

THE APOSTLE JESUS RENAMED

John 1:35-42

Intro: Today I am beginning a series on 1 Peter, but rather than begin with the text of the Apostle Peter's first epistle, I want to spend the time today thinking about Peter himself. I believe it always helps us to appreciate anyone's writing if we know something about that person. And I say that knowing that the Apostle Peter did not write his epistles "on his own." When he said in his second epistle with reference to the Old Testament that "men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), his words applied equally to the writers of the New Testament – and so they applied to himself! Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit did not ignore the character of the men He used to give us the Bible, not did He ignore their own understanding of the truth which they wrote about. And any reader of the Gospels, and of the book of Acts, will readily agree that the Holy Spirit has given us much information about this man who was so marvelously used by God, and yet a man like all of us who had many and deep spiritual needs.

We will be looking at several passages of Scripture today, but I am starting today with what must have been:

I. PETER'S FIRST MEETING WITH OUR LORD (John 1:35-42).

It is ought to be interesting to all of us that John the Baptist was really the human instrument the Lord used to bring Simon (which was Peter's original name) to the Lord. We learn here that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, and it is generally agreed that the other man of the two who are spoken of in John 1:37, was the man who became the Apostle John. Both were disciples of John the Baptist.

You will notice from our text that these two, Andrew and, supposedly, John, spent at least several hours with the Lord. As soon as that time was over, Andrew found his brother Simon, and brought him to the Lord. The only thing we are told about their time with the Lord, was that the Lord said to Peter, "The art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas," and then John the Apostle added, "which is by interpretation, A stone." That interpretation is for our benefit.

This was probably not all that the Lord said to Peter, but this was the main message that He had for him.

"Cephas" is Aramaic, the language spoken by the people of Israel at the time our Lord was here on earth. It is very similar to Hebrew. "Peter"

means the same thing, but it is from the Greek. The name Cephas is found only here in the Gospels, but it is found again in 1 Corinthians four times, and in the epistle to the Galatians once.

We are not told what Peter's reaction was, but it must have startled him somewhat for the Lord to tell him this. It meant that he would be known for his strength, especially his spiritual strength. And it is in this direction that the story of Peter in Scripture goes and develops.

We can only speculate as to why Peter's parents would have named him Simon, or Simeon. It was the name of one of Leah's sons, and that may have been the reason. It meant "hearkening," and perhaps they had hoped and prayed that their son would become a man who would *hearken, listen*, to the Word of God. And they may have prayed to that end. If so, their prayers were certainly answered.

As far as we know, Peter and Andrew were the first to be called to be apostles, and Peter's name appears at the first of every list of the apostles in the Gospels. So it was very important that spiritually he would live up to his name. In fact, we all should be Peters because the work of the Lord requires that we "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10).

But let me take you to another passage. This time it is to a very familiar passage in the Gospel of Matthew: chapter 16, beginning with verse 13. It is the account which gives us what Peter understood about Christ. It is often called,

II. PETER'S GREAT CONFESSION OF CHRIST (Matt. 16:13-23).

It is not my purpose to go into this whole passage except to show what it revealed about Peter.

The Lord had taken his disciples unto into Caesarea Philippi. And while they were there He asked them what people were saying about Him, that is, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matt. 16:13). They had different answers to give. Some thought that He was John the Baptist. Others thought that He was Elijah. Still others said that He was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But then the Lord turn the question on the disciples themselves: "But whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Peter responded by saying very definitely, "Thou art the Christ," *i.e., the Christ*, "the Son of the living God."

Peter had come to a true understanding of the Person of our Lord. The

Lord declared that Peter was “blessed,” meaning that he was blessed, happy, fortunate. But then the Lord went on to say how Peter had come to this understanding: “For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matt 16:17).

I think that we can say from this that Peter was ahead of his fellow disciples in his understanding of Christ. He was a man who had been taught by God, the Father. And this is one of the important factors in becoming spiritually strong. No child of God is truly strong unless he, or she, is strong in the Word, and especially concerning what the Word teaches about Christ.

But if you read on in that same passage you will see that Peter went from being declared “blessed” by the Lord, to being the spokesman for Satan himself. And I say this because when the Lord began to tell His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the Jews, and then be killed, but would rise again, Peter began to rebuke the Lord telling Him that the Jews would never be able to do this to the Lord. And Peter certainly meant that he would be there to make sure that they didn’t do it.

So Peter was clear on Who the Lord was, but he was completely in the dark as to what the Lord had come to do. And this is what the Lord said to Peter in His rebuke of Peter:

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matt.16:23).

Peter deserved the same kind of a rebuke that the Lord gave to the two disciples He walked with on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. Do you remember what He said to them?

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? (Luke 24:25-26).

Peter was like we all are. There were some things that he understood, but there were other things, equally important, that he did not understand. This brings Peter’s words at the end of his second epistle into clear focus. I am referring to 2 Peter 3:18 where he wrote:

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

How wonderful it is to read Peter’s message in Acts 2 which he preached in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost following the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. What he had not understood before, at this point in his life he proclaimed the truth about our Lord’s work as clearly as it

could possibly be.

