

Peter—the Apostolic Leader

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As a Fisherman (Luke 5: 1-11; Jno. 21: 3).—The men whom God calls into his service are not the idlers, but the workers, not the men who have nothing else to do, but the men who are already engaged in some form of work. Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, Elisha was ploughing, Amos was tending his sheep on the hill-tops of Tekoa, Levi was collecting taxes, and Peter was fishing, and God called them to public service in His Kingdom. The men whom God calls to honorable service are those who have already learned the beneficial discipline of labor. Peter was a fisherman, and on two different occasions Jesus directed him where to cast his net so that he got great hauls of fish. Jesus called him to be a fisher of men, and under His direction the Apostle succeeded in gathering great companies of men into the gospel net.

As a Disciple (Jno. 1: 40-42; Luke 5: 1-11, 6: 13-16).—There were three stages in the history of Peter's fellowship with Jesus, as there were also in the case of certain other disciples. The first stage commenced when John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to his disciples as the Lamb of God. Then it was that Peter was brought to Christ by his own brother Andrew. In this stage the disciples were simply believers in Jesus as the Christ, and were his occasional companions, especially on festive occasions. (See John 1: 4.)

The second stage commenced when Jesus found Peter and his partners at Capernaum in pursuit of their occupation as fishermen, when, in response to the invitation of the Master, "they forsook all, and followed him." Then his partners became the constant companions of the Master, which involved the habitual abandonment of their secular occupations. (See Luke 5: 1-11.)

The third stage commenced when Jesus formally called and set apart The Twelve, as a select band to be trained for the Apostleship. It was the privilege of these chosen men to be always near the Master, to witness his wonderful works of mercy, and to hear his wonderful words of wisdom and of grace.

While this was the privilege of the whole apostolic band, yet Peter and James and John seem to have received special attention from Jesus. These three were taught special lessons in private, and were witnesses of scenes to which the others were not admitted. They only were permitted to enter the room where Jairus' daughter lay dead, and were witnesses of Jesus' miracle in restoring her to life. They only were witnesses of Jesus' glorious experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. They only were chosen to be near Jesus while He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. To Peter and John was entrusted the work of preparing the last passover. It would appear that in all these experiences Peter was being trained for special leadership in the church. "Jesus had many things to say," but only trained hearers could fathom many things to do that only loyal pupils could undertake, a legacy of service to leave that only skilled followers could carry out.

As a Leader (Matt. 16: 13-20).—Peter seems to have been the recognized leader among the disciples, and that in spite of occasional jealousies which called for the Master's rebuke. He was spokesman for the Twelve. This may have been due to his impulsive nature, his innate ambitions, his outspoken manner, and the natural boldness of his heart; qualities

which tended to push him to the front. It was Peter who sought to know the meaning of the parable of the Watchful Servant, and who asked the Master for the interpretation of the law of forgiveness, and of the law of defilement. He was the first to recognize the Lord as he came walking on the water, and, with characteristic boldness, ventured out upon its surface to meet him. He was the first to utter the famous confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," on account of which Jesus promised him the keys of heaven, by which we understand the power to exercise the legislative and judicial functions of the Church. Hence we find Peter proposing to fill the vacancy in

PETER

Eager, torrential soul, which oft o'er-ran
All bounds conventional, and poured
Along
Unwonted ways a selfhood deep
And strong;
Yet "neath the discipline of love this man
Of foam became the rock, Truth's
guardian
And bulwark 'gainst the seething
Aids of wrong—
When Pentecostal flame baptised
his tongue,
Till martyrdom fulfilled his Lord's
great plan.
O mystery of Love and of the Cross,
Whispering, "Lovest thou me?" and
"Follow me."
And straightway self forgetteth self,
And loss
Is counted gain, and death is large
with life.
Christ towers the only goal of
worldly strife.
The vision that absorbs eternity.
—From "Among the Immortals," by
R. Walter Wright.

the apostolic band made by the desertion and death of Judas, and exercising the judicial function in rebuking Ananias and Sapphira in wife, so that they both fell down dead. As leader, he preached the sermon on the day of Pentecost; he went down with John to Samaria to establish a church after the preaching of Philip; he was sent as the first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, to Cornelius and his family; and he pleaded at the Council of Jerusalem for the recognition of the Gentile converts in all the privileges of the Christian Church.

