

Simon, or ... Peter?

Among the 12 disciples, Jesus chose Simon Peter to be the clear example for us, in the gospel accounts, of how he takes a man from his natural earthly roots, to bring him to be ready for a new heavenly start. (What he calls 'a birth from above' in His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3). So every reference to Simon Peter is the next step in the conversation. Read the passages as you go (not afterwards!).

They meet first (in John 1v42,43) through Simon's brother Andrew. Jesus has a direct line straight to Simon's inner state. 'You ARE Simon. But You WILL be Peter!' (Petros is the Greek word for a rock)

Surely Simon the fisherman was proud of his Jewish name and family. It's all the life he knew. But that is our problem too, and Jesus wants to take us *with Him*, so we need to change too! I wonder what Simon thought of their first encounter?

Next reference to their meeting is from Luke (5v4-8). Jesus has borrowed his boat as a preaching platform (!), and then embarrasses Simon publicly by suggesting how he should do his job! I fancy Simon was taken aback at the amateur's suggestion, but to his credit he stays cool and does what this strange but authoritative carpenter requests.

Simon's in control, as usual, until he realises that the carpenter is TOTALLY in charge of fish, boat, Simon, and everything else! He's shocked. This man knows me inside out. 'Leave me alone', he says. 'I'm just a sinful guy.'

Jesus doesn't disagree, but he doesn't press him. He hasn't come to condemn, but he wants Simon to become honest about himself. That's the start for us all. But He 's looking forward to the day when the new Peter will be more interested in reaching out to other people – He calls it 'people fishing' to calm the flustered Simon- than making a living.

Matthew is the next writer (16v15-17). Jesus wants Simon to make the clear confession of the truth about Himself that he's already begun to believe. For Peter's sake! 'Who am I', asks Jesus. 'You're God's Christ', blurts out Simon.

'You didn't get that from *your* background, son of Jonah.' says Jesus. Not from smart old Jonah, but 'from MY Father'. Keep listening to Him, and you'll be a blessed man, Peter!

But Peter quickly reverts to streetwise Simon in v21,22. He can't keep up with Jesus talking about His death, in his mind, so he says, 'No Lord – not that - *look after yourself!*' Like Simon had learned to, in a harsh world. Now Simon is listening to the darkness which prompts all human thinking,

and Jesus has to tell him, so he knows the difference. 'It's the devil,' and we need to know it! The preservation of self is the PROBLEM, not the solution. Read verse24:

'DENY your SELF, take up your 'cross' (like Jesus had already received His from His Father) and FOLLOW ME.

Another public heart-conversation! Simon is going a road he has never met before.

Jesus wants His disciples to know that they're not going to be proud leaders of the new mission to the world, but its humble servants. His own death is only hours away when he takes a towel in John 13, and washes their feet. He comes to shocked Simon/Peter (v5-8) who has very different ideas about this new kingdom. 'No way' he says. 'Not now, not ever!' Jesus gently reminds him who he's 'listening' to - 'you don't understand *now* (Simon)..... but you *will* afterwards (Peter)'.

The same day Jesus tells them about his death, again (John 13v36-38). Again Simon challenges Him. Again Jesus gently reminds him 'who' is really talking ':

'You CAN'T FOLLOW Me now (Simon), but YOU WILL LATER (Peter)!'
That's a promise!

Simon persists, as 'Simon/self' always does! 'Oh yes I will!'

And then the eternal truth which we must all acknowledge if we're to get anywhere on the way with Jesus :

(If you won't deny your SELF, Simon...), 'you'll deny ME!'

And in the end, that's the eternal choice we all have to make. It's us.....or Him. Either my own way of doing things will survive, and I'll have to deny Him.

Or I refuse that way, and take the death of my-self, and the LIFE He is offering me as a free gift, and I just.....FOLLOW HIM.

We know what Simon chose that night that he 'followed' out of his own strength (John 18v15-27), and the awful result, and the pain of that knowing look from Jesus as they parted.(Luke22v61)

Was that the last chance? Simon was sure it was! He knew the problem now with devastating clarity. But it was hopeless. He'd always be a loser, because the one who'd shown him hope, had gone.

The cross, God's miraculous solution to the human self, followed. Jesus, God-become-representative-Man, takes all the moral consequence of self-raised-up-against-God, on Himself. He had laid down all His own rights as the Son of God, to do it. (That's why He has the right to tell me to lay down mine, or to 'take up my cross')

Of course I'll have to deny to that same SELF whose punishment He has carried, any further say in my life, if I'm to follow Him. But wouldn't it be stupid not to?

Ask Simon! He would, if he got another chance. But surely...it's too late.....?

Simon had forgotten that Jesus had talked about His resurrection, while Simon had been busy arguing about His death! So when it happens, Peter doesn't know what to believe. And then he sees Him, so he knows it's all true, but feels that it's fine for the others, but not for failure-men like him! So Jesus gently arranges a meeting, after Simon has gone back to what Simon does best. (And worst!) Fishing! (John 20) Another fruitless night. Another cryptic command from the stranger. And Simon is right back in the place where he knows...that Jesus knows...everything. And then the honest response to Jesus's painful question –

'Do you LOVE Me'?

'Lord – I can only say- I like you' says Simon, brokenly. (You need to see the 2 different Greek words, *Agapeo*, and *Phileo* in the original to understand the conversation) Better an honest 'No', than a self propelled 'Yes'!

Simon needs the LIFE that can LOVE, and when the Holy Spirit is given a few weeks later, he WILL! (Acts chapter 2) And so will we, if we stand with him in honesty, and believe in the Man whose Spirit can change EVERYTHING.

And Jesus is looking ahead, as always. 'Feed my lambs', He says to the Peter who will lay down his life for the church which is to grow under his leadership. He's breathing faith into this broken man. He is building on a firm foundation, which He Himself has laid. He never leaves that job to anyone else!

So Peter can write (1 Peter 5:6) from a lifetime of FOLLOWING:

'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God (and he'd felt its weight!), so that in due time HE will lift you up!' Death always precedes resurrection for mankind, for we have a self that's got to GO! And in v 10: 'And after you've 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'!

And did the tough fisherman become a tender shepherd? Yes sir – try verses 1-5! What a transformation!

Now what more could anyone even dream of?