

# Peter

## Introduction

The writer of Hebrews said that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...<sup>1</sup> We could word this differently by saying that faith is the assurance of the certainty of the promises of God, and the persuasion of mind and heart that what we cannot see now is there.

Faith makes the promises of God to be real, to have substance...

The Bible Exposition Commentary says this:

“True Bible faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured ‘hope-so feeling.’” Faith is not an intellectual acceptance of a doctrine. It is certainly not believing in spite of the evidence! That would be superstition. True Bible faith is confident obedience to God’s word in spite of circumstances and consequences.

Think about that last sentence again and let it soak into your mind and heart.

Faith operates quite simply: God speaks and we hear His word. We trust His word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be. The circumstances may appear to us to be impossible, and the consequences frightening and unknown, but we obey God’s Word just the same and believe that He will do what is right and what is best.<sup>2</sup>

The apostle Simon Peter was a man who struggled with his faith. Peter was a bold man, a man of impulse and action; yet he was also a man of conflicts and self-doubts. He is not lazy either; for when the gospel narrative about him opens, he is working. Peter and his brother Andrew were casting a net into the sea when Jesus saw them. “Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men,” Jesus said to them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:1, NASB.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Heb 11:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 4:18-19; Mark 1:16-17.

**Peter meets Jesus (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11; John 1:40)**

It must have been before Jesus met them at the Sea of Galilee that Peter's brother, Andrew, came to him. Andrew was enthusiastic. "We have found the Messiah," he told Peter.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus likely was nearby, for Andrew took Peter to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which translated means Peter).<sup>5</sup>

Peter did not believe as readily as his brother. He needed more convincing. Peter had practical matters to which he must attend. He must fish. So, after he met Jesus, he returned to Galilee with his brother, Andrew, and resumed fishing with his partners, the Sons of Zebedee.<sup>6</sup> There is a gap in the gospel record between Peter's first meeting with Christ and when next we meet him, but it is clear that Peter became a follower of Christ, for we read in Luke's gospel that he referred to Jesus as "Master."<sup>7</sup>

Peter lived with his wife in the city of Capernaum. Capernaum stood on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, which in Simon's day was also known as the Sea of Tiberius. Peter and his brother fished the Sea of Galilee for their living. On this morning Peter and his partners, tired and grumpy, returned to Capernaum from a night of fishing. Their nets were wet but the hold of their boat was empty. Their mood must have been that of fishermen who had fished all night, and had not got so much as a bite.

They drew up to the shore, moored the boat and began to clean the nets.

On the way in, Peter had seen the Teacher from Nazareth, talking to a crowd. And as he stood cleaning the nets, he looked up and saw Jesus coming. Jesus got into Peter's boat and asked Peter to put out a little from the land. Then Jesus began teaching the crowd from the boat. After He had finished teaching the people who had gathered, Jesus spoke to Peter.

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<sup>4</sup> John 1:41.

<sup>5</sup> John 1:42.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 5:10.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 5:5.

For Jesus said, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."<sup>8</sup>

The word of the Lord seldom comes under what we would consider the most favorable circumstances. In Peter's estimation these were not promising conditions. Peter thought the best opportunity for fishing was past. Besides, it's hard work to fish all night and then clean the nets—doing it twice in one day is hardly what Peter wanted.<sup>9</sup> So, Peter, showing his doubts, answered, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing—but at your bidding I'll let down the nets." It is as if Peter said, "If you say so, Lord, I'll do it. But this is on You. I don't think there's a fish within a mile, but if you insist, I'll go."

At this point Peter had little faith in Jesus. He seriously doubted that they would catch any fish, but if Jesus really was a prophet it might be worth a try. If they fail it only means that they have to clean the nets again.

Peter and his brothers, with half-hearted enthusiasm, rowed their boat back to the middle of the lake. For a second time they spread the nets and watched them sink. Wasn't this a waste of time—to bring the men back out on the lake when the sun was getting hot, and when he knew the fish had long since gone?

But something happened. The nets began to get heavy. There were fish in them! So heavy were they that the weight of the catch nearly broke the nets. There were so many fish that they called to the other boat to come and help them. Their partners came, and still the quantity of fish was great enough to fill both boats. To their dismay they discovered that the boats were laden with so many fish that they began to sink.

Can you imagine such a quantity of fish in the lake where, before, there had been none? Peter thought there were no fish to catch, but this time the Lord provided the fish. The circumstances looked impossible, but the outcome was extraordinary.