As a Preacher (See Acts 1-15).—Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached on the day of Pentecost a sermon of such great power that men were pricked to their heart, and some 3,000 of them were led to accept the crucified and risen Christ as their Saviour. In this sermon, as in all his recorded sermons and addresses, his central theme was, "Jesus whom ye crucified." His preaching was in the power of the Spirit, with the result that many people were converted, and the Church added daily to her numbers.

As a Philanthropist (Acts 3: 1-11, 9: 32, 36).—"Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I to thee." In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Thus did Peter bless his suffering fellow-men. His sympathies went out to the needy and the afflicted, and like his Divine Master, he healed them. He cured the cripple who waited at the gate of the temple called Beautiful so that he leaped for joy, praising God. He restored a man who had been stricken with palsy for eight years, a cripple of Lydda. He brought back to life a woman

who was full of good works, Dorcas of Joppa. The Church of God to-day, in sending out missionaries to the heathen nations of the world, must send out men who, like Peter and his fellow-apostles, are able to heal the bodies of men as well as their souls.

As an Author (1 and 2 Peter).—Peter has left us two Epistles, besides a number of sermons and addresses recorded in the Book of The Acts.

From the Epistles of Peter we note three things which we learn with reference to his character:—

First, his faithfulness in obeying his Master's last injunction.—"Feed my sheep." He sought to comfort and to encourage and to warn the followers of Jesus. In his First Epistle he preaches the Gospel of Hope to the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor. In his Second, he sounds a note of warning against the false teachers, who were already making their influence felt in the early Church.

Secondly, Peter was not original, but practical.—There is no evidence in his writings that he was an original thinker like Paul. An examination of his First Epistle shows how much he was dependent upon the thought of others. In this short Epistle of 105 verses there are 35 references to passages in the Old Testament, 30 references to the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, 16 references to passages in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 17 references to Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, one reference to Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, and eight references to the Epistle of James. He thoroughly studied, inwardly digested, and was powerfully influenced by the principles of Christ, the teaching of the Old Testament, and the Letters of Paul and James.

Thirdly, Peter was wonderfully influenced by his company.—He received impressions easily, and could not without an effort avoid reflecting the tone of the company in which he lived. His eminently sympathetic nature helped to make him a great leader, but, at the same time, it tended to make him largely dependent upon the thoughts and feelings of others.

When Jesus was yet a free man, Peter draws the sword to defend him; but when he was arrested, Peter's courage fails, and he begins to follow after. The presence of the Master and His disciples makes him bold, and he professes himself ready to die with Him; but the presence of his enemies makes him a coward, and he actually denies his Lord. At the sight of Christ he is bold and walks upon the water; but at the sight of the waves he wars. At the Council of Jerusalem, he makes bold to offer the Gentile Christians the right hand of fellowship; but when certain Jewish Christians came from James, his boldness deserts him, fear seizes him, and he gives the cold shoulder to his Gentile brethren. By nature he appears to be a boastful coward, but by the grace of God he becomes a courageous martyr.

God In National Life

It sometimes seems to me that we look upon life as one might look upon a chessboard in which the pieces played the game themselves. Now it is a knight, now it is a castle, now it is a pawn, now it is a bishop. It is a king that moves; and why they move back and forth, and what the end of it all will be, we are puzzled to determine. But these great historians of the past saw God's hand on the chessmen, saw Him moving them, and knew that at the end of the white would checkmate the black, and sweep the black off from the conquered board.—*Lyman Abbott.*