

Mark 16:1-8

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[0 : 0 0] In the account of the resurrection we read in Mark's gospel, it tells us that the angel said to the women, He's not here, He has risen. Go, tell His disciples and Peter.

And then in the version that we read in Luke's gospel, when the two on the Emmaus Road get to the upper room, meet the disciples, they're told with great excitement, It's true, the Lord has risen, and He has appeared to Simon, to Simon Peter.

And in the passage we read in 1 Corinthians, it tells us all that is of first importance in our Christian faith, that Jesus died for our sins, that He was raised on the third day, and that He appeared to Peter and to all the other disciples.

And we're going to focus on that little fact with regard to Peter in just a moment. You all know how throughout our country there are probably thousands of houses and other buildings that have on the outside wall a plaque, usually a blue plaque.

And that tells us that on this spot, here, in this house, or in this building, some famous writer perhaps wrote her famous or his famous books.

[1 : 5 7] Some famous general was born here. Some distinguished scientist carried out discoveries on this spot.

Or somebody else of equal celebrity died here. Well, it seems that, oh, it must have been a hundred years or so ago, because this is something of longstanding, that there was a man in America who got fed up with all this rash of plaques going up on different houses to celebrate certain famous people.

We don't know who he was. We don't know who he was. Whether he was peeved that an ordinary guy like him wasn't given any recognition, I had no idea.

But one morning, the inhabitants of this particular town woke up to find a new pillar had been erected, and on it was a plaque.

And the plaque said, on this spot, in 1897, nothing happened. Well, I'm here today to declare to you that there is another spot outside that city wall in Jerusalem where 2,000 years ago something happened, something incredible, something irrepeatable, something world-changing.

[3 : 3 3] And we're going to view the significance of that something, that great event, the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ. But rather than try and cover all the meaning of the resurrection, the doctrinal meaning, the meaning for the church at large, I'd like us to pick up on that little phrase that you find in each of the passages we read, where it refers specifically to Peter.

Go, tell my disciples, and Peter. And then they say, it's true, the Lord has risen, he's appeared to Peter. And then Paul says, he rose from the dead, and he appeared first to Peter, first of the apostles.

Now, it's not that I want to go deeply into Peter's life, but what I would like to do is notice how this personalizes the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It individualizes it. Of course, his resurrection is of vast significance for the whole church worldwide in every age.

It's of vast significance for all of humanity, even though most don't admit it. But it's also of huge significance to you, to me, like Peter, an individual.

[5 : 09] Jesus, the risen Jesus, has something in his resurrection life for each one of us here today. So I want us to notice what might have been some of the reasons for Peter being singled out in this way.

I suggest that, first of all, this meeting with Peter demonstrates an intimacy of fellowship, an intimacy of fellowship.

Why was Peter singled out from among the others? We know that with God there is no favoritism. Well, of course, ultimately, it's the sovereign wisdom of Almighty God, and he doesn't reveal all his purposes to us, just what we need to know.

But I do think that knowing what we know about Peter's life from the Gospels, that we can suggest a couple of things. And first of all, I think that this intimacy of fellowship on that resurrection morning, just Jesus, just Peter, that it shows a special compassion for a man greatly in need of it.

It's as if Jesus meets him on that resurrection morning and says to him something like this, Peter, you've failed miserably.

[6 : 47] You completely misunderstood me. You remember I had to rebuke you severely. I had to say to you, get behind me, Satan, for you make me think of the things of men, not the things of God.

I know, Peter, you've wept bitterly as you've thought of these things, your denial on that terrible day of the crucifixion.

But in spite of the glory of the transfiguration, remember Peter? You had a real privilege with these other two that day when you had a glimpse into the glory of heaven.

In spite of all that, you're afraid, Peter, that you've no hope. Your hope is gone. You've denied me. You've failed me. And in such situations, the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, he comes very close.

And that day, didn't he come close to Peter? Didn't he restore his hope? And didn't he lift him up out of the depths, just as he promises to do for us, for you, whatever your situation might be?

[8 : 11] Think of another man in desperate, desperate despair. Think of David, who committed such dreadful sins.

And there he pours out his soul in Psalm 51. And he knows that he deserves nothing but the judgment of God. But he cries out, after thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me, for thy compassion's great.

Blot out all mine iniquity. And he goes on to sing, of sin being washed away, and of bones that had been broken, now healed and rejoicing.

