

Disciples at a Distance

The Master Disciple Maker – Part III

Matthew 26

Introduction

I invite your attention to the gospel of Matthew as we focus on the work of Jesus, the Master Disciple Maker, in the lives of individual disciples. We will look at this gospel because it contains a sketchy, yet fascinating biography of Simon Peter.

At the mention of Simon Peter, everyone knows this is the disciple with whom they can identify. This identification is not because of what he did right, but because of what he did wrong.

Have you ever wondered why the Bible is filled with the failures of men and women? If there is proof that God is the author, this is probably one of the most convincing ones. We tend to gloss over the faults, the failures, the sins of our fellowmen, but God exposes it all. God does not do it because He particularly enjoys hanging out the dirty laundry of the saints. He does it so we will be aware, take note, learn, and be cautioned and will not fall into the same pit.

Two Qualities that Made Peter an Exceptional Disciple

Now before we dissect the details of Peter's failure, we should at least look at a couple of nice things about him. It is not that we are going to say mean things about him today, but in looking at his life, we often tend to overlook all that made Peter an exceptional disciple. To do justice, we should spend more than one session on his life, but let me give at least two qualities that I have observed in Peter, while studying his biography.

1. First, Peter was always hungry to learn.

Peter was the disciple who asked more questions, as recorded in scripture, than any other disciple. In fact, he asked more questions than all of the other disciples combined. Peter had an insatiable hunger to learn and asked the most questions.

It was Peter who asked the question about the fig tree that withered. Peter was also the one who asked the question related to taxes. It was Peter, as well, who asked the question concerning the number of times he should forgive. Peter also asked questions of the risen Christ. He was always asking questions.

We have the misconception, I fear, that a disciple, or one who walks with God, will have all the answers. We should realize that someone who walks with God may simply ask more questions.

Peter was a man who was always hungry to learn.

2. Secondly, Peter was always involved.

This, as you may remember, got Peter into trouble many times. He was always the one out front. God taught, through Christ, lessons on faith that Peter said, "I'll put this to use."

You may remember that when Jesus walked toward the boat on the water, Peter clambered over the side and started heading for Jesus. So often we criticize Peter for the fact that he sank because of his lack of faith, but the other disciples never even got out of the boat.

This was the man who, because of his involvement, often said the wrong thing. I had one professor in seminary, by the name of Howard

Hendricks, who said the thing that fascinated him about Peter was that this man had the original hoof and mouth disease. He was the man who could open his mouth, put both feet in and then, wonder why he could not walk.

This was Peter. He was an exceptional disciple, yet he was so interested, so insatiably desirous of getting involved with what he was learning that he often got into trouble.

Four Steps that Separated Peter from Christ

Now there is a succession of events in Peter's life that brought him to disaster. We will look today, at four steps that separated Peter from Christ. I believe we will all fall in at least one of these areas, so let us take note. Please turn to Matthew chapter 26.

1. The first step is that Peter disagreed with the word of the Lord.

Look at Matthew 26:30-33. Underline the word "all" in verse 30.

After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to 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 said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."

This is the failure of misplaced confidence.

The problem is not that Peter did not know who Jesus was. In fact, turn back a few chapters in this gospel to discover that it is Peter who is given the grace of God to come out with the declaration of Christ's deity. Look at Matthew 16:13.

. . . Jesus . . . was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

The disciples answer in Matthew 16:14,

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Then, in Matthew 16:15, we read,

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

In other words, Peter stepped forward and said, "I know who You are. You are deity."

The problem is not that Peter has forgotten that Jesus is deity; the problem is not that he has forgotten the depth and the heat of the battle that may come, the problem is that Peter does not know Peter very well. The flesh will *always* fail.

In these verses, God is, in part, giving us a reminder to realize that our flesh will always fail. As one man said, "God does not have an improvement plan for the flesh. It will always fail."

However, the Spirit will always succeed. It is the disciple who allows the Spirit to overwhelm; to outvote the flesh who will then, place their confidence in the right Person.

I can remember one man's comment in a seminary classroom full of men dedicated to the ministry. Knowing we had committed our lives to living for the Lord and were going out to serve Him, he said, and I can still see him shaking his hand in the air, "The Christian life is not difficult, it is impossible."

Peter, with confidence that he had in himself, said, "Lord, You don't know me. You may know the others, and though all of them may back off and walk away, . . ."

. . . I will never fall away. (Matthew 26:33b)

Note Matthew 26:34-35.

Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

All the other disciples got in on this too. They said, "Peter's not going to be alone. Lord, count us in on this too."

Now what is Peter doing? This has gone beyond confidence in himself. Now, he is just plain arguing with the Lord. This is a man who had said earlier, "I know that You are deity. You are God in the flesh." So Peter is meaning, "You know everything, but You really don't know me, Lord."

