to be desired, it does show leadership among the brethren.
- ◆ It was Peter who healed the lame beggar in the portico of the Temple saying, “*Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk*” (Acts 3:4-6).
- ◆ It was Peter who was falsely accused by the Rulers of the People and the Elders of the Council of Israel; and it was Peter who gave a defense of Christ (Acts 4:8-12,29).
- ◆ It was Peter who foretold the death by divine discipline of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
- ◆ It was Peter who was imprisoned and scourged and who had to give a second defense before the Jewish Council (Acts 5:17-42).
- ◆ It was Peter who was first sent to Samaria as the Church expanded its missionary labors and souls were brought into the Kingdom in obedience to the command of Christ (Acts 8:14).
- ◆ It was Peter who prayed for the reception of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-18).

- ◆ It was Peter who rebuked Simon, the sorcerer, when that greed son of Satan desired to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-24).
- ◆ It was Peter who returned to Jerusalem to report on the great grace of God (Acts 8:25).
- ◆ It was Peter who received Paul into the fellowship of the church and the work of the ministry (Gal.1: 18; 2:9).
- ◆ It was Peter who visited Lydda and healed Aeneas (Acts 9:32-34).
- ◆ It was Peter who visited Joppa and stayed with Simon the tanner in order to raise Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-43).
- ◆ It was Peter who had a vision of a sheet containing ceremonially clean and unclean animals representing the Gentiles to whom the gospel was to be given (Acts 10:9-16).
- ◆ It was Peter who received the servant of the centurion, ministered in Caesarea, preached to the centurion and his household in the middle of the night and had a baptism service (Acts 10).
- ◆ It was Peter who advocated the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles in the hearing of the apostles and elders (Acts 11:1-18; 15:7-11).
- ◆ It was Peter who, when imprisoned, was delivered by an angel (Acts 12:3-19).
- ◆ It was Peter who wrote some of the earliest letters of the Bible.
- ◆ It was Peter who told his story to a young man named John Mark who wrote a gospel that bears his name. The life of Peter is foundational in manifesting the visible church of Jesus Christ.

Of course there is but One ultimate Foundation for the Church as 1 Corinthians 3:11 teaches. *“For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* In his debates with Erasmus and Meister Eck Martin Luther stressed this point with the Catholic Church. However, there is a secondary sense conveyed in the language of Matthew 16 and confirmed by Church history. The Lord really did fulfill His great promise to Peter. Upon his labors, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church was built in a visible manner (Rev. 21:14; Eph. 2:20).

Unfortunately, a Great Rebuke followed the Great Promise to Peter (Matt. 16:22,23; Mark 8:32-33). In context, Jesus had been speaking of His death. The very thought horrified Peter to the point that he began to emotionally reprimand the Lord. Peter did not want Christ to be associated with death and destruction. Jesus was the Son of Man. He was the Messiah that had been promised. He could overthrow the rulers of the world. He could govern supreme. With His divine powers there was no limit to the kingdom that could come. And Peter wanted to be part of that dominion. He wanted Christ to live and rule and reign. And he wanted to be in the cabinet of

the King. In Peter's mind, Jesus must not suffer shame and reproach and so he said, "*Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.*"

Oh, Peter. You remind us once more that the best of men— are at best— but men and so are subject to spiritual blindness. Here was a shocking emotional display of spiritual misunderstanding of the kingdom that Christ came to establish. Here was a tragic exposure of the fact that Peter did not yet comprehend the nature of the Person and the work that the Lord had come to perform. As a result, Christ moved to silence His servant.

Turning rapidly upon Peter with a stormy look, Jesus uttered some of the most frightening words ever to fall upon the ears of a Saint as He said, "*Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offense unto me: For thou savourest not the things that be of God, but Those that be of men*" (Matt. 16:23).

Is it possible? Can Peter really be Satan? In the literal sense "*No, Peter is not Satan*". However, the spirit of Satan and the philosophy of the Evil One was certainly present in the words of the apostle. The great objective of the Prince of Darkness was to keep the Prince of Light from going to the Cross-of Calvary and making atonement for sin. Many times and in many ways Jesus had been and would be tempted to by-pass the Cross-for a crown. With the World, the Flesh, and the Devil against Him, Jesus did not need opposition and misunderstanding from Peter and so the Lord administered the Severe Scolding.

Immediately the spirit of Satan left the scene of spiritual conflict and Peter was allowed to understand how he had been used in a careless moment. Furthermore, the Ruler of Darkness still had his design on Peter personally. He would return to influence his soul on another occasion for we read of the Great Denial.

As much as it would be nice to reconstruct the biblical narrative on this next matter to exonerate Simon Peter in some way, the truth of the matter is that Peter denied the Lord of Glory. And it happened this way.

*"Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cockcrow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly"* (Matt. 26:69-75).

In denying Christ publicly, Peter was no different from Judas Iscariot who denied the Lord privately by selling information about Him to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver. To curse and deny the Lord of Glory is to betray His love and confidence. "*Peter, do you really not know the Man from Galilee?*" "*Peter, are you truly not one of His disciples?*" And Peter, instead of standing and identifying himself with the Accused said, "*I do not know Him*". There was an irrational rejection of Jesus Christ for sin defies logic. When a person is swept up in some passion or lust and it comes to light and the head is hung in shame, the voice says, "*I don't know why I did that.*" On one level it is the truth. Sin defies all reason and logic to engage in self-destructive and other destructive behavior.

