

Bible Studies about Peter

Study 5: Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane

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2008

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Background

In our previous study we looked at Peter at the Transfiguration of Christ. What an incredible experience that must have been for Peter - to have an encounter with Jesus, Moses and Elijah. In stark contrast then, with that experience, we turn in this study to look at the account of Peter in the garden of Gethsemane. This perhaps represents the beginning of Peter's descent into humility, which continues with his denial of Christ.

The Message

Whilst we will take a look at Jesus' profound experience in Gethsemane in another study, here we intend to focus in our continuation of this series of studies on the account of Peter. This may be found in three key references (Mark 14:43-52 (which parallels Matthew 26:47-56), Luke 22:47-53, and John 18:1-11).

Mark's account reads as follows:

"Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." All of them deserted him and fled.

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked."¹

The account in John's gospel informs us that the one who "stood near" who drew his sword was Simon Peter, and that the servant's name was Malchus². The account in Luke's gospel informs us that after Simon Peter had cut off the right ear of the servant Jesus answered "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him."³

The cutting off of the servant's ear was Peter's penultimate act before his denial of Christ, and an act indicating the emotional 'rollercoaster ride' Peter was on at the time, again reflecting his impulsive nature. I wonder what Peter hoped to achieve in this rash act? There was "a crowd with swords and clubs", and this act of resistance could not possibly have achieved anything...it was futile.

We also have to remember how shortly before:

- The disciples had just had the last supper with Jesus (Luke 22:7-38)
- The disciples had argued as to which of them was considered to be greatest (Luke 22:24)

¹ Mark 14:43-52

² John 18:10

³ Luke 22:51

- Jesus said “*Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*” And he said to him, “*Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!*” Jesus said, “*I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.*”⁴
- When Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and “*got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief.*”⁵
- Jesus returned from prayer on three separate occasions and found Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) sleeping on each occasion (Matthew 26:40, 43 & 45).

We know how Jesus was under so much anguish, “*his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.*”⁶ Although their experience could not have been anything like that of Jesus, through everything that had happened, the three with Jesus were “*sleeping because of grief.*”⁷

We will probably never be able to grasp how the disciples must have felt at this time, and what their thoughts were. I wonder if any of them truly understood the great price that Jesus had to pay. Certainly, at this point of unbelievably low ebb - when you would think there was not lower place to be, when you would think there was nothing left, Peter subsequently denied Jesus just as He had predicted. It is no surprise then that after denying Jesus three times then “*he went out and wept bitterly.*”⁸

In these events and through our previous studies thus far we have learned something of how ‘real’ a person Peter was. Not some amazing spiritual figure that you might have expected to be a disciples, but a very honest person who was all too able to demonstrate his humanity – his impulsiveness, his failings, his zealotness and conviction for what he believed and knew to be right. I can’t see how when we read of Peter that we can fail to take encouragement. If Jesus could choose someone like Peter, surely He could also choose somebody like you and I? What we have to remember is that in our own strength, we will always fail – and we have to learn to rely and trust upon the provision of Jesus. It gives me courage to know that Jesus prayed for Peter that his “*own faith may not fail.*”

THIS IS A PICTURE OF AN OLIVE TREE IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE IN JERUSALEM. THE PICTURE WAS TAKEN IN 1996.

WHAT WORDS COULD EVER DESCRIBE THE FEELINGS WE MIGHT EXPERIENCE WHEN WALKING THROUGH THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES TODAY?



⁴ Luke 22:31-34

⁵ Luke 22:45

⁶ Luke 22:44

⁷ Luke 22:45

⁸ Matthew 26:75

Questions

1. How would you have reacted in Peter's situation, with the encounter with the crowd armed with swords and clubs?
2. Have you ever known what it is like to be 'exhausted with sorrow' – "*sleeping because of grief*"? How did you react to events you encountered at the time? Would you have fallen asleep as the three of Jesus' disciples did?
3. Which of the disciples do you associate with the most?