When they had brought the catch to shore, Peter, forever the impulsive, the first to speak, the first to act, fell down at Jesus's feet and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 5:4.

<sup>9</sup> **Toiled** (κοπιᾶσαντες). From κόπος, *suffering, weariness*; and therefore indicating *exhausting* toil.

The Scripture says that Peter and his fellow fishermen, Andrew, James and John, had been seized with amazement.

But Jesus said, "Don't be afraid; come with me; I'll make you fishers of men."

So they left everything, and followed him. And who wouldn't?

Peter's faith before the incident with the fish was just barely enough to believe that Jesus knew where the fish were. He obeyed the word of the Lord in spite of the circumstances. After that his faith grew stronger. Now his faith—his confident trust—grew strong enough to leave everything and follow Jesus. But there was more growth in store for Peter.

### **Peter follows Jesus (walks on water - Matt. 14:22-36)**

The multitudes following Jesus had grown larger. The teacher was attracting the attention of the authorities, namely Caiaphas the high priest, and Pilate the Roman governor, and Herod. A day came when Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish.<sup>10</sup> After that, Jesus sent the multitude away. Then Peter, with the rest of the disciples, obeyed the Lord, got into a boat and went ahead of him to the other side of the lake.

Out on the lake, the wind became contrary. It began to batter the ship. Waves with white caps rose and tossed the ship. Yet, it is doubtful that Peter would have been much concerned about a little wind, or a few waves. He was after all—a fisherman. But he must have wondered where his Lord had gone. Truth was Jesus had gone up into the mountains to pray.

Night fell on the lake, and the wind and the waves pounded on the boat of disciples. It was a poor night to be out on the lake and with the wind and the spray and the tossing of the boat and perhaps worse, wondering where Jesus was it was uncomfortable. As Peter watched the waves over the gunwale, during the fourth watch of the night (3-6 a.m.), he was astonished to see the Lord coming toward them, walking on the sea.

"It is a ghost!" someone cried.

But Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 14:13-21.

But now Peter the impetuous, filled with wonder, said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

One would think from reading the narrative in the Scriptures that Peter was attempting to put the Lord to the test. If that was the case then the circumstances turned quickly and revealed yet another purpose. The result of his rash statement was not to try the Lord, but to put his own faith to the test, for the Lord answered, "Come!"

Now you've done it, Peter! At that instant Peter might have wished he had not spoken so rashly. Maybe he had not expected that reply from the Lord. Perhaps he wished he could withdraw his request. Could he do this, or not? What was he to do? The Lord was there, and he had asked, and everybody was watching. He could have asked himself at that instant, "How much faith **do** you have Peter?"

And indeed the Lord was asking just that very question.

In these circumstances Peter is in the throes of conflict. He sees the tossing waves; he feels the wind and the spray in his face; his fisherman's mind tells him the utter impossibility of a man walking on water; yet, there is the Lord, standing among the waves, beckoning to him to come.

Do you have the faith, Peter? What if you are wrong? Your emotions want to do this. But can you bend your mind around it? Can you believe?

He got out of the boat, and he put his foot down amid the waves, and he felt support where he had never felt support before in his life. So he was filled with an exhilaration no man had ever felt. He walked on the water toward Jesus.

But then a lifetime of fishing those waters, of seeing the waves rising around him, of feeling the wind buffeting his body, and feeling the spray in his face he began to think as would we that no man walks on water. So, as these thoughts and feelings assailed him he became afraid.

He began to sink.

Then, in the midst of the stormy sea, which for any man who has ever lived could be life itself, he uttered that plaintive cry that comes down to us through two thousand years of human misery, "Lord, save me!"

"And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"

Then Jesus led him into the boat.

When they had entered the boat, the wind stopped. Those in the boat worshipped Jesus, saying, "Truly you are God's son."

We are tempted when we read this story to criticize Peter for his lack of faith, but I think we must temper our criticism with this thought: Peter actually walked on the water. Could I, under those same circumstances? And when the Lord took him by the hand he walked on the water back to the boat. Surely, in the end, Peter accomplished with the Lord's help what we might see as impossible.

A lesson we can take away from this incident is that faith involves not just the emotions of a readiness to believe; that is, the desire to believe, but believing in a way that you are motivated to obey despite the circumstances.

But that's not all. Peter had more to learn.