Fortunately the story of Peter does not end with the Great Denial for there is the Righteous Return. Unlike Judas, Peter did repent of his sin in a genuine manner.

The *Bible* does say that Judas repented of betraying Jesus. The *Bible* records the fact that Judas went to the synagogue and cast the blood money onto the floor, and then he went out and hung himself (Matt. 26:25ff). Judas repented but neither in the same manner nor for the same reason that Peter did (Matt. 27:23) which tells us that there are different types of repentance.

There is a repentance that is legal. Legal repentance is merely a change of mind and is willing to say, *"I made a terrible mistake."*

There is another type of repentance that is evangelical in nature for it touches the inner most being of a person and the soul cries out, *"God be merciful to me the sinner."*

The *Bible* says that when Judas saw that he was condemned for his action, he went out and hung himself. In contrast when Peter comprehended what he had done he went out and wept bitterly. His heart was genuinely broken. Jesus needed him and he had run away. A little girl pointed a finger at him and the Rock turned to sand. Here was no great hero. Here was no spiritual Rock of Gibraltar. Here was no foundation upon which to build a hut let alone a church. Here was a fearful heart. Here was a coward who cursed the Christ he wanted to crown. Weep Peter. Weep bitter tears. It is an awful deed that you have done.

Somehow, Peter made it through the night of the crucifixion and the Sabbath that followed. Then came Sunday morning. A new day dawned that would forever alter the course of human history. Women came to tell Peter of an empty tomb and a resurrected Christ.

*"Peter, the Lord has risen from among the dead! Run Peter! Run to the graveyard to see if it is true. Run Peter! Leave John behind in your haste to enter into the empty tomb and handle the burial clothes of the King of kings and Lord of lords who now wears the robes of Royalty. (John 20:6) Jesus can leave the garments of death behind for He will need them no longer. Run Peter, run. Christ is alive. And Peter, the Lord wants to see you. He has asked for you personally."*

It was true Peter. Holy angels instructed Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome saying to them when they reached the tomb, *"Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter—that He goeth before you unto Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you."*

Peter went to Galilee and there he found Jesus, the Great Lover of Souls. The Lord had something He wanted Peter to do. He wanted Peter to feed His sheep (John 21:1-19). Three times the Lord told Peter, *"Feed my sheep."*

And Peter did as the Lord commanded. For the rest of his life, Peter fed the sheep as he followed the Great Shepherd and the Savior of his soul. Never again did Peter curse Christ or turn away from Him although, according to legend, there was a final opportunity to do that.

According to one account by Hegesippus, when persecution broke out in AD 64 under Nero, Peter was back in Rome. By this time he had preached the gospel far and wide in such place as Britain and Gaul (France), but then he returned to Rome. As the leader of the Christian community that did not worship the Emperor, who thought himself to be God, Peter was arrested by Nero and thrown into the Mamertine dungeon for nine months.

Prior to being arrested, Peter had a chance to flee the city, as many Christians wanted him to do. At last he was persuaded and made preparations to leave. But arriving at the gate, Peter saw the Lord Jesus coming to meet him, to whom he, worshipping said,

*"Lord, whither dost Thou go."*

Jesus answered, and said, *"I am come again to be crucified."*

By this, Peter, perceiving his own sufferings were in view, returned into the city.

St. Jerome said that Peter was crucified on an x-shaped cross, his head being down and his feet upward, by his own request, because he told his tormentors that he was not worthy to be crucified after the same form and die in the same manner as the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is much more that could be and should be said about Peter. A single characteristic will have to suffice. The Great Sensitivity of Peter's Soul should not be overlooked. The sensitive soul of Peter is reflected in his hospitality. It was in the home of Peter that Jesus often went to rest from His labors. One of the great virtues of the Christian life is to be given to hospitality. In fact, it is so important that the Holy Spirit makes it a qualification for church leadership. (1 Tim. 3:2)

Again, the sensitive soul of Simon Peter is reflected in his intense sense of sin. It was Peter who once said, "*Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man*" (Luke 5:8).

And it was Peter who once wept bitter tears of repentance after receiving only a look from Jesus. "*One look from the eyes of Jesus could always bring Peter back to the way of honor and fidelity*" (*The Master's Men*, Dr. William Barclay).

It would be good if the soul of every saint were as sensitive to sin as Peter's. We need such a heart to beat in us because we are living in a cold and cruel country reflected in the ever-increasing random acts of violence. Neighbors do not know one another and families are torn apart. Nations are at war, and individuals feel isolated. Many are filled with hatred and hostility. The Church has an opportunity to show kindness and sensitivity to others in a sin saturated society. Indeed, Christ calls upon His Church to care. It was St. Francis of Assisi, who prayed,

*"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

*Where this is hatred, let me sow love;*

*Where there is injury, pardon;*

*Where there is doubt, faith;*

*Where there is despair, hope;*

*Where there is darkness, light;*

*And where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,*

*grant that I may not so much seek*

*to be consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand;*

*to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,*

*it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,*

*and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."*

By God's grace, we want be sensitive enough to love and to care. We want to cry with those who cry and laugh with those who are laughing. And, by God's grace, we want to be sensitive to sin in our selves so that we can pray to the Lord and say with sincerity, "*Lord, when thou see'st me waver, with a look recall.*"