

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

“Feed My Sheep”*: *First and Second Peter
Lesson 1. The Person of Peter

Although Peter did not write as much as the three greatest contributors to the New Testament—Paul, Luke, and John—he is nevertheless one of the most outstanding Bible characters. Aggressive, ambitious, self-assured, bold yet somewhat vacillating, Peter had yet an underlying loyalty and devotion. Jesus read these qualities when He first met Peter, and saw also his potential under the discipline of grace. [1]

Simon, surnamed Peter, was the son of Jonah, or John (Matt. 16:17), and came from the fishing community of Bethsaida (John 1:44), where he seems to have lived with his wife, his mother-in-law, and Andrew, his brother (Mark 1:29-31). The brothers were in partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:7-10).

The tremendous revival under John the Baptist began with the confession of sins, and ended with a declaration of the presence of the divine Son, in whom alone forgiveness and atonement could be found. Peter listened to him at Bethabara, and his soul was set aflame.

“The demand for confession of sin seemed new and startling.” [2] The declaration “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) was both startling and reassuring. Yet John and Andrew and Simon were ready, “moved by an irresistible impulse,” to accept the Messiah’s presence. [3]

Peter demonstrated a faltering faith and striking confession (Matt. 14:22-33). “Bid me come unto thee on the water.” Peter knew it was Jesus approaching. The fury of the storm had reduced the disciples to helplessness, “and they longed for the presence of their Master.” When Peter stepped overboard he was not presumptuous, for he went at Christ’s command. “Looking unto Jesus, Peter walks securely; but as in self-satisfaction he glances back toward his companions in the boat, his eyes are turned from the Saviour.” A sea of troubles may assail us today, but we can be safe by keeping our eyes on Jesus. [4]

Peter was the first to find words to express the bold faith that had gripped their souls when Christ asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matt. 16:13). Not only was this Man a greater than all the prophets; not only was He the long-expected Messiah; “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Peter boldly confessed (Matt. 16:16). Jesus commended Peter’s faith, but quickly cautioned him against the sin of supposing he deserved credit for it: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17).

Now that the disciples were thoroughly convinced of His divinity, Jesus was prepared to enlighten them about His death. He plainly, even bluntly, told them that He must be rejected and slain: “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt. 16:21).

Simon, who had been first to confess the Son of God, was first to deny His cross. “Then Peter took Him aside, and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not happen unto Thee” (Matt. 16:22). Crosses are for felons, not for One who is the Son of God!

The idea of the cross was something so original, unworldly, that it could arise only in the mind of God. The cross is both the “wisdom” and the “power” of God (1 Cor. 1:18, 24). It is a divine strategy of spiritual warfare of sublime skill. But Peter’s response to the Savior’s stunning announcement was the same as that which people of every place and age would experience. He was expressing the thoughts of our own hearts, even today, in treating as repugnant foolishness the very idea of being crucified.

Jesus revealed this insight in His rebuke to Peter: “Thou art an offense to Me: for Thou [are not mindful] of the things that be of God, but those that be of man” (Matt. 16:23). Peter was simply a man, he was just being himself. He couldn’t fathom “the things that be of God” enough to discern the meaning of the cross.

Jesus put His finger of recognition on the plague spot of mankind’s opposition to the cross: “He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan! Thou art an offense unto Me” (Matt. 16:23).

He had unwittingly let himself be a tool in the hands of Satan by seeking to turn Jesus away from His sacrificial purpose. That temptation was real to Jesus! Peter’s attitude toward the cross perfectly reflected the attitude of Satan himself.

The old covenant, as clearly brought to our attention by E. J. Waggoner, one of the 1888 messengers, is making promises to God. [5] At the last supper Peter promised his Lord, “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I” (Mark 14:29). Verse 31 indicates continuous assertion—“the more vehemently.” Vehemence has its place, but it is not always proof of enduring loyalty. Peter’s tragic denial three times was equally vehement (Luke 22:54-61). Time often lends poignancy to our vehemence, as when poor “Peter remembered the word of the Lord, ... Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice.” It was like a sword thrust into his heart, and “Peter went out, and wept bitterly” (vs. 62).

If you or I make promises to God, immediately it’s old covenant. It’s Peter promising that he will never deny Christ, and then doing it before the rooster crowed next morning. It’s “all the people” promising at Mt. Sinai, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do!” (Ex. 19:8); and then bowing down to a golden calf in a few days. The problem is simple: we humans don’t keep our promises; in fact, we can’t, because we have no righteousness

of our own. This is why so many New Year's resolutions go down the drain after only a few days.

Someone may say, "What's wrong with making good promises to God even if you do break them?" Several things: God Himself has never asked you to do so; and further, Paul says that making and breaking promises to God brings you into spiritual "bondage" (Gal. 4:24). "The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you. ..." [6]

It was the beginning of centuries of sad Israelite history that finally led them into the "bondage" of foreign captivity and then at the end, to crucify their Messiah. Those who think that the old and new covenants are the same thing are confusing liberty with slavery.

When God makes the promise, there you have the new covenant. And believing the promise is liberty, not slavery. He always keeps His promise. "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4). You may say, "That's such good news—I can hardly believe He will ever do that for me!" Peter couldn't believe it either, until he repented of his unbelief. You can repent, too. That's the good news!

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 381, 382.

[5] For example, see Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, p. 71 (CFI ed., 2016).

[6] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/9sHmc0ZJrG0>

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