

Simon PETER

"Chiefest" Of The Apostles

I

Peter was a Galilean. He was born in Bethsaida near the Sea of Galilee northward. (~~John 1:44; 12:21~~) Later, he lived in Capernaum, some miles southward from Bethsaida near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Existing ruins show that Capernaum at that time was a notable city of much beauty. It was a Roman rendezvous. Indeed, a large population and much of the culture of that day clustered about the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

In Capernaum Peter had a home in which he lived with his wife; and, at times at least, his mother-in-law lived with them. Whether ^{Peter} ~~he~~ had children is not definitely known, though many students are of the opinion that the evangelist Mark was his son. Certainly, Mark's gospel is based on Peter's narratives.

Peter ^{became} ~~was~~ his surname, conferred upon him by Jesus. Up to that time he was known as Simon Barjonah, or Simon, son of John or Jona. (~~John 1:43; Matt. 16:18~~) ¹⁹ ~~Matt. 16:18~~ ^{Peters}

Though nothing is really known of ~~his~~ education, we may safely assume that in addition to speaking Aramaic, his native tongue, he also spoke everyday Greek, as required of a business man operating among people, many of whom spoke only Greek. The author of the Acts of the Apostles declares that ~~Peter~~ ^{he} was not possessed of the learning of the rabbis. (~~Acts 4:13~~) ~~-----~~ ^{clan}

*8:14, 15.
Matt: 16:18
Mark 1:30*

He was a fisherman by occupation. It would appear that he was a member of a fishing outfit, owning several ships ~~and~~ ^{with} equipment and employing assistants. Luke actually says that he had partners, among whom were his brother Andrew, and Zebedee with his two sons James and John. (~~Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:7, 9-11~~) ~~He~~ ^{Peter} was a leader of men before he met Jesus; ~~and~~ undoubtedly a citizen of some consequence; and apparently of some property.

~~True,~~ ^{humble} men were chosen by Jesus to become leaders in his Church. This should not, however, be misunderstood. It was not a question with Jesus of riches or poverty, social or political position, or mental training. Was the man a seeker after truth, humble, teachable, and devoted? Then he could be used in the work of the Lord. It was these qualifications, that led to Peter's call to the apostleship and ultimately to his position as leader of the Church after the crucifixion of the ~~Christ~~ Christ. (~~Mark 3:14~~)

II

In the early mature life of Peter, the message of John the Baptist swept the Holy Land. The call, "repent and be baptized," was heard in every household. The voice of "one crying in the wilderness" was everywhere discussed for good ~~and~~ or for evil. Lovers of truth listened to the call; turned from evil; resolved to live more worthily; and made covenants with the Lord in the waters of baptism. The followers of John ^{the Baptist} became a small multitude.

Among those who yielded themselves to the call of the Baptist were Peter and several members of his fishing firm. Under the tuition of John the Baptist, Peter laid the foundations of the faith that made him the leader of the Church of Christ.

It was in connection with the work of ^{John} the Baptist that Peter first became acquainted with Jesus. Soon after the baptism of Jesus, Andrew, Peter's brother, who had heard the Baptist's declaration that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lamb of God, sought out Jesus, abode with him for a day. Then Andrew hurried to his brother to tell him the news that Messiah, the Christ, had come and had been found. The brothers called on Jesus, who said ^{to Peter,} "Thou art Simon the ~~son~~ of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which by interpretation, ^a stone. (Cephas is Aramaic. Its Greek equivalent is Peter.) (~~John 1:35-42~~)

In this manner, Peter became acquainted with Jesus, with whom he was to be so closely associated, and for whose cause he was to spend the strength of his life. It is, of course, more than likely that, though Peter had not met Jesus before, Jesus had heard of Peter through ^{John} the Baptist. In discussing together the coming work of the Lord, John the Baptist would naturally ~~have~~ call^d attention to the men of capacity and faith among his followers.

