

Simon Peter, the Restored Disciple

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 40:26–31

Background Scripture: Mark 8:27–29; Luke 22:7–38;

John 18:15–18, 25–27; 21:15–17

Today's Scripture: Mark 8:27–29; Luke 22:31–34; John 18:25–27; 21:15–17

I. Identity of the Messiah

Mark 8:27–29

27 And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

28 And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

29 And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

27a. This first passage of Scripture comes from the third and final year of Jesus' ministry. He has just fed the five thousand. As a result, the people try to "take him by force, to make him a king" (John 6:15). When He refuses to accept such an earthly crown, many stop following Him.

Over the next several months, Jesus is on the move. Then Jesus and the disciples cross the lake to Dalmanutha, then to Bethsaida on the other side of the lake (8:22). From there, Jesus and His disciples travel north.

Without the constant distraction of crowds or opposition, Jesus prepares His *disciples* for the next phase of His ministry. They visit the *towns* in Caesarea Philippi, an area nearly 30 miles north-east of the Sea of Galilee.

27b. Answering the question "Who is Jesus?" is a fundamental issue that everyone, especially the *disciples*, must face.

28. The disciples report the various opinions and rumors circulating about Jesus. Some believe that He is *John the Baptist*, who had already been killed by Herod. Others think that Jesus might be *Elias* (Elijah), the Old Testament prophet known for speaking out against a king. The Old Testament prophesied that a person like Elijah would someday return (Malachi 4:5–6), a prophecy that was fulfilled through the ministry of John the Baptist.

29a. Now the question becomes pointed and personal: *But whom say ye that I am?*

29b. The title *Christ* is the Greek equivalent of the Jewish title "Messiah" (John 1:41; 4:25). Both designations mean "the anointed one."

II. Failing of a Follower

Luke 22:31–34

31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

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

33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

31. It is Thursday night of Jesus' final week, "the day of unleavened bread, when the passover [lamb] must be killed" (Luke 22:7). Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion looms. He shares one final meal with His disciples, using the opportunity to teach them about their role in service to Him.

Jesus singles out *Simon* Peter and makes him a representative of the trials the other disciples will encounter.

The role of *Satan* is similar to that in the opening chapters of the book of Job (Job 1:6–12; etc.): a heavenly official who accuses and tests God's people. The warning that Satan *may sift you as wheat* evokes the image of separating valuable wheat kernels from the useless chaff. The text does not specify what the "wheat" represents. Instead, Jesus' point is that Peter will undergo a season of trial as Satan tempts him away from faithfulness to Christ.

32. Jesus has *prayed* to strengthen Peter's faith and devotion. This is not the only time Jesus prays for His followers. Even today, the risen Christ is our "advocate" with the Father (1 John 2:1).

The Greek term translated *faith* encompasses more than simply "doctrinal belief." The term can also convey meanings such as "loyalty," "fidelity," and "faithfulness". Although Jesus knows that Peter will soon deny Him, He prays for Peter to experience only a temporary failure of faith rather than a complete disavowal.

The Greek term translated *converted* often has the sense of turning away from a wrong course, which aligns with the concept of repentance Jesus assures Peter that he will be restored. Peter's experience will ultimately *strengthen* the *faith* of others.

33. Peter has been with Jesus since the

beginning of His public ministry. He is the most outspoken of the disciples. Peter's association with Jesus leads him to boldly assert his devotion to the *Lord*, even unto *death*. Peter now understands the possibility that Jesus might experience imprisonment and death. This marks a shift in perspective from his previous confessions.

34. The word *cock* refers to a male rooster, a bird known for its tendency to *crow* during the early hours of the morning. This reference to a rooster's crowing also highlights the illegality of Jesus' trial. According to Jewish legal tradition, a trial for a capital offense cannot be conducted at night. Such clandestine judicial meetings are often seen as corrupt and unjust.

