

# Barbecue on the Beach

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[ 0 : 00 ] Looking around the congregation, one sees many personalities, different gifts, different different temperaments, and that is as it should be in the church of Jesus Christ.

We are a collection of different brothers and sisters, and hopefully with one aim, and that is to glorify God. And so it was with the disciples. They were an amazing bunch of individuals. They had different personalities, different gifts. Some were reserved, some were outspoken. Some seemed to have the root of the matter in them, as he would say, and others were lagging a bit behind. I'd like this evening to look at one of these disciples, the Apostle Peter.

I have always found Peter an amazing character. He's so interesting, so lively, so unpredictable, and so we thought that this evening we would have a little look at Simon Peter under the heading Barbecue on the Beach. I think that will become obvious if it isn't obvious already to you why that title has been chosen. First of all, I'd like to think of Simon as a man of action, a man of action.

Simon Peter, or Simon we should call him really initially, was of humble origins. He was a fisherman from the town of Bethsaida, a fishing village on the suburbs of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee.

He and his brother Andrew were business partners with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Remember, the sons of thunder. Andrew had heard about Jesus from John the Baptist and had started following Jesus.

[ 2 : 21 ] He goes to his brother Peter and says, we have found the Messiah. And according to Mark's record, Jesus' first words to Peter were, come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Perhaps Peter at this time was probably in middle age. We're not sure. He certainly was married because Jesus healed his mother-in-law. He was part of an inner circle of the disciples. They were privy to certain miracles, and on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter was among the small group of disciples who were invited by the Lord to that amazing event. Peter showed moments of spiritual awareness.

He declared Christ's Messiahship at a time of doubt and confusion. You are the Christ, he said. And this led Jesus to say to him, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.

And at that point, Simon's name was changed by our Lord to Petra, to Peter, meaning the rock. This suggests to us that our Lord recognized leadership qualities in Peter. Frequently, he was the one who would speak up first, coming up with an idea and took the initiative.

Yet at the same time, he seemed to be so spiritually blind to Jesus' messianic mission, as witnessed by his use of the sword when Jesus was arrested before his crucifixion.

[ 4 : 27 ] He was outspoken in his loyalty, wasn't he? When, because of Christ's hard sayings, many turned back and no longer followed him. Peter said to Jesus, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. Yes, and Peter, didn't he have a bit of misguided zeal? Remember on the Mount of Transfiguration, after they saw this amazing spectacle of our Lord being transfigured, and Moses and Elijah appearing with them, Peter's only thought was to stay there forever and build a few tents and enjoy the company.

Peter also made promises he was unable to keep. Remember what he said? Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. I will lay down my life for you, he said.

He was a bit fearless too, wasn't he? Remember when they said that the tomb was empty, Peter and John ran to the tomb, and John, a bit more reserved, just looked in. But Peter, no doubt panting a bit as he ran fast to the tomb, went straight in to see. He didn't hang around.

Yes, he was fearless. I think what you see in Peter is what you get. He was the sort of man that when he saw our Lord walking in the water, without even thinking about it, he stepped over the boat onto the water. You know, that was Peter. He was a man of action. He was a real extrovert.

[ 6 : 33 ] Such an interesting character. And so, this evening, we'd like to think about this man of action, and our second heading is Stranger on the Shore, because we read in chapter 21 of John about this very interesting event. It's possibly some weeks since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. At least five of the disciples are back on their old stomping ground, the Sea of Galilee, and back to what they knew best, earning a living by loch fishing.

What must have been in their minds, I wonder? Peter's denials were almost certainly still haunting him. Some of them had seen their Lord crucified.

They had all witnessed the resurrection, some on several occasions. And now, was it just as nothing had happened? Was it all a dream? And so, they decided at the instigation of Peter that he, James, John, Thomas, Nathaniel, and a couple of other unnamed disciples should go out for a night's fishing. What better thing to do when you're a bit bored? But like so many who are addicted to that sport, they caught nothing. No doubt tired and disappointed by their fruitless night's work, as day was breaking, they were hailed by a stranger on the shore. Friends, he calls out.

Haven't you any fish? Was this man being sarcastic? Or was it a genuine question? On replying in the negative, he tells them to try on the starboard side, because they would be sure to find some fish there. And when they obeyed the stranger's instruction, they had such a haul that they were unable to land it in the net, in the boat.

It was then that one of the disciples, the disciple that Jesus loved, we recorded, we presume that was John, recognized who the stranger was. It is the Lord, he says to Peter.

[ 9 : 12 ] And that was enough for our impulsive extrovert, throws his coat over him and jumps into the water and presumably swims to the shore. He didn't hang around Peter, did he? The stranger already had lit a charcoal fire and was roasting some fish. Bring some of your catch, he says. As they hauled in this amazing catch of fish, what must have been going through their minds? They knew it was the Lord, that we are told, none of them dared to ask, who are you? There must have been something different about his appearance, his presence, the one who had been raised from the dead. All these things made them tongue-tied. Yes, this was the stranger on the shore. But this incident led us to consider the third thing, Peter's conviction. Peter's conviction. I think I know what was going through Peter's mind.