And you remember the words of the prophet when he talks of God as the one who, the bruised reed, he will not break, nor the smoking flax quench.

And many Christians can testify to this very thing. Mary Magdalene could that day in the depth of her sorrow. Thomas, who had so, so skeptically denied the Lord, and Jesus comes to him.

[9 : 24] There were others there, of course. He comes to him, especially to him, and says, Thomas, come near. There is a special compassion from the risen Christ for those who are in the depths of pain or grief or sorrow, perhaps lamenting their backsliding, perhaps can't find assurance of faith and of salvation.

And Jesus, the risen Jesus, this is a pattern, isn't it? He comes personally to Peter. And Peter, be sure to tell him.

Now, it's true that Peter, we know some more of his story and some further failures, not like the previous ones. And we all know, if we're Christian men and women, how often we fail, how often we don't keep up the promises that we have made.

We cannot and we don't maintain the union and communion that we should with the risen Christ. And the words of the Christian poet, William Cooper, are sometimes true for us as well, aren't they?

Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his Word? But friends, the risen Christ is real.

[10 : 51] He is not bound by time or space. He doesn't need multitudes of people, a large congregation. He doesn't need a vast stage on which to bring his blessings.

He can come, as he shows us here, individually, personally, the risen Lord Jesus for you. But I suggest that this intimacy of fellowship, while it demonstrates a special compassion for a man greatly in need of it, it also shows the sovereign choice of God that Peter should have a leadership role in his church.

He was leaving his disciples to carry on the great work. He was ascending back to heaven. And although he gave his Holy Spirit, but he also, within the church, provided leadership.

Not, of course, exclusive to Peter. James is shown as the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He's the one who chairs that first great church council.

Paul is the one who was given leadership in mission to the Gentiles. And certainly, Peter's leadership role was not transmitted to any supposed successors down through the ages.

[12 : 15] But you just need to look at the book of Acts, and you see that Peter is the one who takes the lead in the choice of the twelfth apostle to replace Judas. Peter is the one who stands up on the day of Pentecost and proclaims with authority the word of God.

Peter is the one who is called to the house of Cornelius when the gospel reaches non-Jews, the Romans, and all other Gentiles. And Peter, on all these occasions and others, knew that he must proclaim the risen Christ, the one who had been crucified for sinners, yes, that had to go before.

But then, again and again, he is proclaiming the risen Christ. In Acts chapter 1, verse 22, when a new apostle has been chosen, what does he say?

For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. In his great sermon on the day of Pentecost, you put him to death by nailing him to the cross, but God raised him from the dead.

Further on in that sermon, God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are witnesses of the fact. Then in the house of Cornelius, they killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead.

[13 : 37] And the risen Christ, the one of whom we sang in Psalm 68, was sent into heaven and sent gifts to his church, supremely the gift of his Holy Spirit.

That same risen Christ still gifts the church, and that's how Paul interprets that passage in the book of Psalms. He gifts the church with men, with men gifted to lead his church, to proclaim his word.

Of course, he gives gifts to all his people. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts, Paul tells us elsewhere, to all Christians. But Peter, that particular day, had confirmed to him a role of leadership in the church of Christ, through the preaching of the word, through the pastoring of the flock of the good shepherd.

And God does that, doesn't he? The risen Christ does it. Think of Paul, blind, there in Damascus, wondering what on earth is going to happen to him.

And he hears the words, this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

[15 : 02] And if we just cast an eye over the history of the church since then, times that God blesses his church with in his sovereign way, in his sovereign time, times of great revival, when the church is stirred, when there's a great repentance, when there's a great bursting forth of new faith, and when the world around is affected by it.

It happened in Aberdeen in days gone by. It happened in many places. And at times such as these, isn't it true that the risen Christ takes men in themselves weak, just like Peter, and he lays his hands upon them.

And as they obey, their preaching comes with fire. And the Word of God is believed, and great things happen, as they did through God's servant, Peter.

And then there is a blessing. Peter, reflecting on all of this, years later, he put it like this, speaking to the believers, many of them persecuted, to whom he was writing, though you have not seen him, you love him.

And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. So then, for Peter, and for us, as individuals who believe in Jesus, there is an intimacy of fellowship.

[16 : 36] But there's also, surely, the joy of forgiveness. forgiveness, the joy of forgiveness. That comes out. Well, it comes out particularly, we'll see in a few moments, in the last chapter of John's Gospel.

