

# *‘Simon, do you love me? ...’*

## Feeding Christ’s sheep the ‘Divine diet’

### THE SETTING

---

A - Last summer we thought about the 3 occasions where Scripture records the Lord using a name twice – *Martha, Martha, you are anxious about many things. One thing is necessary ... Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith might not fail ... Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me. It is hard for you ...*. We marvelled at the wonderful way the Master tempered truth with tenderness in his manner with the disciples.

Now we focus on the Lord’s dealings with Simon called Peter. We recall that on that memorable occasion when the Lord had asked His disciples, *Who do you say I am?*, it was Simon who, as was his habit, came forth with the first response: *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*. To which Christ replied, *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven*. And it was just after that the Lord said to Simon, *You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church*. The commentators agree that while in some way the Lord was remarking upon the place of Peter in the church, His main lesson here was that the church would be built on the confession that Jesus of Nazareth was both Messiah of Israel and Son of God.

Simon’s adopted name, **Cephas** in Aramaic, **Petros** in Greek, meant rock or stone. But comes the night of the cross. Would Simon Peter’s faith prove to be made of rock – or rubble? The events of the night of the cross would not give us much confidence in his leadership of the church. It was to Simon that the Lord had turned His gaze at that last supper, only to say *Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and when you have returned, strengthen your brothers. You will all fall away, because it is written ‘I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.’*

But what does Simon reply? *Though all may forsake you, I will not!* And as if he had something to prove, it is Simon who is quick to draw his sword to defend the Lord when darkness descends. But how little Simon, and indeed all of them – so quick to follow Simon’s confident boast with *Not I, Lord* – how little they knew even their own hearts. Put yourself in the place of Peter as the Lord’s gaze turns to him once more, this time right after the third denial – *I know not the man!* Were you Peter, would you not be wondering whether you will ever see that Face again? Even if you somehow could, would you ever be able to look Him in the eye again? Could someone like you expect anything from God? Is this not the end of everything? *And he wept bitterly.*

B - And yet is it the end? Even as the bitter tears flow, Simon recalls the comfort that went with the warning, *Satan has demanded to have you ... I have prayed for you ... WHEN you have returned...* [repeat]. Certain as you are that Satan has you, more certain must you now be that the Lord leads even Satan by a nosering. Deep is the pit in which you sit – but is there not a little daylight above?

And so we shift scenes to a seashore. Simon called Peter is astonished to again sit in the presence of his Master. They eat fish and share fellowship. But is there anything else for Simon? The Lord looks him in the face once more. *Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?* And if the humiliation of this question is not enough, the Lord asks Simon 3 times. You answer with increasing pain 3 times, *Yes, Lord, you know I love you.*

The Lord says *Feed my lambs*. You remember He had said before *When you return, strengthen your brothers.*

*Yes, Lord, you know I love you.*

*Shepherd My sheep.*

*Feed My sheep.*

3 denials, 3 confessions. What is it that the Lord seeks to accomplish? Surely one thing we have seen clearly in those last hours before the cross: Simon, hardly alone among the disciples, has not learned yet the hard lesson that the way into the kingdom is the way of the cross. The way of service, sacrifice, suffering – and yes – even death.

*Feed My sheep!?* **What manner of meal** would the old Peter have prepared for Christ’s sheep – that Simon who

wished for a seat of prominence in Messiah's kingdom, who tried to dissuade his Lord from going up to Jerusalem (when Christ predicts the cross, even rebuking Him, *This shall never happen to you!*) What would this NEW man, Peter, put on the table, this man formerly made of sand?

***We have the answer in the first epistle of Peter (setting: suffering under Nero) – The MAIN STAPLES of the DIVINE DIET***

We have Peter's brief letter of 5 chapters, written some 30 years after the events by the seashore. Years not without trials: jail, floggings, some lapses – but no 'dark night of the soul'). In this epistle we witness the completeness of the conversion of Simon, the sand man, to Peter, the ROCK. What do we find Peter feeding the flock, these 30 years after the cross?.

***1. SECURITY - Central to our Hope***

---

A - Can you guess why these words immediately follow Simon's salutation?:

1:1 PETER, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen

2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

B - Look at these phrases once more. Shall we wonder that Simon Peter, who once cried out to the Lord, *Depart from me for I am a sinful man!*; who wept so bitterly at discovering that his Master knew him better than he knew himself – shall we wonder that such a man sets such store on this priceless gift – the Father's assurance to believers. Was not Simon there that other day when the Lord said *All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out ... This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I lose nothing ....* Have you ever been so lost as Simon in that locked room? Then here's a word for you – *No one can pluck them from My hand*.

***2. THE WORD - Vital to our Growth***

---

A - But how can Peter be fully assured when he knows how far he fell that night? After a lifetime of faithful synagogue attendance? After 3 years in the presence of the Master? But now, after Pentecost, Peter has a new insight into the nature of the spiritual life:

23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but unperishable, *that is*, through the living and abiding word of God. 24 For,

"ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.

THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,

25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDES FOREVER."

And this is the word which was preached to you.

2:1 THEREFORE, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,

2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

That night Simon stood on his own strength, on his own wisdom, and took up the sword. *Put your sword away*, he heard the Master say, *for how can the Scripture be fulfilled?*. The mature Peter knows that the mature Christian grows by hearing and obeying the Word, NOT by trusting his own or the world's wisdom.

