

# THE PETER STORIES

TALES FROM THE LIFE OF  
AN EARLY FOLLOWER OF JESUS



The Karez Project Library  
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# THE PETER STORIES

## A FISHER OF MEN

**T**he sparrow called out to his friend, “Look at me. I can fly better than the eagle,” as it flew into the fowler’s net.

We often think well of our own abilities. We may think that we know our job better than anyone else. But, there was once a carpenter who showed a fisherman how to fish. And that fisherman was never the same.

Peter was that fisherman. He knew very well how to fish. He was good at his livelihood. He knew *where* to find fish in the lake and he knew *when* to find fish in the lake. But one day someone else told him where and when to fish. That was a day he would never forget.

After a full night on the water, Peter and his friends returned to the shore without any fish. Discouraged from the hard night’s fruitless toil, they set about cleaning their nets.

It was then that the teacher came to the shoreline, followed by hundreds of eager and curious listeners. The crowds left no room for Master Jesus to stand, so he asked Peter if he might sit in his boat in order to address the multitude.

The boat bore the teacher for his lessons when it had failed to bear the fisherman to his fish.

Peter agreed to allow the master a place on his boat. When the master finished his lessons to the crowd, he turned to give a lesson to the fishermen. “Cast your nets in the deep water,” Jesus commanded.

“We have fished in vain all night, Master. But, at your command I will do as you wish.”

Obedying the Master Carpenter, for that was Jesus’ profession, proved favorable for the fisherman. Such a great quantity of fish were drawn in the nets that they began to break.

The tools of the fisherman were strained by the success God granted.

Peter called for another boat to help bring in the catch. As they filled both boats with numerous fish, the boats themselves began to sink, and with them so sank the heart of Peter.

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,” Peter said as he looked with new eyes at the Master Teacher.

Not only had Peter made room for Jesus on his boat Jesus that day. He also had made room for Jesus in his heart. It was then that the light of Jesus’ purity exposed the darkness of sin in Peter’s heart.

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But Jesus would not depart from Peter. No, he had come to call Peter to himself. Jesus knew that Peter belonged with him.

“Don’t be afraid,” was the Master’s reply. “From now on you’ll be fishing for men.”

With those words of comfort and encouragement, Jesus showed something to Peter that he never had known before. Jesus saw a leader in the rugged fisherman. Jesus also saw a future time when Peter would lead the church. But that time would come much later. First, Peter had many more lessons to learn.

When the boats were finally on shore, Peter and his friends left the boats, and the nets, and the fish. It really was Jesus who had caught those fish that day. Jesus proved to be the better fisherman than Peter and his friends, and now Peter was caught in Jesus’ net never to be free again.

When the nets were breaking and the boat was sinking the fisherman found out who he really was.



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## WALKING ON WATER

The young chapandaz<sup>1</sup> picked himself up from the dust as his stallion raced riderless for home. “Some fine horseman you are,” his friends cried out between peals of laughter. “Laugh at yourselves. At least I got up on the beast. Life is always easier from the sidelines,” the youth called back as he chased after his horse, and his dream.

On one fateful night, Peter discovered the limits of his bravery. It was there at the boundaries of his courage that he discovered that he could only master the waves of doubt by calling out to the Master of the waves.

From a lonely shoreline along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus sent his disciples across the water while he stayed behind on land in solitude and prayer. There were able fishermen among Jesus’ twelve disciples on that night journey across the water. Certainly they would be able to guide the boat to the opposite shore.

But the wind and the waves were set against the progress of the tiny boat. As the waves pounded the boat’s sides, fear of ever reaching dry land overwhelmed the disciples’ hearts.

Then they saw him. Out on the sea amidst all the waves the moonlight revealed the figure of a man walking on the water. Their fear of the waves was exchanged for a fear that gripped them by the throat, for they were sure they were in the presence of a ghost.

But it was no ghost approaching them. Across the sea the familiar voice of Jesus called out to them above the roar of wind and waves: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

Fear melted from their hearts as the warm sound of their Master’s voice penetrated the storm.

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

Only the stout in heart test the limits of faith. Most of us are content to stay in the boat, to stay within the boundaries of our comfortable faith. Few are willing to step out onto the water. Peter was one of the willing ones, but only at his Master’s request.

"Come," Jesus called to him.

Peter had answered the call of Jesus before. He had left his vocation to become a fisher of men. Now at his bidding Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. Peter’s faith enabled him to walk on water as though it were land when his eyes were set upon Jesus.

But no sooner was he on the water when, with the waves crashing against him, doubt cast

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<sup>1</sup> The horseman in the Afghan game of buzkashi.

