

## Peter and John

Please read John chapter 21, then re-read verses 15-25; and pray;

*O Lord, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word.*

**Peter and John** feature prominently in the *final two* chapters of this gospel as John homes in on the resurrection of Jesus and his appearances to the disciples. These *two* disciples dashed to the empty tomb after Mary Magdalene's frantic report (20 v 2-9). They were the *two* key personalities during the disciple's fishing trip, enjoying the celebration of the miraculous catch of fish which the risen Lord had orchestrated from the shore line (21: 3-14). Now as we come to the final verses of this faith inspiring gospel (20:31) - **it is just Jesus, Peter and John.**

As I shared last week, I believe this ending to the gospel occurs because John, our gospel writer, wanted to show his readers how Peter and himself were enabled and encouraged to go on to become the principle leaders of the early church. Peter's blatant denials needed to be confronted, challenged and washed with forgiving love. He desperately needed a fresh start. John, who had stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus's mother (19:26-27), was himself going to be prepared for *a very long fruitful ministry* in the service of the Lord Jesus. (21:23)

Peter required healing and release from the pain and turmoil caused by his denial of Jesus. Peter's future partner in leadership describes how this came about after the breakfast on the beach. Peter and John would rise together after this episode, and move onwards with renewed spiritual confidence, hope and power, and their leadership would be characterised by mutual faithfulness, respect and love. Acts of the Apostle's reveals a formidable duo: **Peter and John...**

- Worshipped and prayed together (Acts 3:1)
- In the mighty name of Jesus - healed together (Acts 3:4-8, 11-12)
- Were seized and imprisoned together (Acts 4:3)
- Were interrogated together (Acts 4:7)
- Displayed courage together (Acts 4:13)
- Stood firm together (Acts 4:19-20)
- Were threatened together (Acts 4:21, 5:28)
- Interceded powerfully together (Acts 4: 23-24)
- Performed signs and wonders together (Acts 5:12)
- Faced and withstood persecution together (Acts 5:40)
- Defiantly rejoiced (Acts 5:41) and stuck to their task together (Acts 5:42)
- Laid hands on others for the infilling of the Holy Spirit - together (Acts 8:17)

It has to be said that Peter was the main spokesperson (Acts 2:14, 3:12, 4:8, 5:29). Peter stood up and stood out as an **extraordinary leader (Acts 5:15)**, matched only by Paul who would also be powerfully anointed (Acts 19: 11-12); but John, forever to be known as the *beloved disciple of Jesus*, (John 21:20) was going to be greatly used as a pastor, teacher and prophet in the Church, ultimately becoming the elder statesman of Christianity. (John 21:23-24)

It was essential for the risen Jesus to put these **two men** on a firm footing before he left this world and ascended into heaven. Here is how it came about according to our eyewitness John.

The breakfast of fresh fish cooked by Jesus on a charcoal fire and served with bread was finished. It was now the right moment for Jesus to spend time alone with Peter. Not so very long ago, Peter had stood by another fire (John 18:18) in the courtyard of the high priest, where he denied Jesus three times in rapid succession. His robust denials became stronger and stronger until finally ending with Peter calling down curses upon himself. He emphatically disowned and denied Jesus. After hearing the cock crow as Jesus had prophesied it would, Peter wept bitterly. He was a totally broken man. He hated himself for what he had done.

So now, in private, Jesus asks Simon Peter three times if he **truly loves** him. By speaking to Peter using his previous name "Simon son of John/Jonah", Jesus was taking him back in time to the point when he gave him the name Cephas or Peter – which meant Rock. (John 1:42 & Matthew 16 v 17-18). Tragically, Peter had not been like a Rock when it mattered! Jesus questioned Peter about his love *three times* - mirroring Peter's three denials. This hurt Peter, but Jesus wanted to probe deeply to uncover Peter's true commitment and love.

After the third time of questioning, Peter says contritely;

*"Lord you know all things; you know that I love you."* (21:17)

Jesus does indeed know all things. Nothing can be hidden from him. As Paul wrote to Timothy; *"The Lord **knows** those who are his."* (2 Tim 2:19). Christ knows his true sheep and they know him. Jesus knew that Peter **truly loved** him. Although Peter had openly denied him, there was true love in his heart for Jesus, and he was desperate to make amends. Jesus recognised this and therefore recommissioned Peter on the spot *even while questioning his love*.

Denying Jesus and not acknowledging our love for him, either by our verbal denials or by our deliberate silences (Mark 8:38) is a sin which you and I may have committed, but then, like Peter, bitterly regretted. But with the Lord there is always the possibility of forgiveness and redemption (Psalm 130:3-4). He loves to forgive and restore his sheep. Christ forgives the genuinely sorrowful and penitent. This is the gospel – the good news! Jesus raises us up! We are cleansed and renewed for service. Perhaps you need to be reminded of this today?

Those who deny Jesus can become those who are defiant for him! They can unashamedly take up their cross once again and follow their Lord. However, forgiveness is only possible because Jesus willingly gave up his life for his sheep. Like Peter, we must be made to face up to the seriousness of our cowardice before we can truly know release from the burden of our guilt. Peter was released to start again. We can be too - for Jesus specialises in new starts!

As I reflected on the fact that Peter's original name was used by Jesus, and that he was a son of a man named **Jonah**, my thoughts turned to Jonah in the Old Testament who had run away from God because of fear. After a disastrous time away from the Lord, the Lord came to Jonah **"a second time."** (Jonah 3:1) God is always willing to reach out to us again and give us another chance to step up to the plate for his cause. Do you need another chance to prove your love

for Jesus? If you feel you do, sit quietly for a few moments; offer your life to Christ again; promise to loyally serve him, and say prayerfully with Peter, and with a contrite heart;

*“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”*

Let Peter’s words become **yours** today.