But try and imagine, if you can, that private, intimate meeting on resurrection morning of Jesus and Peter.

Well, we can't really, because Peter himself doesn't give us any details. It was too, too intimate for that. But we can be sure that as Jesus appeared to him alone, Peter saw the nail marks in his hands and feet.

He saw the marks made by the thorns on that sacred head, sore wounded. And I wouldn't be surprised if in a flash, Peter understood what he had formerly refused to accept, that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer.

Jesus had told them that often, and Peter, you remember, had said, no, no, this cannot be, Lord. But now he knew. Now he understood what John the Baptist had told them three years before, that there, this one, is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and that his blood on Calvary was shed for sinners, for Peter, for all, as Peter writes later on, chosen for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.

[18 : 26] And the resurrection that morning of Jesus Christ gave Peter the assurance that the atonement was complete. No more sacrifice.

It was finished. The triumph was there, visible in the risen Lord who stood before him. And again, as we think of some things that Peter wrote many years later, he said this, in his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you, Peter.

And Peter, especially for you, especially for me, and especially for you if today you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

So here is Peter, the one who was plunged into despair, so conscious of his sin, of his denials. Here is Peter, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

Here is Peter who can sing with understanding what he'd often sung in their Jewish liturgy from Psalm 103, as far as east is distant from the west, so far hath he from us removed, from me removed, in his love, all mine iniquity.

- [19 : 56] And then that assurance of forgiveness, it was made doubly sure, as we're just about to see in John chapter 21, the threefold denial followed by the threefold commissioning.
- And this, of course, this joy and this assurance of forgiveness, it was needed by Peter, not only then, it was fantastic then, it was needed right on.
- Remember how so soon Peter sinned? There by the lakeside, just before the ascension, he's been told by Jesus to be his servant, to feed his flock and so on.
- He's been told that he'd be a martyr for the cause of Christ. And then Peter, instead of fixing his eyes on Jesus, he turns around, he sees John, he says, oh, what about him?
- What's going to happen to him? And Jesus rebuked his sinful curiosity. What is that to you? You follow me. But with that command, you follow me, there was a renewed assurance of forgiveness for all the sins.
- [21 : 11] Later on, you remember how he refused to eat with those who weren't Jews? He who had gone to the house of Cornelius and now, out of fear, he won't sit down with those of other nationalities and races, so wrong, so sinful, but thank God he was forgiven yet again.
- So, and Peter. There's the intimacy of fellowship. There is the joy of forgiveness. And one other thing that we notice, and it is the call to service.
- There's a call to service, and that, as I've just indicated, comes out very clearly in John's Gospel, chapter 21. Now, here Jesus, after the resurrection, 40 days or so after the resurrection, he meets with at least some of the apostles.
- He appears to the group, but if you look at chapter 21 of John, you'll see how Peter stands out. Verse 3, I'm going out to fish, Simon Peter told them, and they said, we'll go with you.
- He has a leadership role. Then you find in verse 7, then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, it is the Lord.
- [22 : 30] As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, it's the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment, jumped into the water. He was the one to take the lead. And then again, in verse 11, you find, Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore.
- Well, God had chosen him for a great ministry, a great leadership role, especially through the preaching of that word. But then, in this chapter, you find that the fishing expedition is followed by direct, personal dealing on the part of the risen Lord with Peter.
- The incredible drama of the resurrection morning has passed, but Christ is still risen, and 2,000 years further on, he is still risen.
- We may not have the drama that they had, but we have the reality. And for Peter, there was, as we've seen, the joy of forgiveness, but there's also a new commissioning for service, which you have in that passage.
- I'm not going to go through the whole passage from verse 15. Remember, Peter had denied Jesus three times, and three times Jesus recommissions him.
- [23 : 56] Feed my sheep, feed my sheep, feed my lambs. And there are certain things that very, very briefly I could just draw out from this.
- In this call to service, he is showing Peter, first of all, how to serve. I think it's probably significant that Jesus addresses Peter in verse 15 as Simon.
- You remember he changed Peter's name. He called him Peter, the rock, a man who was called to show firmness of purpose, unshakable loyalty, but he had signally failed to do so.
- And so, perhaps, Jesus is reminding him of his own, what he was in himself, but he wants him again to be Peter, the rock.