Although the rooster's crowing is typically associated with the break of a day, in this context, it does not signal a new day. Jewish custom marks the beginning of a day at sunset, not sunrise. Thus Jesus predicts that Peter's denial will happen on the same *day* as the nighttime meal, during the overnight hours leading up to dawn.

The verb *deny*, having the sense of "renounce" (compare Luke 9:23). When we consider this verse alongside the current passage, two choices become clear: either (1) deny oneself and affirm Christ, or (2) affirm oneself and deny Christ. It is impossible to affirm both oneself and Christ simultaneously.

III. Prediction Realized **John 18:25–27**

25 And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not.

26 One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him?

27 Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

25. After Jesus is arrested and taken by the soldiers and Jewish officials, Peter and another disciple, likely John, follow the crowd into the high priest's courtyard (John 18:15–16). As Peter enters, a servant girl accuses, “Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?” (18:17a). Peter denies this. Then, a second accusation against *Simon Peter* arises, essentially the same as the first.

26. The third accusation comes from *one of the servants* who was *in the garden* named Gethsemane earlier that night during Jesus' arrest. This servant is related to Malchus, a servant of the high priest, whose right ear Peter cut off. Fortunately, due to Jesus' mercy, the injury was not fatal (Luke 22:51). Thus, this servant has good reason to believe that Peter was *with* Jesus!

27. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all note that *Peter* wept after his third denial and the rooster crow. Jesus' prediction has come true, and Peter responds to this realization with shame, anguish, and remorse. At this point, there is nothing he can do to change what has happened.

IV. Reinstating a Leader

John 21:15–17

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

15a. The next section of Scripture takes place following Jesus' resurrection. By this time, the risen Jesus has appeared to many disciples and followers. He appears again to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:2), directing them to a large catch of fish before inviting them to breakfast (21:12).

After breakfast, *Jesus* turns the meeting into a teaching moment. *Simon Peter* had previously boasted of his commitment and devotion to Jesus. But his pledge of devotion proved to be bluster. Jesus' question probes Peter's heart and loyalties.

What does the word *these* refer to? Is it the boats and fishing equipment? Is it the other disciples? Or does it mean, “Do you love me more than these other disciples love me?” We may conclude that Jesus means *these* as a general reference point: “Do you love me supremely, more than anything or anyone else?”

15b. Peter assures Jesus of his *love*, even reminding the *Lord* that *thou knowest* this fact. Jesus had correctly predicted that Peter's previous declarations of commitment would prove false.

15c. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus laid down His life. If Peter loves Jesus, he will lead in the same way, protecting and providing for the *lambs* who are God's people.

16. With only slight variation, the exchange is repeated.

17. Jesus questions Peter's love a third time. For Peter to feel *grieved* at this repetition is understandable. Does Jesus doubt his answer? Or is Peter's distress the result of seeing a connection between these three questions and his three denials? Just as Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus allows Peter to affirm his love three times.

Peter's response acknowledges that not only does Jesus know Peter's thoughts, but He also knows *all things*—a recognition of His deity (John 2:25).

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

What defines “good times” and “bad times”?

Which has taught you more: defeat or success?

Why does failure sometimes lead to greater success?

Today’s study will investigate one of the most successful Christ-followers in history. As we will see, his successes came after experiencing deep failure.

Into the Word

Read today’s lesson Scripture text. In what ways was Peter’s life a success? In what ways was it a failure?

How would you predict Peter’s story would end if the biblical account concluded with his denial of Christ?

In what ways does Peter’s life surprise you?

Can you think of other individuals from the Bible who turned their lives around after a dramatic encounter with God?

What does this tell you about how God has worked in the past and continues to work today?

Key Text

[Jesus] saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.
—John 21:17

Into Life

Write down potential shortcomings a believer might experience.

List ways that shortcoming can become opportunities for you to depend on Christ.

Thought to Remember

Never underestimate what God can do with our weaknesses.