III

Then one day came the call which changed the whole course of Peter's life. Jesus had begun his ministry. He was teaching the people of Galilee. As he was walking along the shore, he saw Peter and his brother Andrew at their work as fishermen, and entered their boat. The catch had been poor; and the ^{men} were about to give up the work for the day, when Jesus asked them to cast their nets once more. This time a "great multitude" of fish was brought up. Awed by the power of Jesus, Peter fell upon his knees and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But, the Lord answered Peter, "Fear not, from henceforth

thou shalt catch men." In obedience to this call, Peter and Andrew, and James and John, sons of Zebedee, rowed to the shore and disposed of their fish, ^{and their fishing equipment.} They gave themselves ^{themselves} to the cause of Christ, ~~and~~ ² In the echoing words of the evangelists, "they forsook all." (~~Matt. 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-18; Luke 5:1-11~~)

It must have been soon after this that Jesus chose twelve of his disciples to be near to him, to assist him, and to carry on his work after his departure from earth. These men were ordained apostles. Among these twelve was Peter, ^{and} From the ^{however} beginning he was the leader of the group, ~~and associated very~~ closely with his former fishing associates, James and John.

IV

Now began a period of education and training for the great work that lay before the apostles and the other disciples of the Christ. Jesus sought to acquaint his disciples, especially the Twelve, by teaching and by miracle, ~~to acquaint them~~ with the doctrine of the gospel, and to prepare them for the coming day when he would no longer be with them. Wherever the Christ went, there were the Twelve and other disciples to hear the words of the glad message.

It soon appeared that three of the twelve, Peter, James, and John, were especially chosen for leadership. All of the apostles heard the teachings of the Lord; they were all near to him by day and by night; they were all given visions of the future of the work they had espoused; the whole group partook more and more of ~~his spirit~~ ^{the spirit of Jesus} spirit. Nevertheless, there were times when Jesus had special communion with or gave special commissions to the three upon whom in due time leadership would fall. The results of such meetings or labors were then communicated to the other members of the Twelve, for the promotion

of the Lord's work.

When he went into the house of the ruler of the synagogue to raise the master's daughter from the dead, he "suffered no man to follow him save Peter, James, and John." ~~(Matt. 5:37)~~

~~Luke 8:51~~ When the Savior entered the garden of Gethsemane to pray, "he taketh with him Peter, James, and John." ~~(Mark I 14:33)~~

In preparation for the last supper he was to eat with the apostles, he sent Peter and John to make the necessary preparations. ~~(Luke 22:8)~~

It must have been generally understood among the people that Peter was the leader of the group that followed Jesus. For example, when the tax collectors sought to trap Jesus, they put the question as to what the Master did, to Peter, who also ~~gave~~ received the answer. ~~(Matt. 17:24-26)~~

The greatest event in the ministry of Jesus was the transfiguration on a "high mountain." There Jesus was transfigured, that is, his Godhood was fully revealed, and the reality of his mission demonstrated. There the ancient worthies, Moses and Elias appeared and committed their keys of authority to men then living on earth. It was a key event in providing for the perpetuation of the kingdom of God on earth after the Christ should have departed. Here was convincing proof of the truth of the Messianic claims of Jesus of Nazareth. To participate in this experience he took with him Peter, James, and John. ~~It~~ It is clear that these three men were called as a presidency over the activities assigned to the Twelve and the other disciples of the Lord. ~~And~~ ^I these men must know beyond peradventure of doubt

the nature and message of Jesus. Therefore, these many experiences were given to them.

Peter grew greatly in faith. The message of Jesus was very real to him. Once when Peter was in a ship, he saw Jesus walking on the sea. Promptly, he ventured to walk on the water himself to meet the Master. He succeeded, until the "boisterous" wind and waves frightened him, and he began to sink, so that Jesus had to rescue him. It was a good lesson to the coming leader that doubt must not weaken the labors of faith. (Matt. 14:28-31)

Jesus tested the Twelve as to their faith in his commission. On one occasion he asked directly, "Who think ye I am?" Peter as usual answered for the group: "Thou art Christ, the son of the living God." There was no lingering doubt in that answer. Jesus, pleased, commended Peter, "Blessed art thou Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Then he ~~turn~~ turned further to Peter who was to lead the Church ^{and said} that upon this "rock," knowing the truth by revelation, his Church was to be built.

