

Peter After

by John Follette

The sermon explores Peter's journey from denial to restoration, emphasizing Jesus' love and the importance of confession and obedience in our relationship with Him.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 43:25, Luke 22:31, John 18:15, John 21:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Restoration", "Divine Forgiveness"

Description

John Follette preaches about Peter's failure and restoration by Jesus, emphasizing how Jesus prayed for Peter in his trial, knowing his weaknesses and the necessary refining process for his faith to grow stronger. Despite Peter's denial, Jesus tactfully reinstates him, showing His love and grace by asking Peter three times if he loves Him, each time using a different word for love to meet Peter where he was at emotionally and spiritually. Through this interaction, Jesus not only restores Peter but also gives him a divine commission, teaching a valuable lesson in confession, humility, and the depth of God's love and forgiveness.

Transcript

The second incident which I think is one of "these things" spoken of in the opening phrase, is found in John 18:15-19. Here is the sad picture of Peter's failure. He has denied his Lord and is now among His enemies. He has made a fearful botch of the whole thing. What a failure after a close and happy walk with Jesus for three years! What a revelation!

How could it all be true ? But Jesus is not through with Peter; He wants to get hold of him and help him. So, in the permissive will of God, he is thrown over very close to the enemy, so close that the enemy can grab hold of him and even shake him good. He is put into a sieve, and Jesus knew all about it. Note the tenderness of Jesus as He deals with this known weakness of Peter's. He helps him as far as He is able. He says, as it were,

"Peter, you are about to suffer a terrific humiliation and testing. I cannot pray for your exemption; the Father does not give me the liberty to pray for that. I cannot pray that you be spared the pain and agony of it. Your very nature and disposition demand this very treatment and experience. However, Peter, I may pray one thing and that I will do with all my faith and power. I will pray that your faith fail not. I will pray that it may not snap under the horrible fire of testing but that it may come out strengthened and made vigorous for the days to come.

Have you ever had Jesus pray you through ? Jesus prayed for Peter in that terrific trial he was to suffer. Jesus did not blame him for it. He knew his makeup and that it was the only way for Peter, so He loved him and prayed him through. By nature we are all a part of the colossal ruin of man. We are all cast in a broken mold and God knows it. But we can become new creatures in Christ, thank God! He wants to come in and move through the different departments of our personalities and show to the world a miracle of His grace in the display of His power in and through us.

Returning again to Peter, we find that after he has made his two rash and extravagant statements, he falls down on both of them. But the Lord had allowed it all. "Oh," you say, "the Lord would never order his steps thus." Yes, He certainly would when He sees it is for Peter's good. Do you think the Lord wanted Peter as he was before that trial? Certainly not. (Did not Paul need a demon to torment him? Many think it would have been wonderful if Paul could have gotten a victory over the demon. He won many other victories but he never was free from the stake. No, he needed the stake as a safety device to keep him in position. He did more than have a prayer answered; he got grace to carry him all the days he had to tarry.)

Up to this time God could not do much with Peter even though he had followed Jesus and knew His message and was called. God wanted more than that. He wanted Peter and could not get him, only through this trial. So Jesus prays him through and poor Peter feels so humiliated and ashamed.

Now we shall better understand Peter's mood when the story takes place. When the disappointment of Christ's disappearance and failure to bring in the Kingdom settled down upon the disciples, what did they do? A perfectly natural thing. Then your faith cannot bridge the chasm, when it is not strong enough to take the step, you will always resort to some natural means of escape. That is the way we are made. When faith fails then we begin struggling and working and leaning upon the resources of nature. The disciples did this very thing. Peter is the spokesman. I know we sometimes ridicule him for talking so much but I am sure we are glad many times that he said what he did. Many times he saves us the trouble of asking or saying the very thing we are happy he has said. Every once in a while I learn a lesson from what Peter has done. So I have to say, "Thank you, Peter !" No doubt most of them thought as he did in their hearts. At least none of them had a suggestion as to a way out.

I can imagine Peter looking at the rest and saying, "Well, this kingdom business has not turned out as I had expected. I have been thinking: Don't you remember the day He said, 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation!' And again, 'The kingdom is within you!' Then see how He has died and gone. Now He has shown Himself twice but how do we know if He will ever come back again ? This kingdom, it seems to me, is too mystical. And, as you know, I never was mystically inclined. I guess I don't understand it. But I do know something about fishing. So, as for me, I am going fishing. You may do as you like. This whole kingdom idea is exploded and has ended in a crash. I may have gotten into some kind of emotionalism, but I tell you, I am going back to my nets."

