

Amazing Grace "Peter's Story"

Introduction:

It was Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." That's what Proverbs says. And when we come to fear God, we no longer fear the common things in this world. The problem is, learning how to accept God's grace takes a long time. It takes experience and overcoming failures. Today we will look at a couple Christians who overcame their failures. I wonder if we can learn from them, and overcome our own.

It was a tense moment. Jesus had been acting like it was his last night on earth, and then he looked at all his disciples and predicted that they would all reject him.

"Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." (Matthew 26:33-36, NIV).

That conversation probably went back and forth through Peter's mind for weeks. Not 24 hours after Peter uttered those words, he would deny Jesus three times.

This is the same Peter who gave us the great confession of faith when he said to Jesus, "You are the Christ the son of the Living God."

This is the same Peter who stood before the crowd on Pentecost and preached to the people that Jesus was the Son of God whom they had crucified. When they asked, "What must we do to be saved?" he responded by saying "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, for the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit."

This same Peter would be dragged before the very people who condemned Jesus to die on the cross and when commanded to never preach in the name of Jesus again would say, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20, NIV)

But I want us to really focus on Peter's need for grace. Though he made that powerful confession of faith, he would also deny that he even knew Jesus. The night Jesus was taken and put on trial, Peter had followed at a distance. The bible tells us he was challenged at least three times about his own relationship with Jesus.

Matthew 26:69 "Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said.

70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth."

72 He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away."

74 Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before

the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.
(Matthew 26:69-75, NIV)

Can you imagine the guilt and the shame that Peter must have felt when he realized what he had done? And not only did Peter realize it, but Jesus knew it, too. Not only had Jesus warned Peter that this would happen, but we learn from Luke that Jesus turned and looked right at Peter when he denied him that final time.

60 Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him...And he went outside and wept bitterly.
(Luke 22:60-62)

Have you ever let someone down? Have you ever crushed another person because of your own selfishness or insensibility? Have you ever told someone you loved them only to be unfaithful to that love you proclaimed?

I’ll bet for all of us, we not only empathize with Peter’s pain, but we can actually feel it ourselves. This kind of suffering of the soul happens every time we let God down. The Bible says we have all sinned. We have all denied Christ in some form or fashion.

It could have been a time when we went with friends or relatives, and we did what we wanted to do, knowing the whole time that those actions denied Christ. We caved in instead of setting ourselves apart.

It may have been when we treated someone in a horrible way. We cursed them and said things we would be ashamed to repeat. Maybe it was something evil we did to them. Possibly we rationalized that they deserved it, or it made us feel better, but even as we did it the Spirit of God was working on our conscience.

It is likely that if you became a Christian at an early age, at some point along your life you went off into the shadows and left your faith and confession in the dust. You could be beating yourself up for that even now and wondering if Jesus would ever want you back.

How could Jesus forgive such denial? How could Jesus love us when we treated Him so ruthlessly? How could we ever look Jesus in the eyes again after seeing how disappointed He has been in our life?

I’m sure Peter must have had things like that going through his head as well when he went out and wept. He was devastated by his own weakness. He was shocked by how easily he had hidden in fear. He was distraught that Jesus knew of his failure and that his sin helped put Jesus on that cross.

Last week we studied Paul, who was a non-Christian who came to Christ. But here’s what I want you to get this week: Peter had been a disciple who had made a bold confession about his faith in Jesus, and then he denied Christ. Often times we who have been in Christ for some time can fail like that.

Maybe you’ve had a bold faith at times in your life, but since then you’ve allowed circumstances to minimize your faith. This church began with bold convictions about obeying God’s word, but how many of us have at other times failed to uphold God’s word in our lives?

Peter represents a Christian who is inconsistent. Hot one day, cold the next. On fire for Christ in one set of circumstances, but failing Christ miserably through sin under other circumstances.

Now we know that's not how Peter wound up. He became a resilient leader of the first century church. Tradition has it that he was put to death by crucifixion for his faith in Christ, but he refused to die in the same manner that Jesus died. So he was crucified upside down. What changed Peter from a backsliding, inconsistent man, to a hero of the faith? It was the Amazing Grace of Jesus.

John chapter 21

It happened after the resurrection. Jesus had already appeared to his disciples in the upper room. He had already talked with them. But there was still some unsettled business to take care of before He ascended back to the Father.