Does that happen to us? Do we disagree with the word of the Lord? The Lord comes to us in our devotion time or our prayer life or whatever it may be, and He whispers through His Spirit as we read the word, of a problem in our lives.

He says to you, "You have a problem with dishonesty."

"Not me, Lord, I just rearrange the facts."

We disagree with what God does in our hearts.

He says to you, through His Spirit, “You have a problem with gossip.”

“Not me, Lord, I just share my burden with a lot of people.”

“You have a problem with pride.”

“Not me, Lord, I’m just confident.”

What do we do? We argue with deity; with the One who knows us better than we know ourselves. So often we take this first step that will take us away from intimacy with the Disciple Maker.

2. The second step, which closely follows the first, is that Peter disregarded communion with the Lord.

This is true in Peter’s life and in ours, as well.

Look at Matthew 26:36-45a.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee [James and John], and began to be grieved and distressed.

Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.”

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

And He came to the [three] disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “So, you men 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.”

He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.”

Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.

Then He came to the disciples, and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? . . .”

Now, this is a compassionate way to wake someone. Have you ever gotten a phone call at 1 o’clock in the morning and the person calling says, “Did I get you out of bed?”

This is a nice way of apologizing for waking you.

Jesus comes to these three disciples and says, “Are you still sleeping? Roust up.”

He continues, in Matthew 26:45b-46,

“. . . Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!”

Peter disregarded communion with the Lord. We do this as well.

If we look closely at this passage, perhaps Peter did not recognize the urgency of the hour; the battle that was about to happen. Jesus knew and told Peter,

“Keep watching and praying . . . the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41b)

In other words, “Peter, your spirit says, ‘I’ll never deny You,’ but your flesh is weak. You need communion with God. You need to pray.”

Perhaps we do not pray as we should because we do not see the necessity.

When our children were younger, my wife and I, as a morning custom, would have the kids sit on the living room floor while we read from God’s word. Then, we would share prayer requests and each of us would take one.

One morning, our three-and-a-half year old daughter prayed for “the soldiers over there,” which was about all I could understand. Our twin boys, who were nearly five, had been praying for their grandmother’s toe to get better, and it had to be getting better because they had been praying for a year for that thing! However, this particular morning, one of our boys announced, “I’m not going to pray this morning.”

I thought, “He’s not even five yet, and he’s acting like a preacher’s kid!”

I asked, “Why not?”

He replied, “‘Cause I don’t need to.”

That was debatable! As a matter of fact, from his actions, he should have spent the rest of the morning in prayer.

This is the attitude, I believe, that we have as adults. Why do we not pray? Why is it that the one area we typically bail out of is prayer? Why is it that there would be no argument if I stood before you and said, "You need to pray."?

We all know that we need to pray more than we do. We know we do not pray enough. Perhaps it is because in our hearts, like my young son, we say, "I don't really need to."

Let me give the progression so far. Peter disagreed with the word of the Lord; did not take heed. So why would he need to commune with the Lord?

The first time we disagree with what God is trying to tell us; the first time we debate with God's Word, do you know what will be the next thing missing? Communion with God.

We think in our hearts, "I don't want to pray. He's just going to remind me of that thing again."

Then, communion with God is shelved as well.

Peter was not praying because he did not think he needed to, but he should have been praying all night. In fact, look at the text closely to get the implication that Jesus told Peter twice to stay awake and to pray. This is the failure then, of insufficient communion.

3. The third step, which is inevitable in this progression, is that Peter disobeyed the purpose of the Lord.

Look at Matthew 26:47-49.

While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him." Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

The tense of this verb indicates that Judas repeatedly kissed Jesus in a gross, counterfeit display of love. Continue to Matthew 26:50-51.

And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck

the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.

John will tell us that it was Peter who cut off the slave's ear (John 18:10).

Great Peter! This is a man who should have been praying, but did not. Because of that, he did not know what the will of God was.

When we disobey or disregard the words of God, we fail to commune with God, and then, when the heat is turned up, we are really going to blow it.

Now we know from history that Roman soldiers would practice for an hour a day, unsheathing their sword, swiveling it over their head, and bringing it down over the head of their opponent. They did this because the helmet of the opposing soldier was weakest at the crown where the two pieces were welded together.

Now Peter is a fisherman, so he has not had a lot of sword practice, but he knows what he is supposed to do. He must have whipped that sword out and swiveled it around, but his aim was off or perhaps, he was not going for the slave after all.

The text tells us that Peter hit the slave of the high priest. I think Peter, being the kind of man that he was, was going for the head man; the high priest. The slave, who could have been a bodyguard, stepped in the way perhaps, and lost an ear as a result.