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him into the raging torrent. Peter lost sight of Jesus at the sight of the waves and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Called to follow Jesus among the waves, though his faith faltered, Peter rose from sinking by calling out to Jesus and taking hold of the One who called him.

Held by Jesus' strong arms, the Master and student climbed into the boat. Once onboard the wind died down. What storm can abide when our Lord is by our side?

Worship was the response of the disciples. "Truly you are the Son of God," was their confession. Worship and confession are also on the lips of all who, like Peter, know the grasp of the Master's loving grip amidst the crashing waves of doubt.



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### BEHOLDING THE CROSS AND THE GLORY

**A** boy came home from school dejected and said to his mother, “My teacher says I must learn to control my tongue. He says I talk way too much.” “I am not surprised,” his mother replied. “You know, God gave us two ears and only one mouth. That’s so that we will listen twice as much as we speak.”

Peter was like this boy sometimes. He was always eager to speak his mind. However, there was a time when he learned that when God has something to say and it is our job to pay attention.

Two questions for his disciples; Jesus had two questions. The answer to the first question required them to have been listening to the people around them. The answer to the second question required them to be listening to God.

Traveling with his disciples one day far away from the crowds, he asked them, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They had heard what the people were saying. The disciples knew right away the answer to their masters’ question. “Some say John the Baptist,” they replied. “Others say Elijah and still others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

It is easy to report what others think, but harder sometimes to know what we ourselves think.

“But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Turning their thoughts inward, they each had to ponder the question that all who hear the good news of the life and work of Jesus must ponder. Peter, always eager to speak his mind, confessed the truth by listening to God.

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Peter answered.

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”

The Christ, there before them was the Christ. He was the one spoken of by the prophets. He was the hope of the nation. Their long awaited Christ had come. This was good news.

But Jesus told them not to declare this good news just yet. In the light of this good news he had some other terrible news. From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

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Peter, always eager to speak his mind, was rebuked for listening to Satan. Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

When confronted by wind and waves, Peter had learned the boundaries of his faith. Now confronted by his master, Peter learned the boundaries of his knowledge. He had listened to God and discovered who Jesus was. He had listened to Satan and rejected what Jesus must do.

About eight days later, Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.

As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two prophets of God, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. Sleeping in the sight of glory they nearly missed a wondrous sight.

As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Peter, always eager to speak his mind, did not know what he was saying.

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”

The disciples may have missed hearing God speak to their hearts. They could never miss hearing God speak from the cloud. They fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don't be afraid.”

When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus again told them to not yet declare the wonderful things that had seen and heard. “Don't tell anyone what you have seen,” he said, “until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

They listened to their master. They never forgot what they had seen and heard from God. And after Jesus had been raised, they were always eager to speak of this good news.



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## SERVANT OF ALL

**W**hen does the lion stoop to serve the mouse? When does the king stoop to serve the beggar? When they learn the secret known only to the truly wise.

Confident of who he was, the greater served the lesser, Jesus served his apostles. It was then that Peter learned how great his master was and discovered a road to greatness rarely traveled on.

The meal should have been a delightful celebration. But a sense of foreboding troubled every heart. Around the table were his closest students. Yet in a few hours, Jesus would be arrested and betrayed by one of those sitting at that table.

Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. He loved his disciples and he now showed them just how deep his love ran.

During the meal Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples feet, drying them with the towel.

The greatest among them became the least thereby revealing the secret path to true greatness.

He came to Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Confident of who he was, the lesser would not be served.

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

When he did not understand Jesus' conduct, Peter sought his master's honor. But, when he came to understand Jesus' conduct, Peter embraced his master's service. Confident of who Jesus was, Peter grasped for all he could get.

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean."

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. The lesson first demonstrated was now made sure.

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“Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

Confident of who his disciples were, he knew that would follow him on this servant road to true greatness.



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## THE TEST

“I’ll never leave your side,” the confident soldier told his commander before the battle began. “Never say never,” the commander thought to himself as he fought the battle alone.

Peter, quick to confess undying loyalty, was all too quick to deny his master. All we, who like him would seek to be loyal, must wait for the battle’s end to know what we’re made of.

At their last meal together, Jesus dismissed the betrayer Judas to go about his dark business. He turned to the remaining eleven and, speaking of his soon departure from them, encouraged them with these words.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Peter was confused. “Lord, where are you going?” he asked.

“Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

“Lord, why can’t I follow you now?” Peter replied. “I will lay down my life for you.”

“Will you really lay down your life for me?” Jesus asked. “I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”

“I’ll never leave your side,” confident Peter proclaimed.

