

# UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

## Part 17 – Simon Peter’s Journey of Faith

### Key Questions:

- What does faith in Jesus look like? Is there hope for people who fail? Is there anyone who cannot be saved?

### Simon the Fisherman meets Jesus (John 1:40-42)

This was the first occasion on which Simon met Jesus. In verse 42 we read that Jesus “gazed intently” at Simon. What did Jesus see in Peter? We have no physical description of Peter in the Bible, but we do learn the following:

- *He was a fisherman* (in partnership with his brother Andrew and the sons of Zebedee, James and John); therefore he would have been muscular with rough hands, probably smelling of a lovely mixture of sweat and fish!
- *His name was Simon bar-Jonah*, so his father’s name was Jonah (we do not know his mother’s name)
- *He had no formal education* (Acts 4:13), but as a Jewish boy he would have studied the Old Testament from age five
- *He was married* (Matthew 8:14 records that his mother-in-law was healed by Jesus)
- *He had a distinct rural Galilee accent easily recognisable in Jerusalem* (Mark 14:70).

Jesus gave Simon a new name, “Peter”, which means “a rock”. “Simon” was the most common name in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, but this is the first time on record that the name Peter was ever given to someone. Jesus uses the future tense – “*you will be called Peter*” – in other words Jesus is saying this is who Simon will become (not who he is now). In Luke 6:12-14 we read of Simon being called to be one of Jesus’ 12 disciples. Simon Peter is always named first in the lists of the 12 in the Gospels (Judas, the betrayer, was always last), as he became their leader.

It is not until the book of Acts that the name “Simon” was finally replaced by the name “Peter”. The new name signified a new identity: who Simon is becoming by God’s grace. Other people in Bible were given new names (e.g. Abram became Abraham, and Jacob became Israel). Each of these people received a new identity and a new role in God’s plan with their new name. Jesus was going to change an ordinary fisherman (Simon) into a rock on which He could build (Peter).

#### LESSONS TO LEARN:

- **Jesus changes people.** He always sees the potential of what a person can become when God works in their lives. He is able to transform us so that we become something special in God’s plan if we will follow Him.

### Jesus calls Simon Peter to be a Fisher of Men (Luke 5:1-11)

These events happened around one year after Simon first met Jesus. Over the past year Simon had combined his fishing business with following Jesus. He had seen Jesus performing many miracles, including healing his own mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39). Now Jesus performed the first of two miracles of catching many fish.

Simon’s was humbled as he became aware of his own sin – even though he had obeyed Jesus, he had doubted that they would get any fish. Jesus’ replies with the comforting words: “*Do not be afraid!*” This reassurance from God that we don’t need to fear is often found in the Bible to people who are humble before Him. Peter would become a fisher of men – calling people to follow Jesus. Although this seemed impossible to Simon, Jesus had shown him that it was possible as He is the “master-fisherman” both of fish and men!

After this Simon left his business and began to follow Jesus full-time. He left behind his boat and nets, and even the most profitable catch of fish he had ever made to follow Christ. Simon, afraid and uncertain of himself took this first step of faith in Jesus – because **HE** called, Simon would follow even though he knows his own sinfulness and weakness. Simon was beginning to learn that Jesus could always be taken at His word.

#### LESSONS TO LEARN:

- **We do not need to be afraid of God if we are humble and admit our need of Him**
- **Despite our sinfulness, Christ tells us not to be afraid, and invites us to know and follow Him.**
- **With Jesus what seems impossible becomes possible.** We can always trust in Jesus.

### Simon Peter walks to Jesus on the water (Matthew 14:22-33)

Christ had just miraculously fed over 5000 people using two fish and five loaves of bread. He then commanded the disciples to go out in their boat, and they obeyed. Although they were obeying Christ in faith, they soon got into trouble in a strong wind. They were terrified, and especially when they saw Jesus walking on the water and thought it was a ghost. Again Jesus told them, “*Do not be afraid!*” Simon walked to Jesus on the water. Notice the doubt in his question (“*if it is you ...*”) but the faith he displayed in stepping out of the boat. Faith is taking Christ at His word, and that is what Peter was prepared to do! He waited for Jesus’ command BEFORE he stepped out of the boat. Although he got distracted by the storm and took his eyes off Jesus and so began to sink, when he cried out to Jesus, He immediately rescued him.

#### LESSONS TO LEARN:

- **Jesus does not promise a problem-free life for people who follow Him**, but He does promise to be with us through all our problems and to help us to rise above the problems if we trust in Him.
- **It is not the amount of faith we have that saves us, but who our faith is in.** Many people have faith in different people or ideas, but their faith will not save them if they are trusting in something that doesn’t have power to save them. Believing in something does not make it true. In reality the things we often depend on are little more trustworthy than water – our own health, financial security, career etc. Only Jesus is completely trustworthy.
- **Jesus will not allow His followers to sink, even if their faith is weak – He will keep them safe**

## Simon Peter recognises who Jesus is (Matthew 16:13-26)

This discussion occurred near Caesarea Philippi, the Roman capital of Judea, which was a very multicultural city, and therefore a centre for various religions. Jesus' ministry had reached a turning point – He had been rejected in his home town (Capernaum); John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod; His family thought He was mad; and opposition from the Jewish religious leaders was growing as they began to plot His death. Against this background Jesus asked his disciples who people thought He was. They answered with three possibilities people had suggested.

