

“Resurrection Restoration” (The Life of Peter)

I’m going to ask you to do something difficult. I would like you to recall the biggest failure of your life. What is the one thing you’ve done that you regret more than anything else? What is the one thing you wish you could do over again? Perhaps your most devastating failure or regret is a previous marriage, a current marriage, unsaved children, a former or present promiscuous lifestyle, an extended span of rebellion, or a miserable career. Whatever your failure, I understand. Believe me, I understand. Oh, I’m sorry, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Simon.¹ You probably know me as Peter, which means “rock.”² Although my name means “rock,” I feel more like a pebble. You see, I experienced a devastating failure. To make matters worse, my failure was recorded in Scripture and has been read or heard by countless people. But before I confess my failure to you, I want to share with you a bit about my life.

I grew up in Israel. I had a decent house along Lake Galilee and lived with my wife and mother-in-law.³ I had a fishing business with my dad, John, and my little brother, Andrew.⁴ We were working class—we labored with our hands—long hours, crummy conditions, and little pay. Like all good Jewish boys, I was trained in the Law, I lived under the oppression of Rome and I wanted freedom. John the Baptizer had been preaching about repentance. Many were flocking to him, but not me. I had to work, and my work was fishing. But Andrew went and heard John the day that John pointed to Jesus of Nazareth and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”⁵ Jesus then invited Andrew and some others to the place where He was staying. Andrew returned to me and said that he had found the Messiah. Naturally, I told him that he was out of his mind. But my little brother was insistent. When he asked me if I would come and see for myself, I responded, “No, thank you, Drew.” But he wouldn’t take no for an answer. He ended up dragging me to Jesus. I will never forget seeing Jesus for the first time. With compassion and confidence He looked at me and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas.” (Jesus and I spoke Aramaic and Cephas was the Aramaic word for “rock.”)⁶ What an amazing experience! I believed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Unfortunately, I had to go back to fishing and provide for my family.

About a year later, my brother and I along with my business partners, James and John, had spent the night fishing with dragnets.⁷ It was backbreaking work because it involved laying out a huge net in a semicircle, encompassing over one hundred feet, drawing it in hand-over-hand over and over. It was hard work that only strong men could perform. We had sweat through the night without as much as a fish. We were tired, exhausted, dejected, and in a foul mood. Fishermen like to say, “Your worst day fishing is better than your best day in the office,” but I couldn’t agree at that moment. At dawn we beached our boats, ate breakfast, and engaged in the tedious process of washing, mending, and drying our nets. Once dry, they would be folded and placed back in the boats for the coming night. On this particular day, the monotony was broken by the presence of a large crowd pressing around Jesus “listening to the word of God.” Jesus was preaching “the good news of the kingdom of God.” His authoritative preaching drew a packed crowd. Since I had anchored my boat a few yards from shore, Jesus asked if He could use it as a floating pulpit. Of course, I consented. Jesus resumed His teaching, His voice carrying effectively over the waters to all gathered on the shore. Although Jesus was a master teacher, I confess, I was having a hard time focusing on His words. Perhaps you can relate to sermon slumber? I had some excuses though: I was tired and frustrated. I was working hard to get my nets prepared for another day of fishing. Not to mention, the warm sun was numbing my mind. But all of a sudden Jesus broke into my world and had my full attention. In one breath, out of nowhere, He said to me, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”⁸ I was flabbergasted by this command. My mind began to run away with all kinds of thoughts: Jesus, come on, it’s late morning; the time to fish is late-evening/early-morning. The sun has warmed the water, the fish are now deep in the lake, and our nets can’t reach that deep. If any fish are to be caught it will be in the shallow water. More than that, our nets are clean! We would have to clean them all over again to obey Jesus. This just doesn’t make sense. In fact, it is absolute nonsense!