It must have been like a day-to-day experience. He certainly would have remembered a previous occasion very early on in Jesus' ministry, when after a similar fruitless night's fishing, Jesus had told Peter, or Simon, as he was known then, to try into deeper water, only to receive Peter's frustrated reply. Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught a thing. But because you say so, I will let down the nets. The catch, a huge catch. The nets broke. The boats were beginning to sink.

And remember Peter's response on that occasion. He fell at Jesus' feet and said, Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. I wonder what was it that made Peter confess that?

He was in the presence of deity. He realized that. And he also realized how sinful a man he was.

And so he makes this confession. I am a sinful man. But at that point, Jesus says to Simon, don't be afraid, don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men. This was the moment Peter, along with his business partners, James and John, decided to abandon their fishing, left everything, and started following Jesus. How this must have reminded Peter of his sin.

[ 12 : 21 ] This catch of fish that they had there by the Sea of Galilee, this second catch, as it were, it must have reminded him of the time that he confessed his sin before our Lord, of his decision to follow Jesus, but also his failure to follow him fully. And then there was the fire on the shore.

I wonder if the charcoal fumes reminded him of the night in the high priest's hall, where he had denied his Lord. Not once, but three times. Yes, he had promised, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. I will lay down my life for you. That's Peter, isn't it? Yet, we know what happened. That door girl, John 18, accused him, you're not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it. Then there was a group round the fire, that charcoal fire. You're not one of his disciples, are you? And we read, he denied it with an oath.

And then there was the high priest's servant. Didn't I see you in the olive grove? And at that point, we read that Peter began to call down curses on himself, and he swore at them, I do not know the man.

And no sooner had Peter denied his master for the third time that the cockerel crowed.

Peter was immediately reminded of Christ's words, and his conscience was seared as with a burning steel rod.

[ 14 : 31 ] He was a coward. He was ashamed of his master. He had denied any knowledge of him. He went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter's remorse was enormous, his sorrow intense, a turning point in his experience. He saw himself for what he was. He saw his promises for what they were. He had failed himself. He had failed his Lord.

How could he ever look his master in the face again? There would be no opportunity, perhaps. He might never see him again. His days of following Christ and serving him were surely over.

How that remorse must have lived with Peter in the hours and days that followed. How could he ever be forgiven? Yet I wonder if Peter was clinging on to two things which Jesus has said and which may well have given him some hope. Remember at the Last Supper where there was a dispute among the disciples.

It's so real, isn't it? In this very holy occasion, the disciples deciding who was going to be the greatest.

[ 15 : 58 ] And our Lord said to Simon, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen then your brothers. I have prayed for you, Simon. And then after appearing to the three women, our Lord said to one of them, go tell his disciples and Peter. Peter was singled out by our Lord to be told the news. He is going ahead of you into Galilee. Yes, Peter was convicted. And I'm sure this rings a bell with us in our own experience, doesn't it? Things we have said, things we have done, things we have not done.

And we enter a period of conviction of sin and depression and how terrible that is. But there is hope.

Because fourthly, let us see how Peter was reinstated. This is a very interesting conversation, I think, that our Lord has with Peter in the second part of that chapter.

Simon, he says, Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these? Now, I know commentators are a bit, they're not entirely certain about the use of this word love. And whether the interpretation I give to it is genuine or not, I don't know, but it's certainly interesting to look at it from this point of view. When our Lord asks Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?

Our Lord uses the strongest word for love, agape, the Christian word for love, the word that we find for love in 1 Corinthians 13, for example. It's a Christian selfless love, a love of wholehearted devotion of the entire person, the emotions, the mind and the will.

[ 18 : 26 ] Do you love me more than these? What do these mean? What were these? Was it the fish? Was it his career? Peter? Or was it the other disciples? We don't know. They only forsook him, but Peter denied him.

In an earlier promise, Peter had placed himself above the other disciples. Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. And now, in the presence of these same disciples, he has to make his confession.

Yes, Lord, he says, you know I love you. But he doesn't use the word agape. He uses the word philio, the word that you would use for a relationship between friends.

I like you, perhaps we could say. I have affection for you. And Jesus' response was, feed my lambs. Feed the weak, immature believers.

You see what's happening here? Our Lord is beginning to reinstate Peter. Then the second question.

[ 19 : 52 ] Simon, son of John, do you truly, really love me? And our Lord uses the word agape again. Yes, Lord, you know that I love philio you.

I like you. He does not affirm the higher love. Nevertheless, our Lord says, take care of my sheep.

Those, perhaps, who are prone to wander, the dependent. Take care of them. Guide them. Protect them. Then the third question.