Jesus then asked them who **they** thought He was. Simon replied on behalf of the twelve disciples, saying, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This was a remarkable statement of faith. Simon had realised that Jesus was the Christ, and, even more, that He is the Son of God. He had been convinced by the words and actions of Jesus. Jesus commended Simon highly – it was God who had revealed this truth to him.

Then Jesus made an amazing promise to Simon – that starting with this first rock, Peter, He would build His church. Peter later wrote that God was building Christians into His church as "*living stones*" (1 Peter 2:5). Here Jesus lays the first of these stones, Peter, into the building. Together with the other apostles Peter would become the foundation of Christ's church (Ephesians 2:20). Every Christian who comes to the same position of faith in Christ as Peter becomes a stone too.

After Simon's confession, Jesus began to prepare the disciples for His coming death and resurrection. Peter could not accept this, and tried to correct Jesus, but Jesus stopped him. Then Jesus presented an amazing challenge to anyone who wanted to be His disciple. The **ONLY** way to follow Him is by the way that He Himself would take – the way of the cross. Anyone who wants to follow Him must deny themselves and take up their cross, dying to their right to rule their own life.

### LESSONS TO LEARN:

- **The central question of the Bible is the one Jesus asked – who do you say Jesus is?** If He is really the Son of God (as Simon said), then He cannot be ignored.
- **Everyone who will follow Simon Peter in putting their faith in Christ will become a "living stone".** Christ will build them into His plan, and into the new community of His people (the Church).
- **To follow Jesus means to deny ourselves and take up our cross.** This means we must die to your own rights and submit to God's will for our life. This is what the Bible means by repentance and faith.

## Simon Peter witnesses Jesus' majesty (Matthew 17:1-8)

On this occasion Jesus took His three closest followers – Peter, James and John – up a mountain with Him. There they saw an amazing sight as Jesus was transformed and Elijah and Moses (representing the authority of the Old Testament prophets and Law) appeared with Him. More amazingly still, they heard the voice of the Father speaking from Heaven saying, "*This is my Son, and I am fully pleased with Him. Listen to Him.*"

### LESSONS TO LEARN:

This occasion (which is often called the "Transfiguration") confirmed several things about Jesus:

- **Jesus is the Son of God** – the Father said this, and the glory He shone with proves it
- **The Old Testament points to Him and His death** (see Luke 9:31 – they talked about His death)
- **He was perfect and sinless** – the Father could say that He was fully pleased with Jesus

## Simon Peter denies Jesus (Luke 22:47-62)

Simon didn't understand that Jesus must die, and so when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus he tried to defend Him with a sword. Jesus, however, knew that He had to die, and so He refused to let Simon fight. Simon followed at a distance to see what would happen to Jesus, but he was very afraid that he might be arrested next. When he was accused of being a follower of Jesus three times he denied that he even knew Him. Then Jesus looked intently at Simon once more (as He did the first time they met – John 1:42), and Simon realised what he had done. This was the worst moment in Simon's life. He was overwhelmed by guilt and fear, and his hope was shattered. Jesus had actually predicted that Simon would deny Him (see Luke 22:31-38), but Peter had been confident that he would remain strong so that he would even die with Jesus. This occasion showed just how weak Simon still was.

## After the Resurrection Jesus restores Simon Peter (John 21:1-23)

Here we read of another occasion when Jesus met with Simon Peter beside the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps Simon expected Jesus to criticise or reject him. Surely there was no hope for someone who had denied Jesus? However, three times (mirroring his three denials) Jesus asked Simon whether he loved Him. Jesus was gently restoring Simon. Instead of rejecting Simon, Jesus gave him a new task to fulfil in His name – to look after His "sheep". Simon would still become Peter, the rock. The simple call of Jesus in verse 19, "*Follow Me*", was a powerful reminder to Peter of that time at the shores of this same lake after the first miraculous catch of fish when Jesus had spoken the same words. Jesus had reconstructed that situation – again calling Simon to follow Him after a miraculous catch of fish. Peter's failings during the previous three years were forgiven. All that mattered was Simon's loving relationship with His Lord. This was truly a new beginning and Peter would become the first preacher and a foundation rock of the church. As a fisher of men he would travel widely to preach the gospel, but he would also be the shepherd of the flock, feeding and caring for Christians until his dying day.

### LESSONS TO LEARN:

- **Jesus gives people a second chance after failure.** He is ready to forgive if we repent and ask for forgiveness, and He will restore us into a good relationship with God and use us to accomplish God's purpose.

### Key Lesson: Jesus patiently leads people to trust in Him

Peter's experience teaches us that Jesus is patient with people. He calls us to trust in Him and follow Him, and He knows us personally. Despite our sin and weakness He sees the potential of who we can become in God's plan. When we realise who He is and repent of our sin and commit our lives under His leadership He will change us to become the person God wants us to be, and He will never give up on us even if we stumble and fail Him.