“But, you will, Peter,” was his master’s painful reply. Peter’s test was foretold and so was his result. “But when your faith returns,” Jesus continued, “go to your brothers and strengthen them.”

With these thoughts on their minds, they left their meal to walk through the night air to a quiet garden, the garden of the olive press. And just as oil is drawn like blood from the olive’s pressing, so too was Jesus pressed in that garden. The pressure of the cross before him led to anguished prayers to his Father in heaven.

There in the garden of the olive press confident Peter slept alongside the other disciples. There in the garden of tears his master wept with no friend to comfort. There in the garden of prayer Jesus passed his test just as Peter’s test was about to begin.

The soldiers, the torches, the mob, the swords were all too hard to take in when waking from slumber. Their master taken away bound, the disciples fled into the darkness with only two to follow Jesus from a safe distance. Peter was one of those two. Fear mingled with unbelief. How could this happen? What will become of him? What

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will become of us?

Keeping watch at the door of the house they took Jesus to, a girl posed the first fateful question to Peter.

“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”

“I am not,” confident Peter replied.

It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. It was there that the second fateful question was asked.

“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”

“I am not,” he denied, he lied.

One of the high priest's servants challenged him, “Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?”

For the third time Peter denied knowing his master and immediately a rooster crowed.

There by the fire on that cold dark night confident Peter forgot his promise. There by the fire on that cold dark night the disciple failed his test. There by the fire on that cold dark night a rooster had the last word.

Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And so he left the courtyard and wept bitterly.

The early followers of Jesus said that from that day onward whenever Peter heard a rooster crow, he broke down into tears. We don't know if that was true. But we do know that this test was not the last one for Peter. The story was not over. In fact, it was only just beginning, and Peter had a major part to play.



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## THE EMPTY TOMB

**T**he butterfly broke out of its paper-like tomb unfurling its wings in the bright sunlight. Earthbound before, it now soared into the fresh dawn of its new life.

Each day is new; is recreated by the Master of creation. Yet there was a day, like none before or after it, that dawned with new life, new hope, and a new future. Peter was witness to that new day, a day that would make him into a new man.

Sick with grief, with all hope lost, the disciples were numb from the constant nagging pain of the past few days. The promised One was dead, and with his death so died the their future. Peter would go back to Galilee, back to his boats and his fishing.

Then a commotion at the door, the women returned from their early morning trip to the tomb. Grief and confusion were compounded by Mary's words. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Without a word, Peter and John ran for the tomb. Younger and more fit than Peter, John ran on ahead and arrived first on the scene. He peered into the tomb. It was just as Mary had said. The stone was rolled away and John could see the strips of cloth that had been used to wrap his master lifeless form. The cloths remained, the tomb was intact, but both were empty.

When Peter arrived he went past his young friend into the open tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

What could it mean? Who would have taken the body? Was it as he had said? Had he risen?

Finally John also went inside. He too saw the cloths and at that moment believed that Jesus was risen from the dead.

But, where was he? If had really risen from the dead, why did he not reveal himself?

Later that day Mary told them that she had seen the Lord. But, why her and not Peter? If Jesus was really risen from the dead, why was she the first to see him?

Then two disciples came in from Emmaus. They told an incredible story. While walking along the road a man had joined them and spoken with them all the way to their home. He taught them from the Law and the Prophets how the chosen One would be killed but would rise again. They asked him to stay with them for he a meal. And when he broke the bread with them they suddenly realized that they had been speaking to Jesus. They don't know why they did not realize this before. And at that very moment he vanished from their sight.

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Now two others had seen him. First a woman, then two lesser disciples, not any of the eleven remaining apostles had seen the risen Lord. It was as if the last had become first.

But Peter once had been first. Yes, he had been first in denying that he even knew Jesus. What now, would he be the last to see him? Would his denial mean that he would never see him?

It was now evening on that wonderful and bewildering day. Afraid of the authorities the doors had been locked. But in a moment, Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

It was true! Jesus was alive! It was not a ghost or the figment of their imagination. He was real. To prove it he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Jesus was sending them to be fishers of men. It was not over. Peter still had a future and a hope.

And then Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven."

Forgiven! Could Peter be forgiven? Could he be given a second chance?



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## RENEWAL ON THE SEASHORE

**T**he friend most wounded and wronged spoke first. “We have been best friends from our youth, you and I. Can we not leave our differences behind?” Like soiled clothes bleached white by the sun, so a true friendship is lived in the light of day.

