****

**Easter's Prominent People**

**Peter: Faithful and loyal - yet as flawed as us all**

**By Pastor Chris Cleary**

**John Chapter 18 verses 1 – 27**

1. **Introduction**

Long before the **Apostle Peter** preached his first sermon as a leader in the early Church he was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, and he was a bold and loyal follower of Christ to the end.

**Well, mostly!**

Peter’s story is an interesting one. It’s a story about a **flawed** man, with **a great heart** and **a great ending.**

Peter was a career fisherman when Jesus first asked him to follow Him.

Like the other disciples, Peter had his own unique background and temperament. He came to be known as a man with loads of passion but with **a mouth and emotions that got him into trouble sometimes.**

Peter was a guy who could be **impulsive and overly outspoken**, but he also allowed Jesus to correct him.

In His relationship with Peter, we see the grace and patience of our Lord and how He works with flawed followers **(like all of us).**

**We can learn a lot from Peter’s story.**

1. **Some Background and Context**

Peter is mentioned so often in the **New Testament - in The Gospels, The Acts of the Apostles, and in The Epistles** which can make us feel we know him better than any other person who figured prominently in the life of Jesus.

We have no knowledge of him prior to him answering Jesus call, save that he was a Galilean fisherman, from the village of Bethsaida or Capernaum.

We picture Peter as a shrewd, yet simple man, of great power for good, but now and again afflicted by sudden weakness and doubt, at least at the outset of his discipleship.

Yet, after the death of Jesus, his authority among the Apostles was shown as a result of his courage and strength of character. However, it is perhaps Peter's capacity for growth, and openness to change, that makes his story so inspiring to other erring humans.

One of the most profound episodes in Peter’s life can be found in **Matthew Chapter 16 verses 15-19,** when Jesus asked the disciples, **“Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”**

There seems to be quite striking evidence that Peter was favoured among the disciples. He was selected, with James and John, to accompany Jesus to the mountain, the scene of the Transfiguration, to be given a glimpse of His glory. It is here, in **Matthew Chapter 17 verse 5,** that God pronounces the words, **"This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”** Further confirmation to Peter of the truth of Jesus as the Messiah.

**So, we come to the prelude to Peter’s denial.**

In **John Chapter 13 verses 37-38,** when all were gathered for the **Last Supper**, Peter declared his loyalty and devotion with these words, **“Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”**

So, as the tragic night unfolded, this prophecy came true.

When Jesus was betrayed by Judas as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and was taken by soldiers to the Jewish high priest, Peter followed far behind, and sat half hidden in the courtyard of the temple during the proceedings.

1. **Peter in the Easter Story**

**This man Peter.**

* **Peter -** Who walked on water - [**Matthew 14:28-29**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+14%3A28-29&version=NIV)
* **Peter -** The disciple Jesus planned to use to build His church - [**Matthew 16:18**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A18&version=NIV)
* **Peter -** The disciple who recognised Jesus as the Messiah - [**Matthew 16:15-17**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16:15-17&version=NIV)
* **Peter -** Who followed Jesus through thick and thin; who cut off a man’s ear to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane - [**John 18:10**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+18%3A10&version=NIV)

**Yet, even this disciple stumbled … fell hard … gave up hope … lost faith.**

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, this Peter thought surely he would stand strong and remain faithful even if none of the other disciples did, **but he went on to deny Jesus three times.**

**What** made this disciple think that he could do it if no one else could?

If even Peter could fall when things got rough, **what hope do the rest of us have?**

Yes, there’s a warning for us in Peter’s story, but **there’s also tremendous hope: a hope that can also be ours.**

After the denial he wept tears of regret, but in **John Chapter 20 verse 1-10** we see him running to the tomb after news of Jesus’ resurrection. **Love and hope for His Lord abounded.**

Then, in **John Chapter 21 verses 1-20**, we see that Jesus appeared to the disciples, and **He restored Peter to fellowship, and the rest is Church history.**

One of the things I remember most fondly from my high school years is playing American Football. Now with American Football you have set formations on the field, and on a signal given by your Quarterback, you run various plays. This means that each player has a certain job to do as part of the play.

I can guarantee you that every time the team developed a new play, and then tried it in a game, that even after practicing, I would get it wrong at least three times before getting it right! **I had some very annoyed coaches during this time!**

I’m afraid, at times, this trait seems to have carried over into a few other aspects of my life! Often with dire consequences! I call it **The St. Peter Syndrome**! Yet, I think for all of my mess ups, **I’m in good company with the big man!**

**I have come through by the grace and love of Jesus – His Forgiveness and Restoration.**

**Jesus never gave up on a flawed Peter, and He won’t give up on you, either!**

1. **In Conclusion**

**There is a key to Peter’s recovery and victory over his own flaws: After each of his setbacks, Peter made a habit of *running*to*Jesus*, rather than *running*from *Him.***

**Proverbs Chapter 15 verses 32-33** tells us this, **“Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding. Wisdom’s instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honour.”**

You see, Peter may not have liked it – but he valued and knew it was necessary to be corrected by Jesus, and set right – set back on the straight and narrow - **after he had got it all wrong!**

* How do you handle correction?
* How do you handle setbacks?
* When was the last time you allowed God to correct you through His Word and His Spirit?

**A reprimand from Jesus was actually a huge blessing for Peter. It prepared him to honour God in the role he would soon have in the Church.**

Jesus still calls and leads **flawed followers.** Yet, if we comply with His corrections along the way, we can get our great ending as well!

After the events of his denial, Peter was a different man. He had gained a **new humility and learned not to rely on his own strength.** Never again did Peter deny Jesus. Instead, as we see in **Acts Chapter 2,** **when Peter lifted his voice, thousands came to believe.**

In **Acts,** we see Peter **tending to the sheep**. For the rest of his life, Peter **taught, cared for, and led Jesus’ sheep.**

In the end, Peter did die for Jesus, just as he said he would. There is no biblical record of Peter’s death, but early Christian writers report that Peter was executed by Nero.

In spite of Peter’s past failure, there was a time and place for Peter to do great things for the Kingdom. **When Peter repented, Jesus was quick to restore him and give him an assignment.**

**We too can have that hope for our future. Like Peter, our story isn’t over when we stumble and fall. If we repent and return to Jesus as Peter did, He will restore us and use us to do great things for Him and His Kingdom.**

**Amen.**