

Bible Studies about Peter

Study 11: The Ministry of Peter

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Background

In our previous studies on the disciple Peter we have amongst other aspects taken a look at his great commission and seen his transformation through the enabling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Who could have imagined that a simple fisherman could have been used by God in such a mighty way, and what hope it gives us in how we might be brought into our potential in Christ through the Holy Spirit?

In this study we will be taking a look at some of the events leading up to Peter's vision from God (which will be the theme of the next study) that are foundational to and formational of Peter's burgeoning ministry.

The Message

It seems clear from a variety of references in the Bible that Peter and John were very close to each other, despite the fact that each of them also had a brother amongst the other disciples:

- It was Peter and John who Jesus asked to prepare the Passover meal for the last supper (Luke 22:8)
- Similarly in Acts 3, it was Peter and John who were going up to the temple together at the hour of prayer.

It is in Acts 3 that we read of the encounter of Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate of the temple with a man who had been lame from birth who was asking for alms. Peter's response was in some ways reminiscent of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. He said *"There is no silver and gold to me, but what I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk!"*¹ Peter's response seems to be very measured, and clothed in humility. Yet in his restraint is a quietness and confidence in the Lord that is markedly different to the same Peter who denied Christ three times, the same Peter who previously had demonstrated his impulsive nature. Peter was moved with the real need of the man, and as we see in Acts 3 the man was miraculously healed.

The fruit of the Spirit is very much in evidence as Christ's light shines from Peter, and he explains the healing to the gathered crowd at Solomon's Portico (Acts 3:11) in an evangelistic way by presenting the good news (Acts 3:13-18), and offers a call to repentance (Acts 3:19-26). The message that Peter brought was one that the Sadducees struggled with since he was *"proclaiming in Jesus that there was the resurrection of the dead"*², something the Sadducees did not believe that the Scriptures taught. We learn in Acts 4:4 that *"many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand."*

In my mind, the most notable gifting that he was blessed with was pastoral leadership and this was central to his ministry and mission, and constantly in evidence as you endeavoured to build the Church. In his heart, Peter must surely have remembered his last exchange with Jesus...*"Feed my sheep"*³, and prior to that Jesus' response when he told Jesus that he was *"the Messiah, the Son of the living God"*⁴ which was *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the*

¹ Acts 3:6

² Acts 4:2

³ John 21:15-19

⁴ Matthew 16:16

gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."⁵ We see Peter is beginning to grow into the ministry in which he was called by Jesus.

Leading up to Pentecost, Peter was a key figure in the early Christian community (Acts 1:15ff); and after Pentecost, he became (as we saw in our previous study) a principal preacher (Acts 2:14ff, Acts 3:12ff) and a spokesperson to the Jewish authorities (Acts 4:8ff). He was also willing and able to rebuke and correct where appropriate (Acts 5:3ff).

His ministry continues through his missionary journeys, one of which we may read of in Acts 9:32 - 9:43 which included his encounters in Lydda⁶, Joppa⁷, and as we shall see in a later study in Caesarea. The following points are important:

- One of the purposes of the missionary journey was to visit believers in other areas (v32). Peter is therefore again true to his calling and taking the opportunity to visit and feed Jesus' sheep.
- In and amongst this, Peter, being bridled by the Holy Spirit, is sensitive to the needs of those he encounters; Aeneas the paralytic (v33-34) is healed, Tabitha is raised from the dead (v40-42). In my mind these are 'Kingdom qualities'; hallmarks by which the world might recognise that God's Kingdom is breaking through.

But we should not simply limit our understanding of these qualities to these acts. What unites – the thread that runs through the tapestry – is wholeness. There are different dimensions of wholeness in a Christian context that include grace, steadfastness, perseverance, honesty, fairness, choice, nurture, healing and liberty all of which are captured in the Hebrew word 'shalom'. Peter's role, through an outworking of mission and ministry, was to help people become shalom people in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit; and it is to this that the church today is called.

Mission is vital to the growth of the church and it is an outworking of our faith in God. Mission is something that needs to embrace those in the church and those outside of the church; an opportunity for all concerned to have an encounter with the Kingdom.

Peter's ministry encompassed so much more, and as we shall see in our next study he did not always get it right! The Bible tells us that we need to "*be filled with Spirit*"⁸ – the use of the present tense here reminds us that this is to be a constant act, something to be continually experienced. I would extend this further in that I believe we are also to be 'bridled by the Spirit', something which seems clear from other passages in the book of James. Peter continued to grow in his ministry – he constantly had to live under grace.

Questions

1. What three things might we change in our lives that inhibit our Christian growth?
2. What 'Kingdom qualities' are in evidence in our Church, and what practical steps could we take to help them flourish?
3. Consider what forms of missions and outreach you are involved in. We should always be prepared to give an account for what we believe and why. Pray that God might continue to open up opportunities for you to share your faith and the good news that you have been blessed with.

⁵ Matthew 16:17-19

⁶ Lydda was the capital of one of the Judean districts that included non-Jews

⁷ Joppa was a profitable port city

⁸ Ephesians 5:18b