Deep down, what I really wanted to say is: “Jesus, I know fishing. If there’s anything I know . . . it is fish. I make my living by catching fish. I am a fish scholar, a fish connoisseur. I’m motivated, for the more fish I catch, the better my income, and my wife is always after me to make more money. But you Jesus are a carpenter. What do carpenters know about fishing? Nothing! It’s absurd for a *carpenter/rabbi* to tell a *fisherman* how to fish!” Yet, in spite of all that I wanted to say, I decided to humor Jesus. “Lord, if it will make you happy, even though it’s a waste of time, I’ll let down the nets.”

We went out into the deepest part of the lake and began to fish. As soon as we put the nets into the water, we saw fish darting into the net. My eyes were nearly popping out of my head! I began shouting praise to God! As I was rejoicing, the nets began to break because they couldn’t contain all the fish. I had to call James and John to bring their boat and nets to help me. When the catch was complete, both boats were so full that they began to sink. In spite of the danger, I fell down at Jesus’ feet saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” Jesus looked at me again with those same eyes of love and compassion and said: “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” I didn’t fully understand what Jesus meant by this statement; however, I understood that He was the miracle working, Son of God. So when we finally brought our boats to land, we left everything and followed Him.⁹

I never once regretted following Jesus. In the course of our relationship, I saw things I couldn’t believe. Jesus turned water to wine. He took on the religious leaders of Jerusalem and put them in their place. He spoke with authority. He healed my mother-in-law, and never even asked me about it first! He cast out demons. He raised the dead. He calmed storms. He fed thousands of hungry people. He showed us His glory on the mountain of transfiguration. I knew Jesus was the Son of God and I expressed this confidence over the course of my life. When Jesus was walking on the water, I got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Him.¹⁰ When Jesus’ disciples stopped following Him and Jesus asked, “Do you want to go away as well?”¹¹ I said: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.”¹² I was also the one who made the confession about Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹³ In the garden of Gethsemane, when Christ’s life was in danger, I was ready to take on over five hundred Roman soldiers.¹⁴ I drew my sword and missed my target by less than six inches, cutting off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. Even after this blunder, I didn’t want to wholly abandon Christ so I continued to follow Christ from a distance.

I had moments of glory, but I also had a terrible weakness. My besetting sin was pride. I was too sure of myself. I was brash, impulsive, and impatient. I lived by the motto: “When in doubt: SPEAK!” Right before arriving in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus quoted the Scripture, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”¹⁵ But in all of my arrogance I responded, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”¹⁶ I promised Jesus: “I will lay down my life for you”¹⁷ Me and my big mouth! I felt I was better than the others. I knew that I was stronger than my brother or James and John. I could weather any storm. I would still be found standing. But you know the rest of the story.¹⁸ In all of my pride, I followed Jesus to the courtyard where they had taken Him. A servant girl recognized me and said, “You also were with Jesus of Galilee.” I denied it. But then another saw me, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” This time I got bolder. I even offered an oath with my denial. What was I doing? I said I would follow Him to death and now within a few minutes I denied twice even knowing Him. But the group of people interested in me grew and they noticed my Galilean accent and they surrounded me and said that I was one of Jesus’ disciples.¹⁹ That’s when I put myself under a curse to prove that I was not lying and said, “I don’t know the man!”²⁰ I still recall like it was yesterday how Jesus’ eyes locked onto mine. It was a look I will never forget. I could sense His disappointment and sorrow. His eyes seemed to say, “Peter, I’ve loved you, how could you?” At that very moment, I heard the rooster crow. Just like He said, “Before the rooster crows, you will disown Me three times.”²¹ I was crushed. I went outside and sobbed.

I imagine that none of you have spoken the words that I spoke, “I don’t know the man,” but I wonder if you too have denied Jesus. Do you deny Him with your life? It is unlikely that I would have denied Christ or John or James had been sitting next to me. Peer pressure is powerful and I would not have wanted to lose face in the presence of my friends. To be sure, Christ was with me and even overheard my remarks. But I thought that Christ would die, and everything would come to an end. With Christ’s death seemingly sure, what difference did it all make? If I could lie and save my own skin, such cowardice seemed prudent. What a great reminder that there is safety in numbers. We are all susceptible to sin and weakness. There is safety with other believers.²² We need each other, not just once a year, but week in and week out.