(Matt. 16:15-18)

Before his work was over, the Lord made sure that the Twelve had certain, living testimony of the truth of the gospel and of his mission. Any other procedure would have been out of keeping with the purposes of heaven. Followers of Christ must walk in the light. It has been a mistake of judgment to assume that the Lord would return to his Father, without teaching his followers the principles of the gospel, conferring upon them all necessary authority, and setting forth the destiny of the kingdom

of God on earth. They were clearly advised of the coming death and resurrection and of their Leader. In view of all ^{their} human experience, the doctrine of the resurrection ^{no doubt} ~~may have~~ tried their faith. The Lord prepared his followers to carry on his work when his mission on earth was ended.

V

Peter was of a practical, enquiring turn of mind. He wanted to understand. He asked questions. His mind was at work. That of itself set him apart as a leader of men.

In one of the parables of Jesus, the watchful stewards of a house are discussed with the conclusion: "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not." Peter, pondering the meaning of the parable promptly asked, "Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" (~~Luke 12:41~~)

It was Peter who at another time asked the Lord a thoroughgoing question concerning human relationships: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" He received a law of heaven when ^{the} answer came: "Until seventy times seven." (~~Matt. 18:21-22~~)

When the Savior at one time declared that "not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth," it was ^Peter again who asked, "Declare ~~unto~~ unto us this parable." He was always digging down to the true and full meanings of teachings received. (~~Matt. 15:15~~)

As they were passing the withered figtree, cursed by the Lord, it was Peter who wanted to know what it meant, and drew from Jesus a wonderful discourse on faith.

Much had been said about the coming death of Jesus, and his second coming. The apostles wanted to know more. Again, it was Peter, this time with James and John, who privately asked the Lord, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (~~Mark 13:3~~)

At another time, when the Lord had discussed the gospel with his chosen twelve, Peter calmly asked, "We have forsaken all. What shall we have therefore?" He was studying the end from the beginning. (~~Matt. 19:27~~)

This eagerness to know, and this desire to build his faith on truth, was a main characteristic of Peter, the chiefest of the apostles.

VI.

Peter's devotion to Jesus was superb. It never failed. At times the expression of his love for the Master took a form which had to be chided. But his faith in Jesus as the very son of God was so strong that he could not resist the impulse to do *honor to those who* ~~him-honor~~ ^{Jesus} and to punish those who failed to do so. In short, he was a thorough convert to Christ's teachings, and divine personality.

At the passover supper, Jesus proceeded to wash the feet of the apostles, but Peter demurred, and said "Thou shalt not wash my feet." Before the Master, Peter always stood humbly. (~~John 13:6-11~~)

In the crowds that often pressed around Jesus, Peter seemed always to be present as a protector. Jesus felt on one occasion that strength had gone out of him. A woman who needed healing had touched his garment. In the ensuing conversation, it was clear that Peter was by Jesus in the crowd. (~~Luke 8:45~~)

When Jesus began to warn the apostles about his coming

death, at the hands of evil men, Peter, in his love for the Master, declared, "This shall not be unto thee." (Matt. 16:21-22)

At the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, Peter was, of course, present. When the enemies laid hands on the Master, Peter's anger flared high; he drew his sword "and struck a servant of the high priests, and smote off his ear." The courageous devotion of Peter to the Lord never failed. *Courage was a main character of his life.*

At last, in the face of the certain announcement of Jesus that he should suffer death, Peter's love welled up to prompt him to offer his own life instead. "Lord---, I will lay down my life for thy sake." The Lord, pointing out the futility of changing the course of his divine destiny, answered, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall ~~not~~ crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." (~~John 13:36-38~~)

This did not suffice. Peter would yet seek to protect his Master. As Jesus was being taken to the high priest's palace for trial, Peter stood at the door and succeeded at last, undiscovered as to his identity, in gaining entrance to the courtyard of the palace. He hoped against hope that he might yet be of help to the Master. If he could be near, he might find some means of saving Jesus. In any event he wanted "to see the end." It was a courageous act, for ^{now} he took ~~there~~ his life in his hands.

The sharp-eyed woman doorkeeper, however, charged him with being one of Jesus' disciples. This was only natural, for, as the leading disciple, he would be known to many and would have been seen by thousands. He denied the charge. His work then ^{he} was of more consequence than to satisfy a woman's curiosity. ~~He~~

He then mingled with the officers and servants who were warming themselves by an open fire. Again and once more, the charge was made that he had been seen with Jesus. Thrice he denied the charge, in the hope that he might be near his beloved Master. As he was being escorted out of the palace courtyard, the cock crew.

