

Second Chances

Bulleen BC - October 2011
John 21:15-19

Is this your most favourite passage in the Bible?

For some people, this passage touches them more than any other, because it speaks of second chances; of flawed characters being given new hope.

How many times have you said or done something, and later wished that you could have your time over again? I'm guessing many, because none of us are anywhere near perfect! I think it's safe to say that we all would like to have some second chances and hopefully do things better.

Our good friend Simon Peter was no different.

In fact, more than anyone else in the Bible, I identify with Peter. In so many respects, Peter was a flawed character. (*Tell me later who you most identify with in the Bible and why.*) Peter was brash, outspoken and so competitive. He so often rushed into situations and said things without thinking of all the consequences.

So, what do we know about Simon Peter?

- * He came from Bethsaida in Galilee (Jn.1:44), which is on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee.
- * He was a fisherman, along with his brother, Andrew (Matt.4:18).
- * He was married (Matt.8:14), as we would expect most Jewish men at that time.
- * He was called by Jesus to be a disciple (Lk.5:10).

Now, these are some of the facts about Peter, BUT, what was he like as a man; what was his character?

As we read the gospels, we discover that Peter was quite a unique character, especially with his mouth. He could never be described as a quiet, reflective kind of person. He was the sort of character who was never backward in coming forward.

Peter was not afraid to ask questions, as evidenced in Matt.15:15 when he said to Jesus; *'Explain this parable to us.'*

He was not afraid to make bold proclamations; in Mark 8:29 we read, *'Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."* Now, the other disciples may have been thinking it, BUT, it was Peter who said it. Like toothpaste squeezed out of the tube, once something like this is said, it can't be taken back.

Peter was also not afraid to even rebuke Jesus when he didn't like what Jesus had said (eg. Matt.16:22).

Of course, the one I shudder at the most is when Peter really put his foot in his mouth and said to Jesus, *"See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"* (Matt.19:27)

Doesn't this sound a little mercenary.

Once again, we must ponder as to whether this reflects what some of the other disciples may have been thinking, BUT, it was Peter who said it. Peter was forthright, brash, full of passion, over-confident and maybe even a little foolhardy.

It wasn't however just what Peter sometimes said. It was also in some of his actions - or should I say reactions. In Matt.14:28-31 we have the story of when Peter walked on the water, at the command of Jesus. While his gaze was fixed on Jesus he was totally absorbed in the wonder of who Jesus was, and lost all perspective of what he was doing (or couldn't do).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, at Jesus' betrayal, it was Peter who drew a sword to defend Jesus against the guards who had come to arrest him. The record tells us that Peter cut off a servant's ear (John 18:10). Obviously he was not just using his sword threateningly or defensively. If the man hadn't dodged, which is a natural reaction, maybe he would have lost more than his ear. To say the least, it was a most foolhardy and impetuous act.

Even after Jesus had been arrested, we read that it was Peter who followed the Lord into the courtyard of the High Priest (Matt.26:58). There is no doubting Peter's devotion to Jesus, even at the risk of his own life, and this is where the real crunch comes.

It was at the conclusion of the Last Supper, when Jesus once again spoke of his coming death, that Peter made his greatest boast. Each of the gospel writers record it slightly differently, though Peter's intent is clear - he said that he was prepared to die for Jesus:
(Matt.26:33) *"Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."*
(Mk.14:29) *"Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."*
(Lk.22:33) *"Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."*
(Jn.13:37) *".. I will lay down my life for Your sake."*

What was Jesus' response to this bold proclamation?
The four gospels are in full agreement as to the words of Jesus: *".. before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."*
(Matt.26:34; Mk.14:30; Lk.22:34; Jn.13:38)

As an aside, there is a lot of confusion concerning the supposed 'rooster crow'. Contrary to popular belief, it was in fact not a bird singing its morning song, but a trumpet blast that signalled the change of the Roman guard at 3.00am, as they stood watch on the walls of Jerusalem. The Roman guard was changed every three hours during the night (9pm, midnight, 3am and 6am).

