

Peter The Fisherman

A look at Peter's character.

Peter is often spoken of in disrespectful terms as though he was foolishly outspoken or always putting his foot in his mouth. I even heard a sermon in which he was called a fool for getting out of the boat to walk on the water. However, I think Peter showed a lot of courage and faith and simply wore his heart on his sleeve. He had the courage of his convictions and was not afraid to show his emotions. The following examples look as some of what we know about Peter.

First, let's look at where Peter walked on the water.

Even though some believe Peter was foolish to get out to the boat, I believe that he showed both courage and faith. He not only had the courage to get out of the boat in rough conditions, he also had faith that was great enough to enable him to walk on water (Matt. 14:22-33). How many of us react like that when the going gets a bit rough in our life? Unlike us, Peter did not have the Holy Spirit to keep him strong so his moment of great faith quickly faded when fear set in, just as fear later weakened the faith of all the disciples and caused them to desert Jesus when He was arrested.

Now, let's look at where Peter declared Jesus to be the Son of God.

In Matt. 16:13-18, when Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was, Peter said that He was the Son of God. Jesus praised Peter for his discernment in listening to and acknowledging what God had revealed to him. It was no small thing to acknowledge that Jesus was the Son of God because the Jewish leadership considered it blasphemy as it meant that Jesus was divine. In fact, Jesus was crucified simply because He said He was the Son of God. So, as well as having courage and faith, Peter also showed discernment.

Next, Peter deserted and denied Jesus.

In Matt. 26:31-35, before He was arrested, Jesus told the disciples that they would all fall away that night. Peter then said, *“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will,”* and the other disciples all said the same thing. Once again, Peter openly displayed his feelings. Even though fear caused all the disciples to desert Jesus, Peter later showed great courage by following another disciple to the High Priest's house where Jesus was being tried. It was there that fear ruled him again and he denied Jesus three times before leaving to weep bitterly.

This, like the walking on water incident, was a vital lesson not just for Peter but for all the disciples. Later on they would come to understand that only through the power of the Holy Spirit could they hope to stand fearlessly for Jesus. All of the disciples would have seen men being crucified and understood the awful pain and terror of such an ordeal. These vital lessons would have shown them that without the power of the indwelling Spirit no one could face such fearful trials.

Next, Jesus rebuked Peter.

In Mark 8:31-33, after Jesus spoke of His coming crucifixion, He rebuked Peter for saying that it would never happen. Jesus rebuked Peter because He needed strengthening to do God's will and face the cross, not temptation to avoid it. A little further on, in Mark 9:31-32, Jesus was talking again to the disciples about His crucifixion and we are told that *“they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.”* So, we can see that Peter wasn't the only one who couldn't understand that Jesus came to be crucified but he was the only one to openly show his love and express his horror at the thought of his Master and friend dying.

So, although Peter was a common fisherman,

- 1) He showed great faith and courage in getting out of the boat and walking on the water.
- 2) He showed discernment in declaring Jesus to be the Son of God.
- 3) He showed courage when, very afraid, he risked arrest by following Jesus to the place of His trial.
- 4) He openly expressed his love for Jesus but was rebuked because he contradicted his Master due to a misunderstanding that was common to the disciples.

Peter had a special place in Jesus' heart. He was one of the inner circle of three whom Jesus had chosen to witness certain things including His transfiguration in Matt. 17:1-9. After His resurrection, Jesus made a special appearance to Peter, undoubtedly to relieve him of his distress and fears (1 Cor. 15:5 & Luk. 24:34). Also, at the end of John's gospel, Jesus talked to Peter about loving Him and taking care of His lambs and sheep and we see in Gal. 2:9 that Peter was one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

Finally

Today, we have the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith, to give us courage and to help us to discern the truth. I don't think it is very wise to speak poorly of Peter when we consider that he showed great courage, faith and discernment *before* having the fullness of the Holy Spirit. How many of us will stand under severe trials or persecution? It's easy to say, "I will," but unless we are walking closely with Jesus we won't. We all need to understand how weak we really are and to learn from the accounts we have of Peter that without the Spirit of Christ we will all fall away. The Bible shows that, after receiving the Spirit, Peter and the disciples became fearless witnesses for the Lord and many disciples were willingly martyred rather than deny Jesus. The Bible tells us that during the end times many will fall away from the faith and only those who overcome to the end will be saved so we need to look to Jesus for strength to face such trials that may come upon us at any time. Amen.

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