

# Peter and the Charcoal Fire

The Two Fires of Simon Peter

JOHN 18:10-18, 25-27 • JOHN 21:15-19

## Where We Are

We are in our series called *The Word Made Flesh*, working through the Gospel of John. Last week we began in John 18, and today we will continue right where we left off. Last week was the moment Jesus was arrested. We spent much of our time walking through the Genesis parallels, because God is once again about to be betrayed in a garden. We saw that Jesus is ultimately the last Adam. Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. Where Adam brought condemnation, Jesus brings restoration. Where Adam rebelled, Jesus obeyed. Where Adam brought the curse, Jesus brings redemption.

Then Jesus and the eleven disciples were approached by a band of soldiers (perhaps as many as six hundred) led by Judas. They asked if He was Jesus of Nazareth, to which He replied, *I am*. And at the sound of the burning bush in the flesh, speaking, they fell backwards under the sheer power of His name. This shows us that Jesus was not captured. He was not coerced. He volunteered. In the midst of pain, and the greatest tragedy ever to hit the planet (God being killed), nothing was happening apart from the sovereign hand of the Lord.

We then shifted focus to the idea that Jesus is a protector. His instinct, if you can call it that, in this moment was to look at the soldiers and tell them to leave His friends alone and take Him instead. We made a big point of speaking about this. He is a protector. Therefore we should be protectors. We protect the weak, the poor, the voiceless, the hurting, and the oppressed. We protect them from being done more harm, from being taken advantage of, and from being manipulated. We protect them from the con men of the world, and from the wolves of the “church.”

We are never more like Jesus than when we protect those in need. I told you that protecting can look like one of two things. Sometimes we shield, and sometimes we fight. Sometimes we take the bullet, and sometimes we grab the sword. You cannot simply shield in every situation. We could not simply shield the victims of Nazi Germany by giving them asylum. It required us to fight. Jesus could not simply shield the people from the corrupt religious leaders. He too had to fight, through open-air debates, flipping over tables, and miracles in front of them. Whether we like it or not, to be a protector means we have to be okay with confrontation. You have to be able to face those with power and say the hard things.

## This Week: Peter

Last week was all about Jesus. This week is all about Peter. Remember Peter? The one who told Jesus he would die for Him? To which Jesus responded, “Brother, you will not make it until morning without denying your love for me three times.” Here is the final arc of Peter in the Gospel of John. We are going to look at this moment, and at two others in chapters 20 and 21, to complete John’s telling of Peter’s story.

JOHN 18:10-18, 25-27 (ESV)

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

... PETER 19-24 ...

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

## Peter’s Sword

“Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. So Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?’”

We are called to protect. I told you that to protect means sometimes we shield and sometimes we fight. That works in every other context except this one. For Christians, we fight to protect the vulnerable. Always. It is not optional. But Jesus was not vulnerable. Jesus was not being taken advantage of. He was in full control. Peter’s mistake was that he was fighting the guards when he was not protecting the vulnerable. He was fighting to prove himself.

Now look, this is important. Put yourself in Peter’s shoes. He had just been told that he would deny Jesus. He is probably on a little quest to prove his allegiance. To prove he is not like Judas. To prove he is not scared. To prove to God how much he loves Him.

And not only was he fighting to prove himself, look what he was fighting: the will of God. It was God’s will for Jesus to be taken, and Peter did not like God’s will. He did not agree with it. His theological understanding would not leave room for him to think this was God’s will, even though Peter had already been told this was supposed to happen. Multiple times. Including that very night.

I cannot stress this enough. Your theology will make or break you. It is the filter through which you view everything in your life.

Peter was well meaning, but Peter was foolish. First, you cannot prove anything to God. He knows everything already. Second, you do not need to protect God from people. He is a big boy. He can handle it Himself. In his well-meaning zeal, Peter found himself fighting against the will of God.

