

THE APOSTLE PETER

The greatest of men at times do not appear so great. If that statement were true of anybody in the entire Bible it would have to be the apostle Peter. Peter is a great portrayal of typical humanity because he was a typical man. He was consumed by the earnest desire to do right as often as he could, but at times allowed temptation to cloud his vision thereby abandoning right for the pleasures or ease of sin. This one distinct characteristic of Peter makes him the great Bible man that perhaps more people in this world can identify with; because generally speaking mankind has an honest desire to do what is right, but also occasionally abandons right when temptation clouds his vision.

Peter is first introduced in Scripture while indulging in his occupation as a fisherman. *“Now as he (Christ) walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers”* (Mark 1:16). The Simon from this verse is learned to be Peter, as he otherwise is addressed by a combination of the two names, Simon Peter. He and his brother Andrew were fishermen from Bethsaida (John 1:44) and the sons of a man named Jona (Matthew 16:17). Little else is known of his private life other than that he was married with children and that his mother-in-law at some point resided with them. However, it is none of these personal matters that portrays him as a great Bible man. His greatness is seen in his faith, work, steadfastness, and, at times, his humble penitence.

When Peter is first mentioned fishing with his brother a distinct event occurred that would forevermore change the course of his life and duty. It was on that day when Christ walked by the two that He called unto them and said, *“Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men”* (Mark 1:17). The response of the two is remarkable because they did not question who He was, what He wanted, or where He was taking them. In recognition of the Messiah for whom they, as Jews, had long waited the Bible simply says that *“...straightway they forsook their nets and followed him”* (Mark 1:18). They did not just follow him out of their boat, nor did they just follow him away from the sea, nor did they simply follow him to his next destination, but when they forsook their nets and followed Him they did so to the top of the mountains of joy and through the valleys of the shadow of death all the rest of their lives. If ever a man were great it would be the man willing to forsake all and follow Christ.

Over the next three years Peter was a constant companion and close confidant of the Lord. When the Sermon on the Mount was proclaimed, he was there (Matthew 5-7). When Peter's mother-in-law was healed and the winds and sea were calmed, he was there (Matthew 8). When Jairus' daughter was raised from her somber sleep, he was there (Matthew 9). When the limited commission was proclaimed unto Christ's faithful servants, he was there (Matthew 10). When the Pharisees were answered and rebuked, he was there (Matthew 12, 22-23). When the parables were spoken, he was there (Matthew 13, et al). When the multitude was fed and the water was made a pathway, he was there (Matthew 14). When the four thousand were fed, he was there (Matthew 15). When Christ was first confessed as the Son of the Living God, he spoke it (Matthew 16). At the transfiguration, he was there (Matthew 17). When a child was exalted, he was there (Matthew 18). When the rich young man went away sorrowful, he was there (Matthew 19). When Christ predicted His crucifixion, he was there (Matthew 20). When Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem, he was there (Matthew 21). When Jerusalem was doomed and the end was foretold, he was there (Matthew 24). When the great separation was warned, he was there (Matthew 25). When the Lord's Supper was instituted and the Lord prayed in Gethsemane, he was there (Matthew 26). When Jesus died, he was there (Matthew 27). When He came forth from the tomb and appeared to the apostles, he was there (Matthew 28). And when the Son ascended back to the Father, he was there (Acts 1).

Throughout the ministry of Jesus Christ, Peter proved himself a faithful servant, but alas, though seemingly at all times he was there, once he was not. Peter's distance from the proceedings of Matthew 27 and his denial of the Messiah in the same often are the sole events used to characterize this great apostle. Should the faults be overlooked? No, because great lessons can be learned from them. However, Peter's life is a great picture of God's forgiving nature and it was His mercy and grace that allowed Peter to once more live out a great life of Christian service.

It is the remainder of his life that eases the worries of Peter's spiritual status, for he is portrayed further in his faithfulness. Using the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Peter stood with the apostles that next Pentecost and eloquently spoke by inspiration on behalf of the One whom he had once denied, but now whom he

proclaimed (Acts 2). He healed a lame man and taught the witnesses (Acts 3). He was arrested for his work, but yet boldly addressed the Sanhedrin with the gospel (Acts 4). He disciplined the iniquitous and pledged full allegiance to Christ (Acts 5). He opened the door to the Gentiles and first preached unto them the gospel of Christ (Acts 10). He answered the calloused charges of Jewish detractors (Acts 11). He was imprisoned by Herod after hearing of James' execution, and yet was delivered by an angel (Acts 12). Paul in places spoke of him fondly, and in the epistles that bear his name he claimed that for a period of time he served as an elder in the church of Christ at Jerusalem (I Peter 5:1). Once again he was withstood for hypocrisy, but again recovered by his humility (Galatians 2).

Peter, perhaps, can generally be characterized by the themes of the books he wrote. I and II Peter are epistles filled with words of exhortation, warning, and hope. His concern for souls is seen from the beginning to the end of his ministering life and in his deep desire for others to not make the same mistakes that he himself had. The final words he wrote are as follows:

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen”
(II Peter 3:17-18).

The last days and death of Peter are unknown in the scriptures. Tradition, however, reveals a touching story of humility and godly courage. It says that in A.D. 61, at around the age of seventy-five, Peter found himself captured in Rome and sentenced to death for his “Christian crimes.” At his request his crucifixion was administered upside down as he saw himself unworthy to die exactly as did his Lord. Such a feat of meekness and lowliness of heart can only characterize a great man of the Bible.

In the end what made Peter great was that he was a Christian. Not a sectarian Christian, denominational Christian, or any other sort of categorized Christian. Peter was just a Christian. And if that is what characterizes one who is great, then pure and simple Christianity should be that for which all attain.

-Andy Brewer