That is why Peter went fishing. It was not because he thought the fish would bite. It was something worse than that. I really do not think he cared much whether or not there was a fish in the sea. He just wanted to get away, away, away from the whole thought and atmosphere of the past years and days. He did not want to be haunted by too many thoughts and suggestions from his friends. He wanted a change of environment! Do any of you know what I mean?

Instantly the others say, "We, too, will go. You have always been a leader and there seems to be nothing else to do so we will go along." They, too, probably wanted a change but did not own up to it. I wonder

what the dear Lord read in their hearts just then? So there they are, out there fishing! fishing! fishing! The night settles down and they fish on and on. It comes to be one o'clock and there are no fish; two o'clock and no fish. They try every old haunt they have ever known; this point, that bank, this little cove and that, all the old holes they have been in before. It is cold and the nets are heavy and hard to handle. Oh, the emptiness of it all! Poor dears, they are on grounds from which He has called them. Did you ever walk over the old paths? Have you felt the haunting spirit of such a place? How many banks and shoals will you try before you give up? We read that they fished all night and caught nothing. But listen--"But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore." Thank God, there is always a morning! There they are, a wretched, forlorn, unhappy, disheartened little group. They had no business in the boat at all for He had called them from their nets to make them fishers of men.

The night cannot last too long. Finally there is a faint streak of light over against the hills and it continues to grow a bit lighter. The mist and fog are hanging along the shore so that only a dim outline of things is visible. But as they look they see someone moving about and finally they hear a voice calling, "Children, have you any meat?" In other words, "Have you caught anything?" Jesus takes the initiative and that by asking a question. Why that particular one? Why not scold them and rebuke them? Are they not out of order? Do they not need to be lined up? Yes, yes, yes, but please wait and let the Lord do it. He knows how. How many of you think that Jesus did not know about the boat or if they had any fish or not? If for a moment you think He asked merely for information, you are much mistaken. He had in mind the blessing of a deliverance and the reinstating of Peter and his commission. But He must first ask them this question. He must build the blessing upon a certain foundation and that foundation is a confession. Have you not yet learned in the Christian experience that confession is the basis of blessing.

He knew all their circumstances but He wanted this one thing: a confession of their defeat and failure in their self-will. He wanted them to own up to the failure and that in most simple form--"Nothing." How much better to make a clean breast of it than to say, "If the wind had not flapped the sails or if so-and-so had not rocked the boat, I think we might have caught some." Thank God, they said in simple form, "Nothing." As soon as He gets this confession He builds up a blessing and directs them as to what to do. Now in obedience they are fishing in the very same boat, the very same water, with the very same nets and in the very same place. But what a change! The fish just could not get into the nets cast in disobedience, neither can they keep out of the nets cast in obedience. It is not a matter of water or place--just His word. Then He bids them come to shore.

Here He has a happy surprise for them. How very wise and tactful Jesus is! See how delicately and carefully He handles Peter! Even though Jesus is tender and tactful, He does not intend to let Peter get by, as we say. He never does. His very love is manifested in correction. He loves Peter dearly and is going to deal with him in a most clever and sweet way without causing him embarrassment before his fellow disciples. But at the same time He will so deal with Peter that he will never forget it. So the Lord has some coals of fire and fish for them. And as the disciples come up I can imagine the Lord saying, "Peter, won't you come and warm yourself? Here is a fine fire and you must be cold and damp."

The very mention of a fire must have set Peter thinking and remembering. The fire of his conscience was hotter than any fire there. Where had he warmed himself just a while before this? Had it not been at the fire of Jesus' enemies? And had he not grouped himself with them? Were not Jesus and Peter thinking of that fire, too? I think so. Do you not think Peter got warm? Surely he must have been warmed through and through. The Lord had not rebuked him by a word, neither had He done one thing to embarrass him before the others. But He had sent home to Peter such a rebuke that I am sure he never forgot it. It was His

kindness that hurt Peter. Then I seem to hear the Lord say, "Shall we now have a little breakfast? Were there not some fish that you caught?" Do you remember who went for them? To be sure it was Peter. My! how he must have fairly run to get them. And to get away from that very hot fire. He needed a cool breath of air by that time.

