

John (83): Jesus and Peter

A Christian is in many ways a contradiction—he knows the truth and yet remains ignorant—he's humble and contrite and yet at times self-confident—he serves Christ above all else, and yet at times is blinded by self-ambition...

These contradictions are seen nowhere more clearly than in Peter—who was bold, humble, and knowledgeable, and yet, also timid, proud, and ignorant...

Alexander Maclaren—"Peter's main characteristics are all in operation here; his eagerness to be in the front, his habit of blurting out his thoughts and feelings, his passionate love for his Master, and his inability to understand Him, and his self-confident arrogance..."

I mentioned two weeks ago, that these final verses of chapter 13, are something of a preface to the three chapter sermon that follows—Judas has left, and now our Savior is about to instruct His beloved disciples, about His departure and the coming of the Spirit...

- I. The Passage Simply Explained
- II. The Passage Practically Applied

I. The Passage Simply Explained

1. Here I want to briefly explain this passage under two headings—Peter's confusion (v36) and confidence (vv37-38)...
2. [1] Peter's confusion, v36—"Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, where are You going"—this was in response to v33...
3. V33—"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, Where I am going, you cannot come, so now I say to you..."
4. Our Savior is referring to His impending death—He was about to leave this world, and return to His Father...
5. Peter obviously failed to understand what our Savior meant—Peter thought He was referring to some earthly place...
6. V36b—"Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward"—that is, you too shall soon die...
7. Jn.21:18-19—"Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish..."
8. In other words, Peter would be martyred, and if tradition is to be trusted, he would be crucified upside down...
9. And so, Peter was confused about what our Savior actually meant—he was mistaken about His death and resurrection...
10. Now, before I move on to the next verses, let me remind you the ignorance of Peter and the other disciples, was in many ways unique...
11. They were so close up to the historical events of Christ's death and resurrection, that they were unable to see them...
12. For example—let's say you went hiking on Mount Everest—from that perspective all you could see is rocks and trees...
13. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to see the actual outline of the mountain—you are too close to it...
14. But as you left that mountain, and let's say you're on a different mountain, then the distance would allow you to see it...
15. Well, this is similar to the apostles—they were too close to these events to rightly see them, until after Pentecost (when they were able to stand back, as it were, and see them clearly)...

16. But nevertheless, we do learn an important lesson—even the best Christians, remain partially ignorant of some truth...
17. [2] Peter's confidence, v37—"Peter said to Him, Lord, why can I not follow You now (by death)? I will lay down my life for Your sake..."
18. It seems Peter understood what our Savior meant in v36—he would follow Christ by death, not now but later...
19. Here, Peter expresses his willingness to follow Christ now, even by death, if necessary—"I will lay down my life for Your sake..."
20. That is—I will give my life for You—I will die if necessary—I will do whatever it takes, to remain with You...
21. Now—before I go any further, let me first of all confess—there is something positive and commendable in these words...
22. Peter, obviously, desired to be with his Lord, and he was willing to do whatever it takes for this to happen—at least he thought he was...
23. And this is really the whole problem—Peter thought he was stronger than he was—he was overly confident...
24. V38—"Jesus answered him, Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times..."
25. He challenges Peter's claim—"Will you REALLY lay down your life for My sake? Are you as determined as you think..."
26. Our Savior then prophetically reveals what will ACTUALLY happen—"the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times..."
27. In other words—far from giving his life for the sake of Christ, Peter would actually deny that he knew Christ...
28. Peter would deny Christ, not merely once or twice, but three times—he would deny that he was His follower...
29. And this would take place before the rooster crows—which is another way of saying—before 3 in the morning...
30. Thus, after Jesus teaches His disciples for three chapters (14-16), prays (17), He is eventually betrayed in the garden...
31. Jn.18:15-18—"And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so *did* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, You are not also *one* of this Man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not. Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.
32. Jn.18:25-27—"Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you? He denied *it* and said, I am not! One of the servants of the high priest, a relative *of him* whose ear Peter cut off, said, Did I not see you in the garden with Him? Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.
33. Thus, Peter denied Christ three times—once to the servant girl, then the soldiers, and finally the servant of the high priest...
34. Now, before I come to some lessons, let me remind you, that if we were honest, most of us deny Christ at times also...
35. We fail to speak up when we know we should, or else, we laugh at a joke that we know dishonors our Master...
36. Now—unfortunately this is a family sickness, something that all Christians, to various degree, are guilty of...