In this connection it is also wonderful to see the depth of understanding that Peter had later in life concerning all of the ways of the Lord as they affect our lives.

But I want to point out another feature of Peter's life which was weak while the Lord was here on earth, but which became very strong as the Lord continued to teach him.

III. PETER'S STRONG SELF CONFIDENCE (Matt 26:31-35).

I am referring to an incident which immediately followed the time that the Lord had with His disciples in the Upper Room where they had observed the Lord's Supper for the first time. This is how Matthew related the incident:

31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

Peter's self-confidence was shared by all of the disciples, but he was the one who expressed how he felt about himself to the Lord.

Luke brought in an aspect of what was involved here, and we find that recorded in 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.

But Peter did not believe the Lord. He did not understand his own weakness, nor did he understand the power of Satan. Do you remember that it was the Apostle Peter who gave us these words?

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of

God, that he may exalt you in due time:

7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

11 To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 5:6-11).

But before Peter understood how foolish his own self confidence was, and how much he needed to trust the Lord, do you remember what happened? Let me read that for you. I find it to be one of the most heart-moving incidents recorded in all of Scripture. Here is Matthew's account:

69 Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

73 And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

74 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:69-75).

Can you imagine an apostle, in fact, the leader of the apostles, talking like Peter must have spoken at that crucial hour in his life? What had happened to all of that self-confidence which he had spoken about earlier? Here was a man gripped with fear, fear for his own safety.

Satan had things figured out fairly accurately when he told God what Job would do if God would allow him, Satan, to attack Job's body. These were Satan's words:

And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life (Job 2:4).

And just five verses later we have these words from Job's wife:

Then said his wife unto him [to Job], Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die (Job 2:9).

Job didn't do what Satan thought he would do, but he did have his struggles with what was taking place in his life. And Job's wife was completely ready to give up.

What did Peter do? After doing what he said he would never do, "he went out, and wept bitterly." Thayer says that "bitterly" means "with poignant [poin-yant] grief. The dictionary defines poignant as *painfully moving*, but also *piercingly effective*. His faith did not fail, but that revelation of himself that the Lord gave him at that time forever crushed his self-confidence. If Peter could hear all of the talk today even among Christians about self-esteem and self-love, he would tell us how the Lord shattered those characteristics which he had a full supply of by nature. Peter learned the hard way how much he needed to trust in the Lord, and not in himself. Oh, I am sure that Peter struggled with himself all of his life, but he was never the same after the terrible way he had renounced any relationship at all with the Lord he really loved very dearly.

In Peter's first epistle he spoke of believers as those "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5). You see, we don't keep ourselves; He keeps us, and no one can pluck us out of his hand.

What experiences have you had where the Lord was teaching you not to trust in yourself, but to put your full confidence in Him? These are times that you and I can never forget. Apart from the grace of God they will leave us in total despair. That is why we need to finish this brief survey of the life of Simon Peter with a remembrance of

IV. THE TENDER MERCIES OF THE LORD (John 21:15-17).

We all need to ask ourselves, "What would I have done with Peter if I had been in the Lord's place? Would I have dismissed him from being an apostle? Or would I have tried to get a pledge from him that he would never again do what he had done? What would I have done?"

Instead of trying to answer those questions, let us see what the Lord did.

The Lord asked Simon if he really loved Him more than the other disciples loved Him, as he had before claimed that he did. And the Lord used the word ἀγαπάω. Peter responded with φιλέω, as though he were hesitant to use the stronger word, ἀγαπάω. The same thing happened when the Lord asked Peter the same question the second time. The third

time the Lord used the weaker φιλέω, and Peter used this same word for the third time. You can see by Peter's answers that his self confidence was gone. Adam Clarke in his commentary on this passage has a very possible explanation for the statement when the Lord asked him the third time about his love. He got it from Chrysostom, and this is his comment: on John 21:17:

[Peter was grieved] Fearing, says Chrysostom, lest Christ saw something in his heart which he saw not himself, and which might lead to another fall; and that Christ was about to tell him of it, as he had before predicted his denial.

(from Adam Clarke Commentary)

The Lord Jesus knew that if he had Peter's love, even though it might not be all that it could and should be, yet that was what would qualify Peter to tend the lambs and to shepherd the sheep.

Concl: How amazing God is in His dealings with us! We all have our own spiritual autobiography which could be written. And in every case we would see not only our own pride and failures, but also much evidence of the grace of God, and of His lovingkindness. As we face another year, and as we begin the study of the epistles of this man Peter who knew and loved the Lord so well, let us profit from Peter's mistakes, but also from what he learned. And let us pray that the Lord will work in our hearts that we may live for the Lord and serve the Lord in the same loving and humble way that the Apostle Peter did. We all need to love the Lord more, and to trust Him more. This is where the blessing is, and this is where we can enjoy the sweetest fellowship with the Lord as well as with each other.