

## ***What Happened to Peter?***

The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

Luke 24:36-49; Acts 4:5-13

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When I first read these two Scripture passages one after the other, I was intrigued by the difference in Peter and the other apostles *after* the resurrection compared to how they acted before Jesus' crucifixion. Peter especially stands out in my mind. Peter was one of the first whom Jesus called personally to "*follow him*."<sup>i</sup> Peter, since he was a fisherman, was most likely uneducated. He was enthusiastic and impulsive, often speaking the first thing that popped into his mind. Peter was the disciple who, when he saw Jesus walking on the water towards his boat<sup>ii</sup>, jumped overboard and tried to walk on the water too.

Peter was the disciple who began to realize who Jesus really was, so that when Jesus asked him, "*Who do you say that I am?*"<sup>iii</sup> Peter could answer with confidence, "*The Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" Jesus confirmed his response with the affirmation, "*Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by humans, but by my Father in heaven.*" Some time later, Jesus had to reprimand Peter, saying "*Get thee behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me!*" because Peter wanted to keep Jesus from his impending doom in Jerusalem.

During their celebration of the Passover, which we call the Last Supper, Jesus was washing the feet of his disciples. Peter said, "*Lord I will not have you wash my feet!*" Jesus responded, "*Unless I wash your feet, you cannot be my disciple.*" Then Peter cried out, "*Then wash not only my feet, but my head and hands as well!*"<sup>iv</sup>

Discussion around the table got more solemn when Jesus began talking about his imminent betrayal and death. Peter said, "*Lord, I will die for you!*" but Jesus, who knows all things, sadly predicted, "*Peter, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.*"<sup>v</sup>

Peter is the one who rashly tried to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, by striking out with his sword and cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Peter followed the soldiers as they took Jesus away to face the questions of the high priest. In the courtyard, Peter tried to warm himself by the fire. There he was recognized by a woman who declared loudly, "*You were with Jesus!*" Peter angrily disagreed, "*I never knew the man.*"<sup>vi</sup>

Again, someone said, "*You were too with him! We saw you.*" Peter, probably fearing for his life, denied ever being with Jesus. A third time they said, "*Surely you are one of his followers, for you are a Galilean!*" And with an angry curse and an oath, Peter retorted, "*I never knew the man!*" And then, just as Jesus said it would, the cock crowed twice. Peter, convicted of his failure, ran away weeping and hid.

During and after the crucifixion, Peter and the other disciples hid in the Upper Room, fearful that *they* would be arrested next. They apparently forgot all that Jesus had told them about his death, and that after three days he would rise.<sup>vii</sup>

Something radically dramatic happened between this point, when Peter was fearfully hiding with the other disciples, and the story in Acts, where he is boldly preaching in the Temple the Truth about Jesus the Christ. What *happened* to Peter after the crucifixion that changed him?

Peter and the rest of the disciples were hiding out in a locked room when amazing things began to happen. Some women came to tell them that Jesus had risen, and Mary Magdalene had seen him! Then a couple from Emmaus showed up, saying that they had met a stranger on the road to Emmaus, and had invited him in for dinner. During the meal, they realized that the stranger was Jesus, but then he vanished!

Later Jesus appeared to the ten disciples in the Upper Room, but Thomas missed it. A few days later, Jesus appeared again, and Thomas got to touch the wounds in his hands and his side, and Thomas believed.

Jesus met the disciples on the shore one morning, after they had been fishing all night. He shared breakfast with them on the beach and gave Peter the opportunity to reaffirm three times that he loved Jesus, canceling out his earlier denials.

On Pentecost, fifty days after the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, the apostles were all together in one place when a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. And all who were there were filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>viii</sup>

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached with power to the crowds outside in the streets. He was no longer in hiding, or afraid, or tongue-tied. Peter challenged the crowd to repent and turn from their sin and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. They, too, would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A few days later, Peter and John were going up to the Temple in the afternoon to worship. There they encountered a beggar who had never been able to walk. Instead of giving him money, Peter said "*In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!*" Peter reached out his hand and helped the man to stand. In his joy, the man began walking and leaping and praising God all around the Temple. Everyone who recognized him came running over to find out what had happened and how he had been healed.

Peter, no longer afraid but now filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly used the opportunity to preach to the crowds about their sin and about the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter challenged the people to repent from their sins and return to God.

Suddenly, Peter, John and the man who had been healed were surrounded by a formidable crowd of the highest Jewish authorities. There were high priests, accompanied by the captain of the temple guard, who was the second most powerful person in Jerusalem, apart from the Roman governor and his army. The Sadducees were there, the wealthy, powerful upper class, who had learned to survive by cooperating with the Romans. Together this group of men were the most influential people in the land; they comprised the Sanhedrin (that is the senate and the supreme court of the nation of Israel). Now all of them were arrayed against Peter and John.