*“Lord, you know all things: you know that I love you.”*

Even while Jesus asked the penetrating questions about Peter’s love, he recommissioned him.

Jesus now requires Peter to serve in *two ways*, and to be ready for one major future sacrifice.

Peter is directed to **feed** Jesus’s *lambs* and *sheep*, and **take care** of them. Peter is asked to prioritise teaching and pastoral care for Jesus’s lambs and sheep, the new Christians and the ones who have been part of the flock for some time; the tender, vulnerable new born lambs, those recently born again, and those who have been in the kingdom for much longer. Peter must feed them with the word of God and care for them with prayer and love. The fisherman is to become a shepherd of God’s flock serving *under* the Chief Shepherd, who is also the Good and Great Shepherd of our eternal souls. (1 Peter 5:2-4, John 10:11, Hebrews 13:20)

This is a personal challenge to me as your current Pastor. I am called to feed you with the pure Word of God, and pastorally care for you all with the pure love of Jesus. This is what Church leadership and pastoral ministry consists of. *Pray for me as I seek to honour this calling among you.* When calling a Minister to serve within a pastorate, a Church need only ask two fundamental questions. Can this person preach and teach the gospel to us and to the world? Can this person pastorally guide and care for our fellowship? If the answer is “yes” to those two questions - then issue the call!

Peter is once again invited and challenged to personally **follow Jesus** (v 19, 22). For Peter and **for us** the call *to follow* the Master involves three things. We must;

- Believe in Jesus, who he is and what He has done for us. (20:31)
- Trust in Jesus, understanding that apart from Him we can do nothing. (15:5)
- Obey Jesus; thereby proving our love for him and his kingdom. (15:14)

Following Christ means believing on his name, trusting in his saving love and power, obeying his commands, taking up our cross, fulfilling his will for rest of our lives. Peter must trust and obey and be ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for Christ. With pathos Jesus prophetically proceeds to speak about Peter’s death. Peter’s **hands** will be **stretched out** by crucifixion (21:18).

Under the deranged and blood-thirsty Emperor Nero, Peter would be crucified just as his Lord had been under Pontius Pilate. Peter would be martyred for his unyielding faith in Jesus. The Christian historian Eusebius tells us that Peter was executed, and that he requested to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy of his *only Lord* - Jesus Christ. *Peter would one day prove his true love for Jesus in the most open and revealing way possible – by publicly dying on a cross in the capital city of Rome.* Jesus foresaw this - and revealed it to **the Rock**.

But what about John, who would be Peter’s partner, the one who was hanging around in the background. (v 20) What would become of him - the beloved disciple? John - the future gospel

writer, the one who had leaned upon Jesus' breast at the last supper, and taken Jesus' mother into his own home (John 19:26-27) after the crucifixion of her son. What would the future hold for him? John proceeds to clear something up – a rumour that was to be passed around about him – a rumour that implied that the apostle John may not die, but could still be around when Jesus returned. Was there any substance to this rumour?

Not really - for John would also die, but not until he had reached a great old age. Not until he had outlived all the other apostles and become the last man standing; not until he had written this gospel which you and countless souls have read; not until he had written other letters (1, 2 & 3 John). AND not until he had received the most amazing, visually dynamic **Revelation of Jesus Christ**. (Rev 1:1). This was revelation for the *suffering Church* concerning the power, glory and future coming of the Lord! Through this glorious revelation, Christ did indeed **appear again** to the aged apostle John whilst exiled on the remote rocky island of Patmos. (Rev 1:9-10) John turned around after hearing a loud voice and saw with his own eyes ***“someone like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. HIS FACE WAS LIKE THE SUN SHINING IN ALL ITS BRILLIANCE.***

And when John had engaged with this vision of the resplendent heavenly glory of Jesus – he fell down as though dead. Jesus then reached out and “placed his right hand” on the old man, and told him not to fear, for here, by John's side, was The First, The Last, the Living One.

***“I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever.”*** (Revelation 1:12-18)

May be there was something in that old rumour after all. Was this future **Revelation** in Jesus' mind as he spoke to Peter about John? Jesus said to Peter, *“If I want him to remain alive (on this earth) until I return (in powerful revelation?), what is that to you?* John eventually died of natural causes – a distinctly blessed and aged apostle - almost certainly in or near Ephesus. He was the last of the 12 apostles to die. Thanks be to God for his faithful life and witness.

His wonderful gospel closes by reminding us of his reliable eye witness testimony (v 24), and of the fact that what he recorded in his gospel is only a fraction of all the amazing things Jesus did. There were so many other miracles that could have been recorded (20:30), but John wrote enough that we might believe ***“that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*** (20:31). *Do you believe this gospel? Do you know life in his name? Are you personally following the One who is the Alpha, the Omega, the First and the Last? Do you know, trust and love The Living One?*

I have had the great privilege of seeing icebergs floating and breaking up near St John's in Newfoundland. They looked absolutely magnificent. And yet all I saw of the icebergs was a small percentage of their total mass. The rest was below the surface and out of sight. John, in his glorious gospel, presented to the world for whom Christ died and rose again, the *tip of the iceberg* of Jesus's unique life and miracles. But we have sufficient for faith and belief in **Jesus as Lord**, and for abundant and eternal life in his name. All thanks be to our God! **Amen!**