But there's something missing so that Peter can be what Jesus wants him to be. But perhaps, strangely, if we think about it, Jesus doesn't center on, now that he's given Peter this new commissioning, he doesn't center on Peter's knowledge being improved, on a strengthening of Peter's self-discipline, on a highlighting and maturing of Peter's leadership qualities, these are all important.

[25 : 28] But what Jesus focuses on is Peter's personal relationship to him. And the question comes three times in this passage, do you love me?

Do you love me? Do you love me? I honestly don't think Peter would have expected that. But that's what came. First and foremost, do you love me?

Now, commentators tell us that there are two different words used for love, the word philo and the word agapal, the one being, they say, an ordinary love, the other special, deep, spiritual love.

Perhaps there is that difference, I don't know, because these two words are used interchangeably in other parts of the gospel. But whether there is something profound in that or not, what is true is that here is Jesus forgiving and recommissioning his servant and pointing to something really deeper.

It's as if he says to him, yes, Peter, you failed me, you've boasted about your loyalty, but you've truly repented and I'm giving you a huge task.

[26 : 47] It lies ahead of you, greater than all your ability, but Peter, I've got an answer. I know how you're going to manage it. Your love for me and my love for you.

And he says the same to us today. If you're a Christian, you were called to service when you first believed. You are a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he says, increase your knowledge, yes. Increase your zeal for orthodox doctrine, yes. Improve on your experience, yes.

Your commitment to the church, your generosity, all excellent. We should have them all, but love to Jesus is the only lasting basis.

My Jesus, I love you. I know you are mine. For you all the pleasures of sin, I resign. So, how to serve in love?

[27 : 50] Whom to serve? You'll notice that the commission Jesus gives is, feed my lambs, feed my sheep. There probably is a difference between the two.

The lambs may be new believers, younger Christians, and there may be significance in the different verbs he uses.

One place he says, feed my sheep, and then he says, take care of my lambs. But whether that's so or not, the fundamental point is surely that Jesus is saying to him, first and foremost, you have to feed, take care of my people, those for whom I have died on the cross of Calvary, the flock of the good shepherd.

And he emphasizes for Peter and for us that role within the church, loving, teaching, helping, showing commitment to the church of the Lord Jesus, local, national, international, and that being so, our hearts must be burdened, and our prayers must be fervent for those for whom we prayed this morning, our brothers and sisters who are being slaughtered.

It's in all the news bulletins, who are being driven from their homes, who are being mocked and despised and left with nothing. Yes, Jesus says to Peter, you feed my sheep.

[29 : 30] Now, he's not saying, of course, that Peter shouldn't have a concern for the rest of the world, nor us. We have to love our neighbor. Everyone he has taught us is our neighbor.

We have to go into all the world and preach the gospel, the good news to every creature, but there is a special commitment for all of us within our church, not with a narrow spirit, but with a desire to love and to serve, the people of God for whom Jesus laid down his life.

And finally, there's how to serve, there's whom to serve, and there's how long to serve. How long is this going to last, Peter, this life, this task that I have given you?

Well, it's there in verse 18. It talks about when you are old. It's going to go on to the very end, till death do us part, as the marriage service puts it.

And Peter, he says, and to us, the road will often be hard. He talks about Peter being martyred in this verse. The road will often be hard.

[30 : 47] There will be temptations to be distracted, as with the apostle John. What's this man going to do? But Christ is risen. No longer the silence of his hidden years.

No longer has been silenced by his enemies. There is he's taken to the cross. Nothing of that anymore, but risen in the power of an endless life.

And we too, in him. I heard some years ago, of two elderly men, Christian men, in Glasgow.

And all their life, they had worked together as Christians. They were both involved in a lot of good Christian causes in Glasgow. They often spoke together and they prayed together.

They were very close. And then, as happens, one of them took ill and was taken to hospital. He was diagnosed with a terminal illness.

[31 : 55] And his friend, they were both old men by now, his friend came along to the hospital. And as I was told the story, he came in to the ward with a big smile on his face.

He goes up to the bed of his close but dying friend. And he says, you old rascal, you've beaten me to it.

And it's only a Christian that can think or speak like that. The glory after a life perhaps full of trials and tribulations to see Jesus, our risen Lord, face to face forever.

Let us pray. We thank you, O Lord, our God, that every day is a day to celebrate the rising again of our Lord Jesus from the dead.

For he is alive forever more. King of kings and Lord of lords, grant that for all of us here today, we will be able to say, he is my Lord, my King, my Savior.

[33 : 14] Amen.