***3. SUFFERING - The Glory of the Christ***

---

A - If we recall the speeches of Peter in the early chapters of Acts we will not be surprised to find his central theme

in those early days remains his central theme in this epistle. ***Christ fulfills Isaiah's great prophecy of the Suffering Servant.*** Listen to this section of Peter's epistle, and marvel that this is the man with the sword!

2:19 For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

24 and He *Himself* bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

B - This written by the man who had struck off the ear of a soldier molesting his Master! *By his wounds you were healed.* Peter remembers: Christ healed the man whose ear you struck off, and He healed you – of your fear, of your spiritual arrogance, of your GUILT. The memory of those final hours is indelible in Peter's mind, but so too that great passage in Isaiah – the Suffering Servant:

4:1 THEREFORE, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Does Peter finally recognize something profoundly surprising about the nature of faith and salvation? That, in the words of Hebrews, *Even Christ learned obedience from the things He suffered.*

But where does this leave millions of Christians who are absolutely sure that they will be spared the great tribulation, sure that their appointed lot in life, as 'kids of the King', is to prosper? Peter, we know, deals here with a similar sentiment among his Jewish brethren. Was it not this positive-thinking, 'victorious' Simon who had rebuked the Master, *God forbid! This will not happen to you, Lord!* And Christ's response? *If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up the cross, and follow Me.* Can there be any doubt that by the end of his days, Peter saw the GLORY of Christ even more in His PASSION than in His POWER?

#### ***4. LOVE - The Test of the True Shepherd – and True Sheep!***

---

A - We think of John as the apostle of love. But it was Paul who wrote the magnificent hymn of 1 Corinthians 13. And it is Peter who writes these admonitions:

1:22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

and again

3:8 To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit;

9 not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

And what does Peter wish for the flock 'ABOVE ALL'?

4:8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

10 As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Surely, Peter had known the 2 great commandments all his life. But he had never known the full meaning of LOVE of God and neighbour till he had known the Master: *He who has seen Me has seen the Father.*

## 5. *SUBMISSION and SERVICE - The Test of Love to Christ*

---

A - 'ABOVE ALL ... LOVE'. But how do we love Christ? By a life of uninterrupted devotions, prayer & meditation? Here in his little epistle are more hard lessons which the impulsive Simon has learned. Submit to authorities, submit to masters – even when such are 'unreasonable' (let us remember these words were written during the reign of Nero!) – submit to each other, submit to your elders, wives to husbands, husbands too, by treating wives with special tenderness. And again, the emphasis upon submission to ill-treatment:

4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are BLESSED, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

*Blessed are those persecuted for My sake.* Peter was there when Jesus said it, but NOW he believed it.

And the 'Spirit of glory' too rests upon those who, like their Master, come to serve not to be served:

4:10 As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 Whoever speaks, *let him speak*, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, *let him do so* as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The special responsibility of leaders to emulate the Spirit of Christ:

5:1 THEREFORE, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,

2 shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Finally, words which have special weight from one who had once exulted in his super-spirituality – *They may fall away, but I will never leave you!*:

5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

8 Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

**[This from the man who slept while the Master agonized in the garden!]**

9 But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

11 To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

And Peter is not yet finished (neither am I): Listen to the next verse:

12 Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

## APPLICATION

And so we end with a question for the western church of which we are all members: Is this THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD in which WE STAND FIRM? Are we, the representatives of Christ in the west, feeding on 'the Divine diet' – and DISPENSING it to others – or are we, as it were, 'fast food junkies'? In this culture, to be sure, the DIVINE DIET is pretty unpalatable.

***Here's a few questions that Peter's life and epistle thrust at the church in the west, indeed ALL Christians:***

1. Is our PEACE & SECURITY in God the Father, or is our 'peace' the weapon in our hand, our confidence in 'the military budget'?
2. Are we growing by the WORD, or depending upon 'spiritual experiences' or, like the old Simon, on our own strength and wisdom?
3. Is our message THE SUFFERING SERVANT, or prosperity and success - the 'good life', the gospel which suffuses the culture into which all of us are born?
4. Is our energy spent showing LOVE to the brethren, or in division and strife (may not be so manifest in SUC, but has multiple applications in denominational life)?
5. Is our 'religion' SUBMISSION and SERVICE, or self-centred and self-serving?

\* \* \*

If we feel we are failing as we ask ourselves these questions, TAKE HEART. Remember Peter, paralyzed in fear and confusion in that locked room. Alone even among the disciples.

But then recall that day by the seashore, when the Lord asked Simon those 3 questions. He added something else:

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go. (This He said to show by what manner of death he would glorify God.) And after this He said to him, *FOLLOW ME*.

Certainly there's comfort for those of us who can relate to Simon Peter perhaps more than to any other Bible character. Simon, after 30 years of following his Master, WAS INDEED 'ready to live and die for Christ'? ARE WE?

If we are not sure whether the faith WE hold can withstand the dark night of the soul, then let us renew our commitment to the Lord, and to His word, which endures FOREVER (and will take us into eternity too). Seek the Lord, who showed Simon Peter that He is FAITHFUL even when we are not. The Lord who confronts us even as He comforts us, – 'FOLLOW ME!'