

Rock Bottom to Rock of the Church: Peter's Spiritual Awakening

Just look at Peter in Acts 2 boldly preaching the sermon that brought in 3,000 souls to found the early church. He preached with amazing authority and confidence. This uneducated fisherman commanded the attention of the huge crowd and eloquently connected the theological dots of Old Testament truths convincing a diverse gathering that Jesus is the Messiah. What has happened to Peter? He was unashamed and courageous as he boldly proclaimed to everyone within earshot they must repent and come to Jesus. He was so different from the Peter we saw after the arrest of his Lord when he cowered before a servant girl, denied Jesus and went out into the night weeping bitterly. What has happened to him to bring about this incredible change?

Sifted Like Wheat

I may know. I think Peter, whose name means rock, hit rock bottom. He was sifted like wheat, shaken to his very core. Earlier Peter was full of swagger. When Jesus told him Satan had demanded permission to sift him like wheat, Peter basically argued with the Lord, “Lord with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” Peter was so sure of himself. But Jesus, undeterred added, “Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.”

You may know the story. After the arrest of Jesus He was taken to the home of Caiaphas. Peter and another disciple were trailing Jesus, trying to learn what was going on. As they waited outside in the courtyard it could be that Peter was hoping to prove his devotion to Jesus by serving as a witness on Jesus’ behalf in the trial. He was ready for the big stuff. But he cratered when he cowered before a lowly servant girl who questioned him. He was tripped up. In the

next few hours Peter denied Jesus three separate times even swearing down curses on himself and stating he had never even met the man.

In the instant he made his third denial the rooster crowed and the Lord, who must have either been just inside a window or was being transferred out of the house, turned and looked at Peter. The Greek word for “look” means a deep penetrating gaze. Jesus must have conveyed a mixture of love and disappointment as he looked into Peter’s very soul. Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him about the rooster crowing and his three denials, and he went out and wept bitterly.

Repentance

That could have been the end of the story. Peter could have remained overwhelmed with grief and disappointment, incapacitated by guilt and shame. He could have grown into a bitter old man, mad at himself, mad at the world. Clearly he had let his Lord down. He had let himself down. He hit rock bottom. But Romas 8:28 teaches us that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. God caused even Satan’s sifting Peter like wheat to be used for good in Peter’s life. This public humiliation brought Peter to the end of himself. After this he will never rely on self again, he will rely on His Lord. His humiliation worked repentance in his heart, he turned back to God.

Forgiveness

Repentance led to forgiveness. In I Corinthians 15 Paul tells us that Jesus met with Peter the day of His resurrection. This was a very private meeting. We are told no details other than the two of them met that day. But I can bet you they didn’t just talk about the weather. I believe Jesus met Peter in his guilt and shame and brought forgiveness. The blood that Jesus had just shed covered Peter’s sin. He was washed clean.

Restoration

Repentance led to forgiveness and forgiveness led to restoration. The resurrected Jesus went on to meet with Peter in a more public way, by the Sea of Galilee with several of the disciples within earshot. There he brought restoration to Peter. He publicly commissioned him with his life's work "feed My sheep and follow Me." The brokenness of shame and guilt were replaced with the wholeness of forgiveness and restoration.

Transformation

Finally Peter received the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost equipping him to be an effective witness for Jesus. Broken yet transformed. Peter was ready for action!

Action Points from the life of Peter

Peter was Sifted Like Wheat

Have you ever hit rock bottom and come to the end of your "self"? What can you learn from Peter about relying on "self"? How do the words of James 4:10 encourage you? "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up."

Peter's Repentance

Have you ever been stuck in your sin and brokenness? How does II Peter 3:9 encourage you? "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. But he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Peter is Forgiven

How does I John 1:8 instruct you when you have fallen short of God's righteousness? "If we confess our sins He is faithful and

righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Peter is Restored and Transformed

“Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit, then I will teach transgressors Thy ways and sinners will be converted to Thee.” Psalm 51:12-13. How does the life of Peter show that God is the God of Restoration? Do you think Peter relied on his own strength to follow Jesus as he moved forward after his denials? What lessons from this season in the life of Peter can you learn from as you seek to follow Jesus?