For three long days, I experienced depression and guilt. You can only imagine how I felt on the Sunday after Jesus’ death. When Mary Magdalene told John and me about Jesus missing from the tomb, I ran to the tomb! It was true—Jesus was not in it! Some cloistered together, but that waiting around stuff wasn’t for me, so I went fishing! The old adage is true, “When the going gets tough, the tough go fishing.” I wanted to forget my failure. I wanted to go do something that I knew I could do well because I knew that “fishing for men” was over. Even though several disciples joined me, we were skunked. That’s right, we fished all night and didn’t catch a single fish. There are three things a fisherman hates: (1) To get skunked. You can’t exaggerate zero! (2) To have your fishing buddies find out about you getting skunked. (3) To have someone else casually walk up and tell you why you got skunked! I was a victim of all three of these travesties. As I was wallowing in my own misery, a man that was standing on the beach began giving us fishing tips. This stranger had the audacity to tell us to cast our net on the other side of the boat. My first reply was, “Go home, you wannabe.” But we figured, what’s it going to hurt? So we tossed our net on the right side of the boat, and I’m telling you I’ve never seen so many fish. We caught a hundred and fifty–three fish!²³ John said, “I believe its Jesus.” This was a true case of déjà vu. I jumped into the water, and swam to Jesus. When I reached the shore, we embraced. Jesus had prepared a crackling fire and fresh fish sandwiches. After we had finished eating breakfast, Jesus asked me, “Simon,²⁴ son of John, do you love Me more than these?”²⁵ I said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to me, “Tend My lambs.” Jesus said to me again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” I said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to me, “Shepherd My sheep.” Jesus said to me the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” I was grieved²⁶ because Jesus said to me the third time, “Do you love Me?” I said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said, “Tend My sheep.” I remembered that I denied Jesus three times. Because I denied Christ three times publicly, He had to make it right publicly in front of all the disciples. Yet, in the face of this bitterness, Jesus exalted me three times. He told him He could use him. My three denials were followed by three affirmations of love.²⁷ Jesus reaffirmed my calling away from fishing for fish to fishing again for men. This is sheer grace.

A short-time after Jesus’ gracious restoration, I stood up and preached a sermon on the day of Pentecost 3,000 people believed in Christ. I performed the first miracle after Jesus ascended to the Father. Then I went on to become the leader of the early church for the first fifteen years of the spread of Christianity. I went from terrible failure to fruitful ministry because Jesus pursued me and refused to let go of me. I’m here to tell you that *failure is not final*. Jesus can and will redeem your failure. *Failure is not final*. Our great God of grace provided His Son Jesus Christ so that no matter how low you’ve fallen there’s hope! Perhaps you have experienced some great failure in your life and you would like to be restored to fellowship with God today. Wherever Jesus finds a believer who is willing to yield to His will, listen to His Word, and follow His way, He begins to transform that believer and accomplish remarkable things in that life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ provides an opportunity to begin again. Easter is the holiday of new beginnings.