### **The confession (Matthew 16:13-20)**

Still impulsive and temperamental, Peter followed Jesus throughout Galilee. The pressures from the Pharisees mounted with each passing day. Peter's faith must have been straining at its moorings; yet, Peter being impulsive was also whole-hearted and courageous. Within the apostle surged a conflict of emotions, a battle between doubt and belief, a struggle between a fisherman's ignorance and moments of incredible insight.

Peter followed Jesus into the district of Caesarea Philippi, the rolling land lying on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon. Peter's faith spoke when the Lord addressed the question to the disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

The disciples said, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you Simon Barjonas, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

“And I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Here, Peter’s faith shows in his sudden, outspoken confession. But that leads to another lesson about faith and presumption.

When it appeared Peter's faith had reached unto heaven itself, when he had attained unto the distinction of that noble confession, he slipped. The Lord continued talking to the disciples. Peter listened in evident dismay while Jesus said he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Evidently disturbed by what he had heard Jesus say, Peter took the Lord aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to you."

With these remarks, Peter's presumptuous spirit plumbed the depths of Hades. True Biblical faith trusts in the Lord’s word regardless of the circumstances or of the outcome. Jesus had blessed him for his confession, but now he dares even to rebuke the Lord for what He had just said.

And the Lord turned on him. "Get behind me Satan!" the Lord told him. "You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Our own opinions—no matter how strongly held—can be obstacles to faith. Our opinions can bring us into direct conflict with the will and word of God. We might even think that our opinion is for the greater good, but if what we want or what we understand to be the right way is not God’s way then we rightly expose ourselves to a Divine rebuke that is justly deserved.

#### **The transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-4)**

Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. “And he was transfigured before them; and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as light. “And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him.

“And Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'

"While he was speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear him.'

"And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid.

"And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, 'Arise and do not be afraid.'

"And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus himself alone."

Peter found himself in the presence of glorious persons, and he was motivated to be especially deferential, but it does not matter in what circumstances we might find ourselves. Listen to Jesus alone. Have confident trust in Him. Faith trusts in the word of the Lord, not others.

There is the story of a missionary whose name was John Paton. When he was translating the Scripture for the South Sea Islanders, he found that there was no word in their vocabulary for "believe," "trust," or "have faith." He had no idea how he would convey this principle to them, since they had no word for it. One day, as he was translating, a native came running up to his house. He ran up the stairs, in the door and flopped himself in a chair in Paton's study. Then he said to Paton,

"It's so good to rest my whole weight in this chair."

The word in the native's language which we translate "...resting one's whole weight upon..." became the word Paton used for "faith."

Paton's definition of "faith": was "...resting your whole weight on God."

The lesson of the Transfiguration is: rest your whole weight on Jesus.

### **The barren fig tree (Mk. 11:20-25)**

The Scripture tells us that as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. And being reminded, Peter said to him, "Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which you cursed has withered."

And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen; it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe



that you have received them, and they shall be granted you. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions."

In these incidents Peter, and the others, received two important lessons to strengthen their faith. They were told by the Transfiguration to put their trust in Jesus, and in Him only; not in Elijah; not in Moses; but in Jesus.

The fig tree had no fruit on it when the Lord came to it expecting to find fruit. Therefore he caused it never to bear fruit again. What is the lesson there? Fruit is borne through simple trusting faith in Jesus, as Lord. Further, great works can be accomplished by simple faith.

### **Peter's denial foretold (Matt. 26:31-35)**

After the last supper, Jesus led his disciples out to the Mount of Olives.

There Jesus told them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

But Peter, always so sure of his own motives and feelings, said, "Even though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away."

Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times."

But Peter would not believe it. He said, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." All the disciples said the same thing.

The lesson here is that faith is confident assurance. It is never stubbornness.

### **Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:40-46)**

Peter should have remembered the lesson of the barren fig tree, but he apparently did not. Peter felt tired, so did the other disciples. So tired that when the Lord took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him to pray Peter couldn't keep his eyes open. He went to sleep.

The Lord woke him some time later, saying, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

No doubt Peter saw the concern and suffering in the Lord's face. But his eyes were so heavy. He felt so sleepy, he just couldn't stay awake.

The Lord woke him again, saying, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold the hour is at hand and the son of man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold the one who betrays me is at hand."

And while Jesus was speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up, accompanied by a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Peter watched as Judas approached Jesus and kissed him, and said, "Hail, Rabbi."