These were the same authorities who had manipulated Pilate into condemning Jesus to death, yet Peter was no longer afraid! He is no longer trying desperately to remain anonymous in the crowd. No more is he claiming not to know Jesus. No longer is he hiding behind locked doors. He no longer is paralyzed by doubts. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, is now bold and confident.

With the authority of the Name of Jesus, he had healed the lame man; now he boldly proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ to an audience of the most powerful leaders in Jerusalem, who had assumed that he was just a simple, uneducated fisherman from Galilee who had never been to rabbinical college, who had no technical education in the intricate regulations of the Jewish Law, and who had no special professional qualifications.

Reading again from Acts 4:8-12:

*"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple, and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

The religious authorities were astonished and realized that these men standing before them had been with Jesus. They had no other explanation for the strength and eloquence that Peter displayed.

What *did* happen to Peter? That kind of radical change does not come from joining a philosophical movement or a social action group. Rallying around a set of particular ideals does not bring such a dramatic and lasting change. Neither does trying "*The Power of Positive Thinking*" or taking a course in "*Seven Steps to Exceptional Leadership*." Transformational change of that magnitude comes from spending time with Jesus, Son of God and Savior of the world, and by being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus died, he had promised that he and the Father would send to His disciples another helper who would be with them always. The Greek word translated "helper" is *parakletos*. It means a lawyer or assistant in a legal question. It also means a person who provides encouragement, counsel, and strength. The Holy Spirit will carry on the teaching and testimony that Jesus began. The Holy Spirit is a gift, given to every person at the moment of their conversion<sup>x</sup>, when they repent from their sins and turn to faith in Jesus Christ.

It is common to think of being 'filled with the Holy Spirit' as meaning speaking in heavenly language, or tongues. But the work of the Spirit is so much more than that! In Scripture, the Holy Spirit is involved, in both the Old and New Testaments, with creation, renewal, teaching, witnessing, searching, comforting, and interceding.<sup>x</sup>

I want to share with you a description of “*How the Holy Spirit Works in Our Lives*” that I found in one of my books.

The Holy Spirit **enlightens** us by revealing answers that were previously hidden, and leading people in the understanding and application of the Bible. For example, have you ever read a familiar passage when all of a sudden you think, ‘wow! I never saw *that* before in this verse.’<sup>xi</sup> you just experienced the Holy Spirit at work.

The Holy Spirit **regenerates** people, giving them new life in Christ. Like Jesus told Nicodemus, they are “born again.”<sup>xii</sup> They are a new person inside.

The Holy Spirit **sanctifies** God’s people, helping us to follow Jesus, to become more like him and to mature spiritually. Those who are filled with the Spirit develop the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>xiii</sup>

The Holy Spirit **inspires** us to accomplish far more than we could alone. The Spirit grants courage to fight injustice. The Spirit gives words of wisdom, and the strength to handle crises.<sup>xiv</sup>

Do *you* want the confidence that transformed Peter?

The secret is in spending time with Jesus, growing in your faith, and cooperating with, or obeying, what the Holy Spirit wants to do in your life. Read your Bible daily. Join adult education classes and small groups. Especially read the Book of Acts where you will discover more about the lives of Peter and other apostles. As you abide in Jesus and spend time with Him, the Holy Spirit will transform you and equip you to do the tasks God has prepared for you to do.

Is God calling you to be an elder or a deacon, A greeter or a small group leader? Is God calling you to be a bell-ringer, or a VBS teacher, or an usher? Is the Spirit urging you to come to the Prayer Summit tonight and be a prayer warrior? Is God calling you to serve others, or to be a Sunday School teacher, or to care for the building, or to support missionaries? Pray about those nudges, and ask the Spirit to make it clear to you.

If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God who was crucified and died and was buried according to the Scriptures, and whom God raised from the dead, If at some point in your life you have acknowledged your sin by repenting, and have put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you have also received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is there to do *for you* all that He did for Peter, giving you a new life, sanctifying you, enlightening you, inspiring and teaching you, purifying you, giving you the strength and desire to become all that God created you to be.

You may just find yourself in a situation where a neighbor, a co-worker, even a stranger, will look at you and say, “Why are you different from most people? What *happened* to you?” Then you, like Peter, can say, “I have spent time with Jesus!”

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Mt 4:18-20

<sup>ii</sup> Mt 14:28-33

<sup>iii</sup> Mt 16:13-20

<sup>iv</sup> John 13:6-9

<sup>v</sup> John 13:36-38

<sup>vi</sup> Luke 22:54-62

<sup>vii</sup> John 20:19-20, 26

<sup>viii</sup> Acts 2:1-4

<sup>ix</sup> Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:13, John 3:3,5; Gal 5:22-23

<sup>x</sup> John 14:16, 26; 16:7-15. Also footnote in the Reformation Study Bible ESV, p. 1542 “The Holy Spirit”.

<sup>xi</sup> Eph 1:17,18; Luke 24:27

<sup>xii</sup> John 3:5-8

<sup>xiii</sup> Gal 5:16-18, 22-23

<sup>xiv</sup> 1 Cor 12:4-11