Then he recalled the words of Jesus. Then he realized that the plan under which Jesus came on earth must be carried through, despite man's every endeavor. As he left the palace door, he saw Jesus, under guard, pass by. He had failed in his attempt to protect the Master; and Jesus would have to go to his death. He ~~then~~ "wept bitterly." (~~Mark 14:66,72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27; Matt. 26:69-75~~)

of an evidence of cowardice.
This incident is often held to be a denial by Peter of the Lord. The headlines in many Bible expressly say so. Yet the text does not so state. He ^{had} denied being among those who followed Christ, *in an effort to help the Master in His urgent need.*

Others have interpreted Peter's denial as an evidence of cowardice. He wanted to save his own life at the cost of truth. This is wholly out of keeping with Peter's character. It required courage, to begin with, to enter the ~~palace~~ palace grounds and mingle with ~~men~~ people who hated Jesus and would kill him. He was above all loyal and courageous. But to acknowledge his identity was to fail in his desire to help the Master. To succeed in that would warrant any price.

The ~~denial~~ of Peter in the courtyard of the high priest's palace was the highest evidence of his soul's devotion to Christ and his cause.

VII.

Jesus had been crucified. His body had been laid in the tomb. Early Sunday morning Mary Magdalene and other women came to the sepulchre to anoint the body. The body of Jesus was no longer there. A heavenly messenger, ~~se~~ sitting in the tomb, told them that Jesus was "risen," and to tell Peter and the other disciples. Immediately Mary Magdalene ran to inform Simon Peter, now in charge, who was in the company of the Apostle John. At once Peter and John went to the sepulchre. They ran, so the evangelist says, and confirmed Mary's statement. When Peter thus saw the first unfolding of Jesus' promise of the resurrection, he "departed wondering in himself at that which was come to pass."

~~(Luke 24:12; John 20:2-6)~~ Later Jesus appeared "to Simon."

~~(Luke 24:34)~~ Jesus left word that he would meet ^{the Twelve} ~~them~~ in Galilee.

During this period of reorganization without the presence of Jesus in the flesh, the eleven apostles kept together most of the time; though they did some traveling to look after their necessities and their families. Once, several of the apostles, the fishermen of the group, were fishing in ^{the Sea of Galilee} a ship some distance from the shore. The catch was poor. In the dim morning, Jesus, not recognized by them, called from the shore to let ~~thier~~ their nets down on the right side of the ship. They obeyed, and their catch was so heavy they could not draw it up. Then, they recognized Jesus. Peter, true to his devotion to the Master, jumped into the sea and swam to shore, to ^{meet} ~~mark~~ the Leader whom he loved so well. The others followed in the ship, dragging the "net with fishes."

After the breakfast, the resurrected Jesus gave his basic instruction. It was addressed to Peter. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs." Three times was this charge repeated. This was to be the guide in the heavy work that lay before him. (~~John 21:1-17~~) To the very end of Jesus' appearances on earth, the leadership of the Church was entrusted to Peter as the presiding officer of the Twelve, and in cooperation with them. Jesus trusted Peter.

VIII.

Jesus had returned to his Father in heaven. The work must continue on earth. Upon Peter, who with his brethren now abode in Jerusalem, lay the main burden, as the first of the apostles. What was to be done?

The default of Judas left only eleven apostles. In recognition of ^{the need of a} correct organization, upon Peter's recommendation, another was chosen to fill the vacant place. The lot fell upon ~~Stephen~~ ^{Matthias}. Thus was set up an example for the future. The organization of the Church must be kept intact. (~~Acts 1:15-22~~)

The first duty of the Twelve was to continue the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This they, and many other disciples of the Lord, did with vigor. Boldly they approached the leaders of the people with the glad message of ~~the people~~ ^{the Christ}. To all they put the question whether it were better to obey man or God. ^{upon} That placed every man the responsibility of decision.