This is also what Jesus referred to in Mark 13:35: *'Watch .., for you do not know when the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning - lest, coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping.'*

The amazing thing was that Jesus prophesied Peter's denial at precisely 3.00am, at the Roman 'cock-crow', on the Day of Preparation of the Passover Festival.

On that fateful night, after all of Peter's declarations of absolute loyalty, when he realised he had denied Jesus, **just as Jesus had said**, he was devastated. It was one of those times you just wish you could take back in an instant - but he couldn't.

It was a huge reality check for Peter. Despite all his years of brashness and bravado, when it all counted, his boasting of absolute love and total devotion for Jesus came to nought, and he was utterly ashamed of himself. He had failed and let Jesus down.

What made things even worse was that Jesus was quickly condemned to death and crucified before Peter could ever explain or put things right with him.

This burden of denying Jesus forever changed Peter's character. Never again would he boast and big-note himself. For three days Peter was plagued with such deep sorrow and remorse, **until the women brought the news that Jesus had risen.**

It is in the days after of the resurrection of Jesus that we now come to the story of Peter's conversation with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

It is an amazing conversation that is not fully appreciated in the English translation. Though the conversation took place in Aramaic, John recorded it for us in Greek.

In vs.15 Jesus asked Peter, 'Do you love me more than these?' Peter's response was, *'Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.'* On the surface that sounds great, BUT, John records Jesus using an expression for 'love' that was very deep and personal (agape), while Peter responded with an expression that implied only deep affection (phileo).

In vs.16 Jesus again asked Peter, *'Do you love me'*, and again Jesus used this very deep expression for 'love'. Peter's response was the same as the first time, *'Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.'*

Again, Peter's expression for 'love' had been muted. Peter was not going to boast in his love for Jesus anymore. He had failed the Lord, and he now realized that it is not what you say that matters, but what you do and how you live your life.

A third time, in vs.17, Jesus asked Peter, *'Do you love me'*. **This time** Jesus used the same expression that Peter had used (phileo). It was the lesser expression for love. Is it any wonder that Peter was grieved, because Jesus had used the lesser word for 'love' this third time.

Still, Peter made his response, *'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.'* Peter's word for love remained the same. He was determined that, never again would he boast more than he could deliver.

To each of Peter's guarded responses of love, Jesus commissioned him to serve God in ministry to others: *'Feed My lambs'; 'Tend My sheep'; 'Feed My sheep.'* They were expressions of confidence! Jesus was entrusting Peter to continue the work of ministry he had begun. Knowing all of Peter's faults and failings, including his denials, Jesus was giving Peter a second chance.

Never again would Peter let Jesus down. Second chances don't come around very often, but when they do, you grab hold of them and don't let go. This second chance was one of the greatest gifts the Lord could have given to Peter.

Today, many people around the world are crying out for second chances. With the breakdown of law and order; the breakdown of economic stability; the breakdown of community cohesion; the breakdown of many family relationships, people are feeling vulnerable, dislocated, directionless and lost.

Where can they turn; what can they do?

Add to this a loss of the place and importance of God in people's lives, and you have a rather desperate situation.

Today, government and community resources are being poured out at an increasing rate to quell many of these growing feelings and fears, but it never seems enough.

What the world really needs is not so much more and more money and programs, though they can be of some short term assistance, but to reconnect with God and experience His forgiveness and restoration.

When people realize that the Lord Jesus has forgiven them all their past mistakes, and is offering them a second chance at life, there is not only a sense of relief, but a new passion for living and new horizons of hope.

When the Lord Jesus forgave Peter, and gave him the gift of a second chance, Jesus gave us two things:

- 1] He gave us new hope that we too can receive a second chance, if, like Peter, we are truly repentant of our past mistakes.
- 2] He set us an example of how we, as God's people, should be prepared to reach out to others who may have offended us, and be prepared to offer them a second chance, if they are truly sorry for what they have done.

The best thing about second chances is that we can let go of past mistakes and have a new beginning with God and others.

Praise the Lord for second chances!