When our journey has been down a dishonorable path, our way home can be hard to find. Peter found the road home a hard path to take, but God’s grace showed him the way. And when he had found his way back home, he could now turn and encourage others.

The early morning light sparkled on the water. Not far out on the lake, Peter and his friends were weary from a fruitless night of fishing when a man called out to them from the shore. “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they called back.

“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some,” came the reply.

Once before Peter had been told to cast his nets down again after drawing them up empty. So, they did as the stranger requested and to their amazement there were so many fish they could not pull their net into the boat.

John looked to the man on the shore again. He was no stranger. “It is the Lord,” he said.

As soon as Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

“Bring some of the fish you have just caught,” Jesus told them.

So, Peter climbed onto the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many fish caught in it the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” He took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

When they had finished eating, Jesus and Peter walked along the shore together. Finally his master said to him, “Do you truly love me more than these?”

Three times he had denied he knew his master. Three times he lost his way.

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“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Jesus said, “Peter, do you truly love me?”

Three times he had denied he knew his master. Three times he lost his way.

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Peter, do you love me?”

Three times he had denied he knew his master. Three times he lost his way.

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Three times he had denied he knew his master. Three times he lost his way. The third time he professed his love, Peter found his way home.

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus went on to say, “when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Three times he had denied his master, but nevermore. From this time forward he would proclaim his master, and his proclamation would cost him his life.

Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

Peter’s first call to follow Jesus cost him his livelihood. Peter second call to follow Jesus cost him his life.



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### BOLD BY GOD'S SPIRIT

A spark was all it took. The dry leaves burst into flame as though ignited by petrol. The fire would have died out if the wind had not been so strong. But it fanned the flames and now the fire seemed to have a will of its own. All eyes were fixed in wonder on the flame as its purifying work moved through the dead undergrowth preparing the ground so that new life might flourish.

The wind blows wherever it will. A fire fanned by an unseen wind can consume all in its path. Peter's life was ignited by the flame of God's Spirit, and the direction that fire took set the course of the rest of his life.

Their master was now gone. Jesus had returned to the Father in heaven. Encouraging them to be his witnesses, Jesus ascended into heaven before their very eyes. And his final instructions were for them to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of God's power. The disciples' simple lives had been interrupted by the coming of Jesus. Now their lives would be interrupted even more. About one hundred and twenty gathered in obedient prayer, expectant that God was about to move.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

At the same time many God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven were in Jerusalem for a religious holiday. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

When God takes hold of a soul, even a timid mouse can become a lion.

Emboldened by God's Spirit Peter spoke to the crowd. "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel when he said, 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.'"

Then Peter went on to explain to the crowd the mighty works that Jesus accomplished through his death on the cross. This same Peter who had denied his master three times, now stood before a multitude and proclaimed the mighty works of Jesus.

When Peter finally said, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ," the people were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

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Peter told them exactly what they must do. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Bold Peter had many other words he used to warn them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

This fisher of men made a catch well beyond any catch he had ever known before.

From that time on the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. Every day they continued to meet together. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The fire was spreading, and even today the same flame is ignited when God’s Spirit finds obedient hearts in the followers of Jesus.



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## SUFFERING FOR THE NAME

**I**n hot pursuit of his prey the lion said to the deer, “As your ruler I command you to stop running!” To which the deer replied, “As your intended dinner I must respectfully decline,” and he sped out of sight.

Is it always right to obey earthly authorities? Is the king always right?

Well regarded by the people, but disregarded by the leaders, the band of Jesus’ followers faced both the popularity, and the persecution, their master had faced before them. Because of their jealousy, the religious leaders rejected Jesus. Because of their jealousy the religious elites also rejected the fishermen from Galilee.

The followers of Jesus were doing nothing wrong so they met openly in the temple area. The apostles would gather at the temple and in clear view of all taught the truth about who Jesus was and what he had done on the cross.

What’s more, the same power for healing that was upon Jesus also was upon them. No small commotion had come about when Peter and John healed a man in the temple courtyard in the name of Jesus. But when the authorities banned them from mentioning the name of Jesus, Peter replied, “If it is right in God’s sight to listen to you or to listen to God, you must judge. However, we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

So, they continued to worship openly, and to speak of the name of Jesus. And in that name, many were healed, so much so that the sick were laid out along the roadside in order that Peter’s shadow might fall upon them and they be healed. This caused great joy and glory to God among the people and many new followers of Jesus joined the church.

But, what one finds to be a blessing, another finds to be a curse. So are the hearts of many revealed.

