



THE CONVERSION OF PETER'S FAITH



Most of us are familiar with Peter's experience of getting out of the boat to walk on water to get to Jesus (Matthew 24:14-31). Peter was out on the storming sea in a boat with the rest of the disciples. Jesus appears walking on the water, and only Peter makes the move to get out of the boat and try to walk to Him. What a hero! Even though he eventually sank, Peter could still boast in his courageous attempt at getting close to Jesus when everyone else shrunk back in fear. What Peter and the rest of the disciples did not realize was that the real storm had not yet occurred, for that was going to happen the day Christ was crucified. It was on that day that the real test of faith would happen. On that day the true understanding of storms and faith and the saving arm of Jesus would be revealed.

Peter was a proud man, extremely confident in his ability to serve God and suffer for him through hard times. There is a sense that Peter felt he was better than the rest. Peter wanted Jesus to acknowledge how committed and valuable he would be as His minister. The real problem with these desires was that Peter's faith was in himself. God wanted to use Peter in glorious and eternal ways, but knew that his faith needed to be "converted".

God knew that Peter NEEDED to fail. Not just fail in a way like when you fall down and then get back up, but fail in a way that destroys all confidence in yourself. Fail in a way that you no longer consider yourself the greatest but the least. Failing in way that forever turns your eyes away from self and unto Jesus in the face of storms, while shame and even Satan is trying to sift you with regret. Such a deep and complete failure is needed to forever settle the question of our own ability to be holy, good and the most committed. To go through such a failure is not meant to press someone unto suicide but into a deep identification of their death with Christ and the loving arms of Jesus who brings us INTO Himself and fills us with the only Life that can overcome. Well, God had such a failure planned just for Peter.

God knew when the real storm was going to happen, and in the midst of that storm God would reveal to Peter just who this “Jesus of Nazareth” really was, and what His true ministry looked like. Let us look at the scriptures that share the account of this storm and Peter’s experience in it, ***“Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him (Luke 22 54-63).***



Peter found himself face to face, even “eye to eye” with Christ as He was being offered up. The Lamb in His selfless and sacrificial love was staring at Peter right in the face. Instead of boldly declaring his allegiance to Him, Peter denied Him three times. Peter slipped, and fell, and then he drowned. It was a complete failure. Because Peter’s faith was not yet converted, he wept bitterly

when confronted with his own lack and utter selfishness. The disciple who once stepped out in courageous faith in the midst of a storm just denied Jesus three times to preserve his own life. And then, to make sure that Peter knew that God heard, a foretold rooster crows three times. All this was proof positive that Peter was not the one in whom God could put his trust. Peter saw into the eyes of the Faithful Witness, the Lamb of God Himself. At that moment, Peter could not deny that only Christ was faithful unto death, even the death of the Cross. God always knew that Peter would utterly fail, that is why Jesus spoke of Peter’s denial beforehand. It was Peter who needed to be convinced.

This loss of faith in self is purposed to lead us to faith in the Cross of Christ and our death with Him. Our faith must be converted. Our faith in self must be crucified. Until we are dead to our own resources we cannot be raised in Christ and filled with His. We must know that we “died with Christ” on the Cross. The day He died, we died (Romans 6:6). Jonah experienced the in-working of the Cross in the belly of a whale, Peter experienced it when he denied Christ, and Saul experienced it realizing he had persecuted unto death the body of Christ in his “service to God”. Those men embraced a real death through those trials. They were confronted with who they are apart from Christ. How precious their redemption became when they saw Christ putting away the filthy rags of all their “goodness” through His death to give them the gold of His Divine Nature in His resurrection. Before God could effectively use any of these people He had to convert their faith. Paul said, “I have NO confidence in the flesh”. He also said, “In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth NO good thing”. But Paul’s confession did not end with the negative, for he went on to declare that “Christ liveth in me” and “through Him I can do all things”. His faith was converted. The faith that He lived by was the faith of the Son of God.

The more confidence we have in ourselves, the more devastating our failures become. Until we understand what the Cross means for our faith walk, our failures will confuse and depress us. Those stormy waters can only be walked upon by those who have found their Life in Christ, the only Life that overcomes.

Many Christians continue to come under the pressure and bondage of the law when they hear the words “have faith” or “believe”. Those words immediately translate in their minds as a work they must do in their own strength and virtue. God wants to convince us that our faith is useless when based on ourselves as its source. New Testament faith was birthed the day Jesus rose from the dead with us in Him. On that day we received a new Source, which is Christ in us. On that day we were given a new security, which is us in Christ regardless of how much we fail.