When the gospel accounts are put together, we find that Jesus says, with an exclamation point, "Stop it!" Then, He touches the slave's ear and restores it. If He had not, there would probably have been four crosses instead of three.

Look at Matthew 26:52-53.

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

Jesus said, in other words, "If I want to fight, I've got twelve legions of angels that will come at the snap of My fingers. So put your little stick away, Peter. Your aim is off anyway."

Continue to Matthew 26:54.

How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?

This is the failure of misdirected action.

Let us note the progression again. Disbelief leads to disregard and disregard leads to disobedience.

Does that happen to us? Because of the lack of communion, have you ever opened your mouth when it should have remained closed? Have you ever kept your mouth closed when it should have been open? Have you been active when you should have been passive? Have you been passive when you should have been active? How do you respond in the middle of the battle? So often, we disbelieve, we disregard, we disobey.

4. The fourth step in this progression, is that Peter denied association with the Lord.

Look at Matthew 26:69-72.

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."

Remember that just a few hours earlier, Peter had said,

“. . . I will never fall away.” (Matthew 26:33b)

Earlier, as well, he had said,

. . . “You are the Christ . . .” (Matthew 16:15)

Peter knew who Jesus was and had committed himself to the keeping of that One. Now, a servant girl is exposing his cowardice. Continue to Matthew 26:73.

A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.”

Peter had a Galilean accent. He could try to convince them that he was not from Galilee, but it would not work – every time he opened his mouth, he proved their point.

This would be like someone from the southern United States trying to prove they are not from the deep south. Every time they say something, they prove they are.

Peter is trying to say, “I’m not from Galilee. I’m not part of the disciples’ band.”

Look at Matthew 26:74a.

Then he began to curse and swear . . .

Why did Peter do this? I think it is because he knew he could not change his accent, so he would change his vocabulary to prove his point. Look at Matthew 26:74-75.

Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, “Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

This is the failure of hypocritical cowardice.

This reminds me of the story of a young mother who discovered that the second story of her home was on fire. She pushed through the flames and rushed into the room where her little girl was sleeping in the crib. She gathered her little girl up to her and forced her way back through the flames. As a result, this mother’s hands and face were terribly and permanently scarred.

On one occasion, her daughter, who was now a very popular senior in high school, was having a field trip on a boat. Chaperones were needed, so this mother, who had never appeared publicly to anyone in the school, had been asked to come as a chaperone, and agreed. On the boat, she happened to be walking along and heard a few girls around the corner saying, “Have you seen that terribly ugly woman? Who is she?”

She then overheard her daughter say, “I don’t know.”

We walk through life, having been rescued from the flames of hell by Jesus. Then, someone says something and by our silence, by our lies, by our actions, we say we do not know Him.

Three Lessons that Peter Learned

Now I have wonderful news – Peter’s failures were not fatal. God graciously, because of his confession, continued the process of making him.

Did this work? Were there changes in Peter? Turn in your Bible to the book that he wrote – I Peter – and let us take a look at three lessons Peter learned.

1. First, Peter learned the lesson of emotional control.

Did this impetuous man who was constantly out of control, gain self-control; emotional control? Did this man who would fly off the handle, finally, by the grace of God, learn to control his emotions? Note Peter's words in I Peter 3:8-9.

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead . . .

2. Secondly, Peter learned the lesson of humility.

Did Peter learn humility? Look at I Peter 5:5-6.

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

3. Thirdly, Peter learned the lesson of courage.

What about courage? We remember Peter denying the Lord. How will he handle the heat now?

We know that church tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down. He was a martyr himself.

However, what does the Bible tell us? What does Peter write in his own hand? Is he courageous when under fire? In I Peter 4:14 and 16a, he writes,

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. . . . if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, . . .

I wonder if Peter went back in his memory to the day when the slave girl accused him of being part of Christ's band and he was ashamed. In verse 16, he

writes, "If you suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed."

Continue to I Peter 4:16b,

. . . but is to glorify God in this name.

What name? Glorify God in the name of "Christian". When someone calls you a "Christian," a "little Christ," glorify God.

Look at I Peter 5:10-11,

After you have 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. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Perhaps I am speaking today, to someone who is in the middle of a debate with God. God has revealed to you, through His word, something about yourself that makes you very uncomfortable. Instead of being the recipient of His instruction and His conforming process, however, you are debating with God and defending yourself.

Perhaps there is someone today, who is finding themselves in the courtyard of the high priest. It may be the campus of a college or a high school, or the third floor of an office building, but you are denying, by your life, your words, your walk, the fact that you know God.

By the grace of God, let us learn from Peter and not disbelieve God's word, not disregard communion with Him, not disobey His purposes, and not deny Him. Let us correct this progression in our lives at the very first step, by accepting the council of His word.

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