What is the lesson? You will do foolish things to prove yourself to those around you. And here is another one: not every hard thing in your life is the devil. I have sat in so many prayer meetings where people are rebuking the challenging situation, the trial, whatever it is, and I will just be sitting there quietly thinking, you all are just lobbing off ears. There are hard situations you are in right now. You are fighting them, rebuking them, refusing to deal with them. Maybe you are fighting the will of God for your life, because He wants you to go through the hard thing for the joy on the other side. That is exactly where Peter finds himself. And then Jesus is taken and put before the religious leaders in a sham trial.

“Not every hard thing in your life is the devil.  
Sometimes you are just lobbing off ears.”

## Following at a Cost

“Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door.”

Peter follows Jesus, but only to a point. In this moment Peter is willing to follow Jesus until it is going to cost him. How many of you know a believer like that? Willing to follow Jesus until it costs them?

Now do not think about them. Think about you. You are the most likely person to follow until it costs.

FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

## Am I Peter?

Resist the temptation to think of others when you read. Get low, and ask the honest question.

*Where have I drawn the line?*

- *Am I happy to wave the Jesus banner until it costs me happiness?*
- *Until it costs me money?*
- *Until it costs me social status?*
- *Until it requires me to give up my own dreams, will, and desires?*
- *Until it requires me to serve the needy and the poor?*
- *Until it requires me to live differently and give up my sin?*

*That is Peter. He was happy to follow Jesus until it might cost him his life and his reputation.*

## The Charcoal Fire

Peter has his first test, and it is a little servant girl. He could not even stand up to a likely twelve-year-old girl. Now what I want you to notice is the pattern. He denies once. Some time passes. He denies again. Shortly after, he denies a third time. When you do the wrong thing once, it is easier to do it again. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

THE DRIFT

Weak moments > Weak seasons

Weak patterns > Weak patterns

Weak conscience > Weak faith

This is Peter’s challenge. He did the wrong thing once, and it got easier. But notice *where* the denials happen. Around a charcoal fire. *Anthrakia*. This Greek word is used only one other time in the New Testament, and it is just two chapters later in this very Gospel, in John 21. There, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus has cooked breakfast for His disciples over a charcoal fire. And He is going to use the smell of charcoal smoke, the same scent that filled Peter’s nose on the night he denied, to call Peter all the way home.

## The Second Fire

Around the first charcoal fire, Peter denied his Lord three times. Around the second, Jesus asks him three times if he loves Him. The repetition is not an accident. John is showing us that for every denial, there is a redemption. For every failure, a question of love. For every fall, a fresh commission.

JOHN 21:15-19 (ESV)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

“Where Peter denied, Jesus restored. At the very smell of the smoke that condemned him, grace called him home.”

## A Few Thoughts on Peter

As we close, hold these in mind. They are not just observations about a first-century fisherman. They are observations about the kind of disciple Jesus actually keeps.

- i. Peter loves Jesus, and still sins against Jesus.
  - Love for Christ does not mean the absence of sin in a believer’s life. It means a heart that returns when it falls.
- ii. Peter fails in the same manner repeatedly, and is still forgiven.
  - Three denials in a single night. And Jesus still walks back to him on the shore.
- iii. You could be Peter.
  - Sit with that. Not in shame, but in honesty. The disciple who sat closest to Jesus is also the one who broke first.
- iv. The person who sinned against you could be Peter.
  - Not every failure is a wolf in disguise. Sometimes it is a weak disciple who will weep bitterly and come home.
- v. Peter is weak. Judas is a wolf.
  - Learn the difference. Weakness gets pastored. A wolf gets named. Both are present in this passage. Do not confuse them.
- vi. Peter fails Jesus, but he responds perfectly.
  - That is the difference. Judas ran from. Peter ran toward. When Mary brings word that the tomb is open, watch what Peter does.

JOHN 20:1-6 (ESV)

“So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.”

The man who denied is now the man who runs. When you fail, run toward.