Many accepted the message. Peter, however, insisted that a profession of faith must be accompanied by corresponding works. The group of believers must be kept pure. The evil one is always

with a splendid courage since the people had chosen him.

active, and can be defeated only by righteous living. There was a stern cleansing of the Church under Peter's direction. This was also a lesson ~~to~~ future days. (—————)

Soon, however, a major question arose. The Lord had commanded them to preach the gospel to all the world. They, themselves, were of Israel, and had accepted circumcision, as a witness of their acceptance of ~~the~~ God's covenant with Abraham. Was it necessary for the gentiles who might accept Christ, to submit to Israelitish practices? It became a subject of debate. Peter did not act hastily. The Lord on earth had not specifically dealt with this problem. At length, a vision from heaven settled his mind. Thenceforth it was ruled, even to this day, that the covenant with Jesus the Christ, in the waters of baptism, was the only ordinance required for entrance into the Church.

Thus, as need arose, the issues within the Church were met under the leadership of Peter, the "chiefest" of the apostles.

IX.

Peter's work was done in the spirit and power of truth. He knew whence power came, and proclaimed it far and wide. The Lord was with him in a marvelous manner.

When Simon the sorcerer offered money to obtain like power, Peter rebuked him in stinging words, which echo even in our day: "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." (~~Acts 8:21~~) As Peter went forth in his calling with this doctrine, he was endowed with great power.

At the gate of the temple a lame man asked alms of the passers-by. Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,

Arise and walk." "And he, leaping up stood and walked."

~~(Acts 3:1-11)~~

These and other miracles were many and well known. The sick were brought into the streets, "that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow them." Peter and the twelve were worthy disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. ~~(Acts 5:15)~~

On a trip to Lydda, "he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise and make thy bed. And he arose immediately."

~~(Acts 9:32-35)~~

At one time at least Peter called a person back into life from death. Dorcas of Joppa, a woman full of good works, had died, and the body had been washed for burial. When Peter arrived, he prayed to God and said, "Dorcas, arise." The woman was raised ~~to~~ into life. ~~(Acts 9:36-43)~~

Peter himself was often blessed in his ministry by special help from heaven. One time he was in prison for his faith's sake. Herod was soon to try him. In the night, while sleeping between two guards, an angel of the Lord appeared, struck off his chains and led him past ^{XW} guards and through the iron gate to liberty and safety. 

X.

Naturally, like his Master, Peter had to endure persecution. The officials of Palestine, who had crucified Jesus, could not look quietly upon the proselyting success of Peter and his associates. Time and time again he was arrested, imprisoned, and threatened with death.

Nevertheless, when he was free again, he continued fearlessly the work placed upon him by the Lord. His courage never forsook him, nor his faith in Jesus Christ and his message.

He travelled far and wide. The twelve were sent to all parts of the earth. The Church prospered. A safe foundation was laid for all who would walk strictly according to the Lord's commands.

He never forgot the admonition to "Feed my sheep." To keep the members in good faith he visited them and wrote to them. His two epistles/^{are} perhaps the soundest letters in the New Testament.

xi.

The story of Peter's life, after the ascension of Jesus, has thrilling interest. It reveals a life of faith, courage, devotion, and self-sacrifice. There was no faltering in his voice or work. The qualities that led to his call to the apostleship never departed from him, but grew into greater power and mellowed use with the increasing years. All men knew that he sought with all his might to become a humble follower, like his Master, whom he loved with all the strength of his rugged character. Men were glad to follow this simple-hearted, true hearted, intelligent fisherman, whose catch was truth-loving men and women; and whose message was one of increasing joy on earth and in heaven.

He grew old in this service. At length, in Rome, he was found guilty ^{of preaching false doctrine,} by a heathen tribunal, and condemned to death. An old legend ^{from the prison} says that he escaped, but on the way met Jesus. Upon his question, Domine, quo vadis? (Master, where goest thou?) the answer came, that Christ ^{was} going to be crucified in his stead. Thereupon Peter returned to his prison. It is but a legend, but

illustrates the soundness of Peter's character. In due time he was crucified, at Rome, but as the legend has it, he was hung at his request with his head down. He felt unworthy to be crucified as his Master was. With his last breath he was loyal to Jesus, whom he knew to be the Son of God.

Peter was the "chiefest" apostle, and an example for all of any office or commission. ~~He was~~ *He was fitted to be the first man, after Christ to head and lead the Church of Christ on earth.*