II. The Passage Practically Applied

Here I want to begin by reminding you, that our Savior knew that Peter would betray Him, and yet did not stop it—the reason being, He intended to teach Peter some important lessons—the entire incident was a classroom

of sorts—our Savior had big plans for Peter as a leader among the apostles—Peter had to learn at least three important truths...

Thus, let me remind you, that all Christians have need to learn these lessons—as God has plans to use all of us in specific ways—this is also a great encouragement, that God uses people like Peter who are very far from perfect...

A. To teach Peter it wasn't about himself

1. This was perhaps the most important of all lessons—Peter had to learn it wasn't about Him but about Christ...
2. Peter had yet to learn how central Christ's death was—he, along with the other disciples, were unclear on the cross...
3. Peter tells Christ he would be willing to die for Him—but, was not clear on that fact that Christ was about to die for him...
4. Put another way—it wasn't about what Peter would do for Christ but about what Christ would do for Peter...
5. Perhaps I can put it another way—Peter had a lot of misguided zeal that was not informed by the centrality of the cross...
6. Now—of course understood the need for atonement, but he was not clear on the particulars or details of that atonement...
7. Peter is like many Christians today, who view Christianity as all about what we can do for God and for Christ...
8. And brethren, we should do great things for Christ—He alone is worthy of all our love, service, and allegiance...
9. But, first and foremost, Christianity is NOT about what we do for Christ, but it's about what He did for us...
10. Now, the more we understand and believe that, the more we will be motivated to do great things for Christ...
11. I really fear that many Christians are misguided at this point—they want to hear another sermon or read another book on what we should do for Jesus...
12. And yet, most Christians, don't need another book on what we need to do, but what He did for us in our place...
13. Peter had misguided zeal—and friends, it's very good to be zealous—but our zeal must be properly informed...
14. I really fear that many Christians, on a practical level, are entrapped in a self-righteous mindset about their acceptance with God...
15. I MUST do something for Christ—I MUST die for Christ—all the while He is telling you—He has died for you...
16. Peter was so desirous to do something for Christ, that he failed to understand what Christ was about to do for him...
17. You know this is an important lesson for us as well—must we be zealous to do great things for Christ and His kingdom—yes...
18. But we must be careful to know, that this is not the main thing—the primary thing is that it's all done for me by Him...
19. My friends, to rest in the works of Christ and not in our own, is not a bad thing, in fact, it's at the heart of Christianity...

B. To convince Peter of his own weakness

1. This is another very important lesson Peter had to learn—he had to be convinced of his weakness and neediness...
2. Peter, along with the other disciples, thought too highly of themselves—they needed to be reminded of their weakness...

3. Peter was self-confident—he had too much confidence in himself, in his own strength, ability, and resolve...
4. You would think this is a lesson we would learn—but unfortunately, we are just like Peter—self-confident...
5. 1Cor.10:11-12—"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall..."
6. In vv1-10 Paul uses the sins of the Israelites as examples for us—they were written for our admonition (instruction)...
7. V12—"Therefore let him who thinks he stands"—that is, thinks he stands in his own strength and ability—that thinks he stands and can never fall...
8. Let him "take heed"—let him beware—"lest he fall"—unless he fall as they did—use their sin as a warning for us...
9. Let us take heed from the example of Peter—none of us are too strong to deny Christ and dishonor Him greatly...
10. Dwelling within our hearts there exists every form of evil, and simply given the right opportunity, it will come forth...

C. To remind Peter he was different from Judas

1. I want to suggest, in closing, this is likely why John puts the account of Peter just after the account of Judas...
2. [1] Jesus' promise, v36—"Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward..."
3. While this is a prophecy of Peter's death, it is also a glorious promise—"you shall follow Me"—You shall go where I am going...
4. If you think about it, there really isn't a greater and more direct promise in Scripture—Peter soon we shall be with Me in glory...
5. [2] Jesus' prayer—by this I mean, as we consider Luke's account, we find that our Savior said something very important to Peter...
6. Lk.22:31-34—"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren. But he said to Him, Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death. Then He said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me..."
7. [3] Jesus' provision—here I am thinking about His words in v38—"I say to you, the roost shall not crow till you have denied Me three times..."
8. These words are a prophecy, rebuke, but also a mercy—a prophecy in that they foretold the future, a rebuke in that they corrected Peter's self-confidence...
9. But they are also a mercy in that they lodged in the conscience of Peter, and would be the means of his repentance...
10. Lk.22:60-61—"But Peter said, Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times..."