Scripture References

Matthew 14:25–32

Matthew 16:21–23

Matthew 26:31–35, 69–75

John 18:15–27

John 20:1–10

John 21:1–19

1 Peter 5:5–7

Study Questions

1. Have I believed in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior? If not, why not? What is keeping me from trusting in Christ? Is this a legitimate reason to refuse a relationship with God? Have I seriously contemplated that I could be wrong about Jesus? Am I willing to risk this possibility and its potential consequences?
2. What is the one thing I have done in my life that I regret more than anything else? Why did I make this mistake or commit this particular sin? What do I wish I could do over again? What advice would I give my child, grandchild, or fellow believer to keep them from this sin?
3. Have I ever denied Christ by my silence? Have I denied him verbally? Have I denied him with my life? Have I repented for this grave sin? Will I ask God to give me a holy boldness to represent Christ and speak for Him at work, in my neighborhood, and in all my relationships?
4. When have I made sincere promises that I have later broke? How have I failed to depend upon the Lord to keep my promises? As a believer, what changes does the Lord need to make in my life (e.g., priorities, goals, motivation, relationships)? Will I allow Him to begin changing me today?
5. In *A Small Book About God*, Roy Hicks Jr. said, “What breaks your heart and mine is being forced to recognize that even though we have failed Him miserably, we genuinely do love Him. We have failed Him—only to discover that He doesn’t want to talk about our failures. He wants to talk about our love.” See John 21:15–17. How much do I truly love Jesus? Will I confess my sin, receive Christ’s forgiveness/restoration, and then begin cultivating a love relationship with Him?

Notes

¹ Simon comes from the Hebrew word *shama*: “to hear.” Simon was a common name among the Jews because it is derived from “Simeon,” the name of one of the sons of Jacob (and one of the twelve of Israel).

² I am mentioned more frequently in the Gospels than anyone else with the exception of Jesus.

³ Mark 1:30; 1 Cor 9:5.

⁴ Mark 1:16; John 1:40–44.

⁵ John 1:29.

⁶ John 1:42. The apostle Paul liked to use the name Cephas for Peter (1 Cor 1:12; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14).

⁷ Luke 5:1–11; cf. Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20.

⁸ Luke 5:4.

⁹ Jesus uses this miracle to establish His authority and serve as a foundation for Him calling His disciples to follow Him.

¹⁰ Matt 14:29.

¹¹ John 6:67 ESV.

¹² John 6:68–69.

¹³ Matt 16:16.

¹⁴ A Roman cohort numbered five hundred or more.

¹⁵ Matt 26:31b.

¹⁶ Matt 26:33.

¹⁷ John 13:36–37.

¹⁸ Peter should have known better. In the OT, Solomon is all His wisdom said, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18; cf. 1 Cor 10:12; 1 Pet 5:5b).

¹⁹ Since I had tried to cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, I knew I was a marked man. I could easily be identified and singled out for martyrdom. In fact, as I said near the fire, I likely became aware of several pair of eyes that looked remarkably like the ones that had seen me flailing my sword. Erwin W. Lutzer, *When a Good Man Falls* (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1985), 102.

²⁰ Matt 26:74.

²¹ Matt 26:34.

²² Lutzer, *When a Good Man Falls*, 103.

²³ Jesus uses this miracle to assure His disciples that He is the risen Lord and to establish His authority to send them to minister in His name.

²⁴ Please notice in John 21:15: Jesus addressed Peter as “Simon, son of John.” This was his original name before he began following Jesus. When Simon was brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, Jesus called him “Cephas,” which means “stone,” a symbol of solidity and steadfastness. Evidently, Jesus recognized Simon as truer to his natural state than to his God-given name, “Cephas” (Peter). Jesus’ three-fold repetition of this name for his disciple (21:15–17) may have humbled Peter, reminding him of what he was before he met Christ.

²⁵ The first question asked by Jesus is: “Do you truly love me more than these?” (2:15). What does Jesus mean by “these?” He means: Do you love me more than these disciples love me?” Earlier, Peter had boasted of his superior love for Christ, suggesting that he loved Christ more than the other disciples (Matt. 26:33; Mark 14:29).

²⁶ How much was Peter grieved? The degree of grief felt perhaps Peter understands best when it is realized at another place John used a form of this verb to describe the pain of a woman giving birth (16:21). As childbirth seemingly takes a woman to the point of death, Jesus’ third question causes Peter to die to self.

²⁷ It is important to note that Jesus fed Peter before He dealt with his sins. How like the Lord to bless us first, then deal with us. Earlier Peter had denied Jesus beside a fire and now beside another fire he was restored publicly. Psalm 103:8: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.”