In response to their disobedience, Peter and the other apostles were put in prison by the religious authorities. If they would not be quiet, then a cold prison cell might silence them. But, during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

So they did as they were told. When the sun rose, it found the apostles in the temple courts teaching the people.

In the meantime, the religious authorities called a meeting of the full assembly of the elders of the land and then sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.”

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On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

Having brought the apostles into the meeting, the high priest began to question them. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.”

Bold Peter, who had denied his master, stood before the same group of men that had just weeks before condemned Jesus to death and said, “We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to our people. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But an elder named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the meeting and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: “Elders of the people, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The apostles left the meeting, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus. By God's grace, Peter and the others had passed the test. Bold by God's power they embraced persecution and received it as an honor.



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## CROSSING BOUNDARIES

**W**hen the black horse saw the zebra he called out to him, “Can we be friends? Well, maybe only half-way friends in honor of your black stripes.” The white horse heard this and replied, “Don’t forget, under those stripes he’s still all white like me.”

The eye sees first but does not perceive. The heart perceives and thus truly sees.

All his life Peter had believed that it was wrong for a Jew to eat with a non-Jew, what Jews called a Gentile. In his day, many Jews would pray a prayer of thanks that they had not been born a Gentile. But God’s grace and forgiveness in Jesus was not only intended for the Jews but for all people of the earth. And if that message were ever to reach the world, the early Jewish followers of Jesus would have to cross boundaries they had never crossed before.

There was a Roman commander, a centurion named Cornelius, living up the coast from where Peter was staying. He was a God-fearing man for he and his family worshipped the God of the Jews, the only true God. One day while he was praying, an angel from God came to him and said, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.” So Cornelius sent three of his men to find Peter and invite him to come to him and teach him and his family about the ways of God.

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching Joppa, Peter went up on the roof to pray. While he was praying he saw a vision where heaven opened and something like a large sheet was being let down to earth by its four corners. The sheet contained all kinds of animals that were unlawful for Jews to eat. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Peter was staying there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Peter, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

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The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.”

Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. Peter hosted those he would have despised only a few hours before because he now knew that God will not allow his children to call any person unclean.

The next day Peter and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied their new friends on their way back to Cornelius’ house. When they arrived, Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

When Peter and the brothers went inside and found a large gathering of people he said to them, “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

Cornelius answered, “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” With that, Peter went on to explain who Jesus was and what he has done for all mankind through his death on the cross.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

With the coming of the seal of God’s Holy Spirit on Gentile believers, a new way was made known to the Jewish followers of Jesus that day. Peter realized that while we judge people from the outside, God looks on a person’s heart. God truly sees.



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### ESCAPE FOR A SEASON

“**N**ot today,” cried the sparrow, as he escaped from the fowler’s net. “Not today,” called back the fowler, “but your final day will surely come.”

Peter twice was freed from prison. But each time, God freed him for His own purposes. Faithful Peter sought, and fulfilled, God’s purposes and thereby proved to be an example to us all of a soul captured by the love of God.

A great persecution of the followers of Jesus came upon Jerusalem by hand of King Herod. He arrested some of the believers, and had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter, putting him in prison to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each.

While Peter was in prison the believers were earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.”

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of Mark where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”

“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

But Peter kept on knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet. “Shh,” he said as he came inside. He then quickly told them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the brothers about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

Just as it was when Peter was in prison before, God had something for him to do. No

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prison cell could hold him back from God's will. So Peter's interrupted life, blown by the wind of God's will, led this fisher of men down an adventurous road in service to his master and Lord.

However, the time came when it was God's will for Peter to give his life in service to his master. Jesus had told him about this sacrifice that day on the seashore. He had told Peter that one day he would be led by someone else to his death, to a death that would glorify God.

The early believers told a story about Peter's death in far away Rome. We don't know if their story is true, but what is true from this story is that each one of us can choose to be faithful to God right up to the end. They say that during a great persecution of followers of Jesus, Peter was told to flee the city lest he be taken and tortured to death. As he slipped out of Rome unnoticed by the guards and onto the Apian Way, he saw a vision of his Lord Jesus walking slowly toward the city. "Lord, where are you going?" Peter asked. "I go to Rome to be crucified again in your stead," was the answer. Peter turned back and reentered Rome. And like his master, he too was crucified. The story is told that he asked to be crucified upside down for Peter did not count himself worthy of being crucified in the same manner as his Lord.

Far from the shore of the lake, where he thought that he would spend his all of his days, our brother Peter gave his life for his master. Far from his boat and his nets, our brother Peter fulfilled his master's call to be a fisher of men. Far from his home in Galilee, our brother Peter remained faithful to the end.