Simon. And interestingly, he doesn't use the word Peter. He uses the word Simon, the name that he had in his old life.

Oh, that might not have gone down very well with Peter. But it was making a point, wasn't it? The third time. Simon, son of John, do you love me?

[ 20 : 54 ] And on this occasion, our Lord uses philio. For some reason, I don't know why. Perhaps our Lord descends to Peter's own level. Lord, he says, you know all things.

You know I. And we were expecting agape, but no, it's philio. You know I like you. Feed my sheep. Dear little sheep.

Immature, arid, in need of tender and loving nourishment of the word. Over a charcoal fire, Peter had denied Christ.

And over a charcoal fire, he is asked to confess his love for his master. Three denials.

Three affirmations. There are other interesting parallels between John 13 and John 21, if you're interested.

[ 21 : 52 ] We read in John 13, where our Lord says, I tell you the truth, or verily, verily, most assuredly, I tell you the truth.

You will deny me. Three times. And this is prefaced by what Jesus said following his restoration.

Here at the lakeside, he's saying, I tell you the truth. He's using the same introduction as he had before. And here he says, I tell you the truth.

When you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

And then there's also the theme of following. Where I am going, you cannot follow, but you will follow later, we read in John 13. And here in John 21, then he said to him, follow me.

[ 23 : 00 ] The first and last recorded words of our Lord to Peter. And also in this context, there's the subject of death. In John 13, our Lord says, where I am going, you cannot come.

And in John 21, Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death which Peter would glorify God. Here then, in this situation, our Lord is publicly reinstating Peter.

And making it known to the entire church that he has been forgiven and entrusted with the care of Christ's flock. To quote Hendrickson, it's as if the master says to Peter, Simon, you were weak like a lamb, wandering like a sheep.

Yet through it all, you like a dear little sheep were the object of my tender and loving advances. Now, having profited by your experiences because of your sincere sorrow, consider the members of my church to be your lambs and feed them, your sheep and shepherd them.

Yes, your dear sheep, and in feeding them, love them. Do not neglect the work among the flock, Simon. That's your real assignment.

[ 24 : 26 ] Go back to it. What can we learn then from this interesting story? I think there are a number of lessons.

Eight I've got here. Peter's fall, incidentally, is recorded in all four Gospels. So clearly, it is something the writers believe to be important.

First of all, the church is made up of individuals who have failed the Lord. Moses, David, Jonah, Peter, John, Mark, me, and you.

Let's beware of the danger of pride and self-confidence. Peter said, I will lay down my life for you. What about us?

What promise might we make? Remember what Paul said. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

[ 25 : 31 ] And I think another lesson is that we should be aware of the danger of laziness. Peter was told to watch and pray, remember, in the Garden of Gethsemane? That he might not enter into temptation.

But fourthly, and perhaps almost certainly the main message from this chapter.

Peter said, Peter, beware of the fear of man. Because it can paralyze our witness. Peter learned that lesson because he could say later, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed.

But praise God that you bear that name. Fifthly, despite our failures, Christ still wants us to serve him.

According to J.C. The same pitiful hand that saved Peter from drowning when his faith failed him on the waters, was once more stretched out to raise him when he fell in the high priest's hall.

- [ 26 : 42 ] Sixthly, remember that success of our service does not depend on our own strength. Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

Isn't it fantastic that we have got a great high priest who prays for us in our weakness that we would not fail?

Seventhly, our service must be preceded by true repentance. Repentance of the pride that prevents a willing and wholehearted service.

Was that the reason for Christ's repetitive questioning? Was it Peter's pride that was preventing 100% commitment?

It was a salutary experience for Peter. For much later, he would write to the scattered church leaders, be shepherds of God's flock. Not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

- [ 27 : 56 ] Not greedy for money, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Only when we truly repent will Christ forgive, accept, restore, and recommission us. And finally, our service must be wholehearted, grounded in love.

Peter wasn't asked by our Lord by the lakeside, are you eloquent? Can you preach a good sermon? Are you learned? Are you doctrinally sound?

Do you fear me? No. Do you love me? And that's the question that we should respond to, especially as we, with gratitude, look forward to partaking of the elements which reminds us of the Lord's death for us.

Let me finish with this poem. O the bitter shame and sorrow that a time could ever be when I let the Savior's pity plead in vain and proudly answered, None of you and all of me.

- [ 29 : 26 ] Yet you found me. There I saw you, dying and in agony. Heard you pray, Forgive them, Father. And my wistful heart said firmly, Some of you and some of me.

Day by day, your tender mercy, healing, helping, full and free, firm and strong with endless patience, brought me lower while I whispered, More of you and less of me.

Higher than the highest heaven, deeper than the deepest sea. Lord, your love at last has conquered. Grant me now my spirit's longing, all of you and none of me.

Let's put in love with you. Thank you.