When Peter first walked on water and began to sink, Jesus reached out His arm and saved him (Matthew 14:31). This picture shows us a kind gesture of the Lord's care. Yet the true salvation brought to us through the Arm of the Lord far exceeds "a kind gesture" and appears in a much darker storm than Peter's windy sea. The prophet Isaiah described what the Arm of the Lord would look when He reached forth to save us with eternal salvation. ***"The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (Isa 52:10,14).*** God's Arm reaching forth to save us was not Jesus of Nazareth in sandals and a white robe, but a Crucified Christ; marred and slaughtered as a criminal. God's Arm was not picking us up from a failure so we could get up and try again. Christ was crucified as us to put away our old nature that fails through His death. He was then raised again to give us His New Life through resurrection oneness. For Christ to reach forth to save us cost Him His Life. Christ did not reach forth to put us back into the boat, but to put us in Himself (Ephesians 2:6). We are saved from the storm through union into Christ as our LIFE!

In our recent studies on the book of Ezekiel we have been discussing the vision found in chapter one in which a storm was descending upon the people of God (Ezekiel 1:4). God was using Ezekiel as an Old Testament picture of someone preparing people to enter into storms hidden and identified in Christ's death and resurrection (Zephaniah 2:3). Hundreds and hundreds of years after Ezekiel's

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vision, another man, the converted Peter (now an Apostle), would also be found exhorting the saints scattered abroad to abide in Christ in times of trial and storm. Peter knew that hidden within their stormy trials was the opportunity to embrace the Cross in a real way. He personally knew the potential for 'less of me and more of Jesus' in the flame. Peter's eyes had been opened to see the Cross of Christ at work in the midst of storms. This is the same Peter who, in his early years, stepped out of a boat into a raging storm to get to Jesus. Even though he fell into the waves then, he eventually learned to reach forth in faith and be lifted up in the Life and strength of the risen Son. Peter was freed from fear and regret by embracing oneness with Christ, and ended His days fulfilling the ministry Jesus desired of him by "converting His brethren that their faith fail not" (Luke 22:32). Let's look at a paraphrase of a portion of Peter's first letter. This epistle was written to those brethren whose faith needed strengthening because they had been scattered abroad during a time of persecution in the early church.

PETER'S LETTER TO THOSE SCATTERED ABROAD

(A PARAPHRASE OF PORTIONS OF PETER'S FIRST EPISTLE)

1:1 Peter, a man sent according to the heart of the risen Son to those scattered throughout Asia Minor.

1:2 God the Father has chosen to deal with us according to His abundant grace, through the working of His Spirit to bring forth His Son in us. Knowing this increases our peace as we receive this work of grace.

1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is so full of mercy in how He deals with us, as His own begotten children in Christ. He gives us the deep confidence that because Jesus was raised from our death and our corruption, we too shall live because we were raised up in Him.

1:4 Our place in Christ is an inheritance that we cannot mess up or corrupt, it is untouched by our failures and will not fade away. It is reserved in Christ for each of us.

1:5 And we are held by God through faith, knowing that the revealing of His Son in us will save our souls, even in our final hours and the years that are well past the time that we should have matured.

1:6 As we realize the greatness of God's mercy in Fathering us in this way, we are able to rejoice in the midst of really hard trials.

1:7 Our faith identifies with the Gold of Christ that will be revealed in us and not in the dross that is being removed. Because we hold fast to God's purpose we are being refined by the fires of these trials. When the Gold of Jesus Christ is revealed in us, there will be great praise, honor and glory made manifest by His Life through us.

1:8-9 Although we have not seen the end of this process yet, we love Him enough to endure through the refining. Because we trust in His faithfulness we have unspeakable joy filled with glory knowing that our doubting souls are being saved by the Life of His Son within.

1:10 This is the very thing the prophets were beseeching God for, and searching to understand as they spoke God's words concerning the wonder of His Son being unveiled in us as His temple.

1:11 These prophets were searching for the fulfillment of the things the Spirit was burdening their hearts with as they testified that God's Son would suffer for us, and for the glory that death would eventually bring forth in His people.

1:12 But it was not unto those of the Northern Kingdom in their Assyrian exile, or the Judeans of the Babylonian captivity that these prophets really spoke... but unto us they were preaching the gospel, even things that they did not understand but which the Holy Spirit would have to open to us.

1:13 Now, when you realize all that has come before you for your admonition at such a time as this, you will prepare yourself to receive the revelation of Christ. You will not allow your mind to roam, or your soul to be un-weaned, rather you will remain steadfast in the hope God has given you until He reveals His Son in you and turns your captivity.

2:9 You are not rejects and misfits banished into purposeless exile, rather you are the generation that is choosing Life, a people of true royalty, for you are living sacrificially through the Lamb's nature, a nation that altogether belongs to God. What a phenomena you are that in the midst of dark exile and trial you shine with the very light of God's Life!

2:10 It is just as Hosea prophesied... that the very worst ones would embrace the Cross and become vessels of honor. Those to whom God would show no mercy accepted His death sentence upon their flesh, and became transformed by the mercy of God to reveal His Son in them.

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Luke 22:32



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