So he leaves the fire but it has accomplished its purpose in warming more than Peter's hands. Oh, how hard Peter was thinking as He saw the Lord moving about and directing, such seemingly simple words, and yet at the same time getting at him in such untold fashion. And now, how could poor Peter eat? Was there not a lump in his throat nigh choking him? Yet the Lord hands him some fish and asks him to eat with Him. I am sure Peter never disliked fish in all his life as he did just then. How it must have choked him! Busy in his mind with thoughts the other disciples never dreamed of--"Oh, Lord, I am such a failure! I have grieved Your heart and disappointed You. I am so miserable and undone. My heart is broken and I am so ashamed. Yet, oh Lord, I need You and I so want to run to You and tell You I Oh, Lord, how can You be kind to me? How can You spread a feast for me? Rather would I that You blame me, scold me. I deserve it! Oh, Jesus, will You ever let me get close to You again? Can You ever trust me with Your love and fellowship?" Poor Peter! The others were having a fine, warm breakfast. Well, let them eat. That is about all some ever get.

Jesus has no rebuke for Peter. Instead He enters into a conversation as casually as in days of old. He does not show by any gesture that there is anything the matter. His looks and spirit do all that is necessary. After they have eaten He says, "Peter, lovest thou me more than these?" Some think He was referring to the fish since he had denied the Lord and left his great calling to catch them. But we find in the Greek that the word these does not refer to the fish but to the others standing by. But why should He ask that? Had Peter not told Him twice that he loved Him more than that even to the measure of death? Yes, so Jesus keeps it fresh in His mind. Does it seem foolish and meaningless that the Lord should have said over and over three times, "Lovest thou me," etc? But Jesus did not say that. Read it in the original. There you will find two different words for love are used. One is *agapao* and means a love, deep and of a sacrificial measure, it is the strongest word in Greek for love, the one used to show God's love for the world, etc. The other word is *phileo*. This means to be very dear, and to be fond of, and is used to show affection such as brotherly love and feeling. It is a weaker word than the other.

Jesus is just wise enough to use the very word that would characterize the statement Peter had made. So He says, "Peter, (*agapao*) lovest thou me?" ,etc. He uses the strong word, for had not Peter declared his love in such lofty terms? Doubtless Peter's failure had taught him a lesson. He had found by now that he did not love Him to the extent that he would die for Him. Peter knows what the Lord is getting at and in answer says, "Lord, Thou knowest that I (*phileo*) am very fond of Thee." He does not dare again to use the extravagant word he once used. Jesus takes the confession for what it is worth and says, "Feed my lambs." Again, the second time Jesus speaks and says, "Peter, (*agapao*) lovest thou Me?" He again uses the strong word. Peter does some deep thinking. He answers the Lord, "Thou knowest, Lord, I am very fond of Thee," using the weaker word again. And all this time the disciples do not seem to know just what it is all about. A third time Jesus speaks, "Simon, son of Jonas"--and here we get a beautiful lesson. When we cannot measure up to the strong place He would have us reach, He comes down to us and meets us in the measure of love of which we are capable. So this time Jesus says, "Are you very fond of me?" or "Am I dear to you?" This breaks poor Peter and he confesses, "Yes, Lord, Thou knowest I am fond of Thee. Thou knowest everything." Three times he failed the Lord and denied Him, and three times he confesses afresh his love for Him.

It was all the Lord wanted. He gained the victory in Peter and yet never rebuked him before the others or made him ashamed before them.

Look, too, at a very clever or wise thing He does for Peter. I am sure those disciples were very human. Do you not think they had spoken of Peter's failure one to another? Behind his back no doubt they said, "My! poor Peter! Wasn't that a dreadful failure? What a dreadful thing! We must pray for him; he needs prayer." Yes, he did, but it was not theirs that got the victory. The Lord knew their inner feelings and thoughts. Therefore before them all, so that they could hear and have the benefit of it all, He reinstates Peter and gives him a threefold, divine commission.

I wonder if the disciples might not have done a little thinking just then? They, too, had a gentle rebuke for any secret thought they might have entertained. Oh, of course, they did not say anything. It is never wise to do that. But the Lord saw to it (for some reason) that they heard Him bless Peter and again entrust him with His love and message. Have you ever been criticized, misjudged or lied about ? It is wonderful just to "stand still and see the salvation of God." He can in a most wonderful way close the mouths of those who do not understand and bless you in their very presence. Is He not wonderful? How safe He is in dealing with a needy heart! Shall we not love Him and trust Him more? Can we not all of us afresh commit to His tender, tactful, and wise dealings the welfare of our foolish hearts ?

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