Jesus said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Peter, seeing the guards about to seize Jesus, stood up in anger, and faced the mob, including the Roman guards. He drew his sword. Then, when Malchus, the servant of the high priest, came within range, Peter struck at his head. The blow was poorly aimed, but still cut off his right ear.

Jesus said, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." And he touched the ear of Malchus, and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against him, "Have you come out with swords and staves as against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."

So they arrested him, and Peter watched them lead the Lord away.

Then all the disciples fled, leaving the Lord to the mercy of the priests and Romans. Faith was on the run.

### **Peter denies Jesus (John 18:15-18)**

We don't know what thoughts coursed through Peter's mind as he followed the mob. They were taking away his Lord, and he did not understand why. But we know that he had used his sword to strike off the ear of Malchus and that in defense of his Lord, but instead of pleasing Jesus, Peter had endured a stinging rebuke again. What was happening? Should he feel resentment for the Lord's latest

rebuke? Could he allay his doubts about the Lord's intentions now that Jesus had allowed himself to be arrested?

What was he to believe?

Yet, hope had not died in Peter's heart, for he followed the mob at a distance. And with him went another disciple. The disciple who went with Peter was known to the high priest, so he gained entrance to the court of the high priest, and he left Peter outside.

Once inside, the other disciple spoke to the slave girl who was keeping the door, vouched for Peter and got him in. But as Peter went in, the slave girl asked him, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?"

And Peter said, "I am not."

The slaves and the officers stood in the court, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves.

Peter went over and stood with them, and warmed himself.

But another slave girl saw him standing in the firelight, and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

And Peter answered, "Woman, I don't know him."

A little later, one of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with him? Certainly this man was with him, for he is a Galilean, too."

Peter's fear, anger and resentment boiled over.

He began to curse and to swear. "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!"

And immediately, while he was speaking, Peter heard the cock crow. The Lord, who was standing nearby, turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told him—before a cock crows today, you will deny me three times.

In this moment Peter understood that faith requires steadfastness in loyalty because the Lord had been clear in his word of prophecy. Peter first denied the word and then he denied the Lord.

So Peter went out and wept his bitter tears of regret and remorse.

It was not much later that the day's incredible events culminated in a crucifixion, a disastrous turn of events that left Peter shattered and empty. They buried Jesus in a tomb not far from where He had been crucified. But then on the day after the Sabbath Mary Magdalene came saying that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb.

Peter and John ran to the tomb to see, and it was as Mary had said. Jesus was not there.

John 20:9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes. <sup>11</sup>

Puzzled because of the events, and still not understanding what Jesus had told them, Peter and the other disciples returned to Galilee. Peter, probably feeling the sting of the Lord's departure the most, said, "I'm going fishing."<sup>12</sup>

The other disciples said, "We'll come with you."

So they went out, got in their boats and fished all night, but caught nothing. But at daybreak they saw a man standing on the shore. The man said, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?"

They answered, "No."

He said, "Cast the net on the right hand side of the boat, and you will find another catch."

So they made a catch. And they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

John said to Peter, "It is the Lord."

When Peter heard what John said, he put his outer garment on and jumped into the sea. Undoubtedly he swam to shore to see the Lord.

When all of them got to shore they found a charcoal fire already laid. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."

So Jesus cooked their breakfast.

Then Jesus asked Peter three times, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

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<sup>11</sup> *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Jn 20:9–10). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>12</sup> John 21:3.

Peter answered yes. The three affirmations correspond to his three denials. Perhaps there is some relation there. Then Jesus said to him,

"Truly, truly I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this he said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he said this, he said to Peter, "Follow me!"

And Peter followed. He was ready. He had been taken to school by the Master Teacher, and he had learned his lessons well. In this, Peter is like many of us. We must be taken to school. We must be taught hard lessons in order to see that faith is more than mere superficial acceptance of a doctrine, or "hope-so" feelings, or of habitual practice because it has been handed down through generations of family and community. True Bible faith reveals itself in confident obedience to God's word in spite of circumstances and consequences.

### **Conclusion**

Here then is the lesson of faith. We, as Peter, must learn what a trusting faith is. True faith arises from the heart, and it is a confident, trusting faith like Peter had after his trials. That is the kind of faith that saves.

In the Gospel of John we read,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16) That salvation was not cheaply bought, neither is it awarded to claimants with flimsy faith.

Finally, Peter, on the day of Pentecost, took his stand with the eleven, and raised his voice and declared to the people of Jerusalem that the Jesus they had crucified was both Lord and Christ.

Acts 2:38 and Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself."