

THE WORD OF GOD
AND
THE LIFE OF HOLINESS

by

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CHAPTER FIVE -

THE WORD AND DEFEATED DISCIPLES

LET US now look at three things regarding Peter's fall and restoration (Matthew 26:30-35, 67-75).

First, *newness of life*. It is a great phrase.

Peter was a fisherman, and I am sure he was successful. He had had some blemishes in his life before JESUS found him. He was accustomed to cursing, because he had been with JESUS for three and a half years, and he certainly did not get it from the Lord; it was a bad habit, and it came back to him; I do not think he did it very often.

Peter was a boaster, a braggart; he talks more than any other disciple in all the Gospels; he said more than all the other disciples put together. When a man is always getting his mouth open he frequently says things that are unfortunate. This is Peter. If he could boast this holy night of what he was and of what he was going to do, what do you think he was before the Lord ever found him?

You know there comes a time in middle life when a man who is a braggart loses the confidence of his fellowmen. It is all right for a boy. The Headmaster of Stonybrook told me that sometimes they get papers in the examinations of the seniors when they are about eighteen, with autobiographical parts, such as, "The world has yet to see what a great man really is." You can forgive a boy for that, but when he gets to thirty-five or forty and struts around boasting, people smile and lose confidence. Then something tragic happens, and you begin to lose confidence in yourself; and you have a bad case, and people just do not place much weight on what you say.

Still, Peter was a good money maker, I am sure of that; and he worked hard enough, but he had come to an hour when life was growing a little sour. And all of a sudden the Lord came down to the Sea of Galilee, and called him and his brother out of those fishing nets, and He gave him the most wonderful privileges that any man on earth could ever have.

First, He called him: and that is what has happened to you and me. I do not know how it is with you, but when I walk up and down the streets of New York or London or Los Angeles, and pass

thousands of people, and know that most of them are not saved, I wonder sometimes why the Lord became real to you and me. You may live in an apartment block of 200 people, five are saved and 195 are not saved, and you wonder why the Lord reached out for you.

But the Lord got hold of this man Peter, and I like that hymn we sing

JESUS has loved me, wonderful SAVIOUR!
JESUS has loved me, I cannot tell why;
Came He to rescue sinners all worthless,
My heart He conquered, for Him I would die.

And that is what He did for Peter.

But He did more than that; He called him to be a fisher of men, and He changed his name.

"Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Peter, which is by interpretation, a rock." He took this man of putty, and He said, "I am going to transform you into all you have ever dreamed of being." And then He gave him all that He had, three and a half years of fellowship. What do you think it would mean to walk with JESUS for three and a half years, to hear Him teach, to hear Him preach, or to hear Him pray, to watch Him privately and remember the conversations at the table? Do you know that if all the three years of JESUS' ministry were as fully recorded as the last week of His life, we should have a book bigger than the whole Bible? We do not know more than thirty days out of the life of JESUS, but all the days must have been wonderful - and Peter was with Him all that time.

More than that, he was a confidant of the Lord. JESUS took him into His confidence, into the inner circle. Three were taken to the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John. I had never met Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones until I came to England, though I had heard much about him and read his sermons. I was asked to tea with him at his Club, three hours before I was to speak in Westminster Chapel. Now I am aware of all my many idiosyncrasies and peculiarities, and I suppose other men are the same; and when you get to my time of life you do not open your heart at once; but in that hour our hearts were just knit, and we became intimate friends; but what would it mean to be of the inner circle with JESUS CHRIST? Three men He chose out of the whole world, and Peter was one of them.

Then, it was Peter that gave the testimony:

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"; and on this very night he was, at the institution of the Lord's Supper. Afterward they rose up and started out for the Garden. Three and a half years of Heaven on earth.

Now we come to the midnight of Peter's life. As they walk long our Lord said, **"All ye shall be offended in me,"** and Peter said, **"If all should be offended, I will never be."** So the Lord repeated it, and said, **"Verily this night, Peter, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."** And Peter takes up the challenge and throws it back and says, **"Even if I must die with thee, I will never deny thee."**

There we have three things. First, Peter is telling the Lord JESUS that He is wrong; and, beloved, when you and I begin to tell the Lord JESUS He is wrong, we are on the way to trouble; it is the way over the cliff when we think we know more than the Lord JESUS; we are headed for disaster. It would have been a great thing if he had dropped to his knees and said, "JESUS, Thou knowest everything, and if that is what you think, save me now from this awful thing."

But Peter said, "Lord, you are wrong." That means something else; he really said, "Lord, you do not know what a brave, big man I am. Not me, Lord. Lord, you have seen me for three years, don't you know me better than that? I am a bold man; Lord; you must be thinking about somebody else." So the Lord told him, "No, nobody else-you: before the cock crows twice, you will have denied me three times."

He replied, "**Though all the rest of them deny thee, I will not.**" In other words, "Lord, I do not think these other disciples of yours are very much; I do not think John will hold up to-night, and James and Matthew, and the rest. Lord, you have got one you can lean on, and that is me. Though all the rest of them will deny you, not me." It is a terrible position to be in, for a child of GOD.

Turn to Mark 14:67, "**Thou also wast with the Nazarene**" - "**This is one of them**" - "**Of a truth thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean.**" What did he do? They identified him with CHRIST; that is what the world does with you and me. We are called Christians, that is, CHRIST's people. The only power in all the world that separates men is the power of CHRIST to save us from our sins; it is not your colour, it is not whether you are a Tory or a Socialist, a Republican or a Democrat, a Jew or a Gentile: there is the world and the Church, and the world looks on us as belonging to the Lord JESUS. "**Thou also wast with the Nazarene.**" And Peter replied, "Me!" While the soldiers up the hall smite and curse and ridicule JESUS, Peter denies Him.

Alexander Whyte describes it as "an explosion of the devil within the heart." And Peter replies, "**I know not this man**" - saved by, called by, commissioned by, empowered by, Him; loving Him, walking with Him, praying with Him, eating with Him, on the Mount with Him, confessing Him as Son of GOD: "**I know not this man.**" That is denial.

A father and mother, plain people with a small income, sacrifice to send a boy to the university, and in his last year they write and say, "John, when do you graduate? We cannot both afford to come, but your father wants to come up; what is the date?" The boy is a member of the rowing crew, or captain of the cricket team, the editor of the university publication, a brilliant speaker in the Students' Union; and he says to himself, "I do not think I want him up." So he does not answer the letter. And the father says to the mother, "Oh, you know he is busy with exams, or maybe he did not get the letter; let us make enquiries and find out when the graduating day is."

So the father goes up, and in his plain clothes meets his son with some other men coming down the hill, and he rejoices that this fine-looking boy, much better dressed than the father, is his son; and goes to meet him lovingly, saying, "Oh, my son, I am proud of you." And the son looks at him and says, "I am sorry, but I do not know you." The father would just as soon die. This was Peter with the Lord: "**I know not this man,**" and he began to curse and swear.

Now remember what this is: this is not an apostasy; he is not losing his faith; he did not sell JESUS into the hands of His enemies, like Judas; this is not betrayal; this is not hardening his heart, for his heart was broken; this is not loss of love, for he loved the Lord; he is not an enemy of CHRIST - not that; he is a coward.

He is thinking more of his skin than of the Lord JESUS in His agony. He is only thinking of himself; he loves the Lord, and is challenged to acknowledge it, and he denies Him.

I want to question you about something which I can only ask because I think your greatest desire is to live as close to the Lord as is humanly possible. Are you denying the Lord in your business or in your home? I do not mean by that, that we are all Taylor Smiths, or anything like that, but I tell you, we can live and talk and act in our private offices with the men and women with whom we work with in such a way that they would never know that we belong to the Lord JESUS. That is denying the Lord JESUS.

You could be found in certain places where you never could give a testimony, because people would never know you belonged to the Lord: "**I know not this man**" -and we do not have to say it. All we have to do is to live like it, and they would never know we belonged to CHRIST. There may be someone answering to this description.

I have a dear friend in Los Angeles who is a dentist. He is a devout Christian, a very expensive dentist, and when he gets Hollywood stars in the chair, he charges them. He is a handsome man, and a very skilful operator, or he would not have these people. There came into his office one of the famous stars of Hollywood, who is supposed to be one of the most beautiful women in the United States. She came in with less on than many people wear on a bathing beach. Pretty soon he hit a nerve while drilling, and she let out an oath. He said, "That will be all." She said, "What do you mean? Haven't you ever heard anybody swear before?"

"Yes," he said, "but never in my office." She said, "I did not want to hurt your feelings." He said, "You did not, I do not care what you say; but you took my Lord's name in vain, and I do not permit that here." She burst into tears and said, "No one ever talked to me like that before." He said, "No, but I am doing it," and she said, "Forgive me."

The next time she came she was dressed as a person ought to be dressed, and no unseemly word was ever heard in that office again from her. That is witnessing for the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

What do you think were Peter's thoughts as he went out? He remembered the words of the Lord, and Peter knew that night he was finished for ever. After three and a half years with JESUS, he had told a lie and denied the Lord, and cursed - not twenty minutes after that Holy Supper, within an hour after the Lord's Table, and he could sink that low. I am sure Peter thought that salvation was impossible for him. Not only had he failed the Lord, but he had broken the Lord's heart; and more than that, the Lord could not use him any more. How could He use him any more, a failure and a liar, a man who had denied the Lord? He was finished. There is nothing more, awful in the world than for a disciple of CHRIST to come to the hour when he thinks he is finished in the Lord's work - called to preach, called to win souls, called to pray, and some awful midnight sweeps across the soul, and you know you are finished.

You can make a living, you can sell things, write books, build houses; but I tell you, when GOD calls us to do a piece of work we live in hell unless we do that work; and when GOD calls us into the ministry, or as a missionary, or anything else, we will never be happy unless we are doing what the Lord calls us to, do. This man was headed for a life of misery.

Now my third and last point, the dawning of a new day. "**Peter went out and wept bitterly.**"

I think he stayed in all day Saturday - I am sure the other disciples knew what he had done. On Thursday night he was strutting around, going to be so brave, and the next night he denied the Lord, and I think it had got around.

If it had been me, I would have stayed in my room, I would have locked the door, I would not see anybody, I would be weeping and hating myself because I had made a fool of myself and forfeited everything.

But on Sunday morning someone told Peter that the tomb was empty, and he ran out to see, and he found it was true, and he knew the Lord had risen. My own opinion is that the one person Peter never wanted to see again as long as he lived, was the Lord JESUS. I do not think he wanted to see Him at all. I think he went back to his room, wrapped up his few clothes together ready to leave - and then he received a message, because it says in Mark 16:1 that an angel said to the woman, "**Go, tell his disciples and Peter.**"

GOD sent a special word for the worst man, the one who was supposed to be out of the picture; He sent a word to Peter.

Sometimes that is just what JESUS does with you and me, the chief of sinners; He sends us a special word.

I had a friend once in Virginia, a pastor of a big church, and he had an elder who was no good - of course, he never came to church, but he was on the eldership list. My friend, who was a man who lived for the Lord, used to have talks with the other elders, who said this man must come off the roll. But the pastor, Tom Young, said, "We have had this matter up ten times, and I know it is a disgrace; let me have one more week, I am going to pray for this man." "All right," said the elders, "one more week, and then he must go." The next day an elder met this reprobate on the street, and said, "You are no good, you are a disgrace to the Church." The man said, "I know, but what are you talking to me for?"

The elder replied, "I want to tell you something. The Session unanimously voted to take your name off the roll, and the pastor said he loved you and was praying for you." The man said, "Did he say that?" "That is what he said; the rest of us are not praying for you, but the pastor is." He went down to the pastor's house and said, "I am told you are praying for me."

The pastor said, "Yes, I pray for you every day; though you are a scoundrel, I love you." And the man said, "Well, if you love me, it is time for me to change." With a broken heart he fell on the carpet and cried to GOD for mercy, and on Wednesday he came to the congregation and confessed his sins, and asked to be forgiven.

"Go and tell Peter."

If Peter was coming down those steps to get out of that city on Easter morning, to get away from JESUS, I think the Lord met him right there. How do I know? Because at the end of the book of Luke, when the disciples on the Emmaeus road came back into the city of Jerusalem that night, the disciples in the Upper Room said to them, "**The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.**" I wish I knew what He said; but that is the way the Lord deals with us, He never tells other people of our secret fellowship with Him.

He took that man Peter up into that room, and I am sure He did not have to probe that heart. Peter just sobbed out his sin before Him, and the Lord dealt with that there.

I open the Book of Acts. Fifty days have gone by, or less, before the Book opens, and I notice something: "**When they were come in, they went up into an upper room where they were abiding**" (Acts 1:13). Peter is not only of the Apostolic group, he is at the head of it; he has been restored! (v. 15) - "**In those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples and said . . .**" Peter is leading the Apostolic group.

Then I look at chapter 2, and read of the time when the HOLY SPIRIT fell on those people: "**But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said . . .**" (v. 14). Those lips that had denied and sworn, those lips cleansed by the Blood of CHRIST, brought three thousand people to the Lord JESUS within the next two months. That is what CHRIST can do for you and me.

I will ask you one more thing: why do you think the Lord went after Simon Peter? I think it was for one reason: because He had work for Peter to do. Did you have a work some years ago which you are not doing now? Do you know there are more people in Great Britain these days who do not know the Lord JESUS, than there were in the whole Roman Empire when JESUS died on the Cross for our sins? Do you not think we have work to do, and the only people through whom GOD is going to be able to work: are the people who are in fellowship with Him?

One last word: there is nothing in all this world, no pleasure, no possession, no power, no reputation, no gains, there is nothing in all this world that is worth the forfeiting of our power and privilege of doing work for the Lord JESUS. From this hour until CHRIST comes, you and I will not let anything keep us from fulfilling His will for us.

"Go, tell His disciples and Peter," and if there is anyone out of fellowship, conscious of denying the Lord here and now, the same warmth of love, the same power for cleansing and restoration, are available for you as they were for Peter, and you too may be brought back again to do a greater work than you have ever done.

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