Early in his ministry, Jesus had come to fishermen who had caught nothing all night, and he gave them a miraculous catch. Now, after the resurrection he does it again. Jesus comes to them as they are coming in from an all night (and unsuccessful) fishing trip. As they are approaching shore Jesus calls out to them to throw their nets on the other side of their boat. They did not realize it was Jesus speaking to them, but they did what this stranger told them to do.

Immediately their nets became so full that they could not haul the fish in. They knew it was Jesus and Peter dove in the water and swam to see Jesus. Jesus had a fire going and he fixed them breakfast. Let's read this next part together.

Peter's restoration – Jn 21:15-19

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

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. 18 I tell you the truth, 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." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

That's grace. Jesus didn't condemn Peter; he restored him. And look how that affected Peter.

Peter had denied Jesus three times. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. Each time Jesus encouraged him, "If you really love me, you will feed and care for my sheep". It's as if Jesus is saying, "The past is in the past. Let's look at the future. You messed up in the past, but that is not how your life will be remembered. You will give your life for me. I forgive you."

And Jesus does this for Peter in front of the other disciples. There would be no doubt that Jesus had forgiven Peter, and had still chosen him to care for his sheep.

From that moment on, that grace Peter received would be a constant reminder of the mission Jesus gave to him.

- Now, he could stand before the enemies of Christ and boldly proclaim Him as Lord and Savior.

- Now, he could help lead people to Christ and give them the same grace He had received. He could not only become a fisher of men, but he would be a shepherd of men.
- Now, he would willing lay down his life for the cause of Christ.

You know, the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all end with Jesus's resurrection and ascension to heaven. But John concludes his gospel with Peter's Restoration.

That's significant, because how many times have we let our failures make us feel worthless in the kingdom of God? How often do we find ourselves feeling guilty over our mistakes? The biggest difference that Jesus makes is that he takes away our guilt, and he restores us. You do not need to be perfect to be used by God. ALL your sins are forgiven when you come to Christ. Not most, or some, but ALL.

Conclusion:

God's Grace is as powerful today as it was on the day Peter repented and asked for God's forgiveness. And it is just as powerful today as it was on March 10, 1748, the day John Newton accepted Christ.

For years, John Newton had been working on slave ships for England. But on that March day, his ship was caught in a terrible storm, and it was almost sunk. Newton began to pray, and he later said that night God began to change him.

Soon after his conversion to Christ, John Newton wrote a Christian hymn, describing his overall encounter with God, which he called "Faith's review and expectation" It later was popularized and renamed: Amazing Grace.

In spite of being freed from sin, Newton was haunted by the thousands of faces of the slaves he had delivered into captivity. Listen to what he wrote about his experience:

"With our ships, the great object is, to be full. When the ship is there, it is thought desirable she should take as many as possible. The cargo of a vessel of a hundred tons, or little more, is calculated to purchase from two hundred and twenty to two hundred and fifty slaves. Their lodging-rooms below the deck, which are three (for the men, the boys, and the women), besides a place for the sick, are sometimes more than five feet high, and sometimes less; and this height is divided towards the middle, for the slaves lie in two rows, one above the other, on each side of the ship, close to each other, like books upon a shelf. I have known them so close that the shelf would not, easily, contain one more. And I have known a white man sent down, among the men, to lay them in these rows to the greatest advantage, so that as little space as possible might be lost.

"Let it be observed, that the poor creatures, thus cramped for want of room, are likewise in irons, for the most part both hands and feet, and two together, which makes it difficult for them to turn or move, to attempt either to rise or to lie down, without hurting themselves, or each other. Nor is the motion of the ship, especially her heeling, or stoop on one side, when under sail, to be omitted; for this, as they lie athwart, or cross the ship, adds to the uncomfortableness of their lodging, especially to those who lie on the leeward or leaning side of the vessel."

It was a horrible past. But understand this: When John Newton came to Christ, he was not just forgiven. God used him to serve in his Kingdom. He was a minister in the Anglican church. He inspired William Wilberforce, a member of the British Parliament, to abolish the slave trade.

The recent movie Amazing Grace, tells that story. I'd like you to watch the scene where young Wilberforce comes to see his now blind preacher friend John Newton for advice.

--Video--

Friends, how do we respond to the grace of Christ? What are the ghosts that haunt you?

Maybe like John Newton, something from your past still weighs you down with guilt. A decision, a sin, a relationship. Maybe it's been an attitude of pride, or racism, or jealousy. There is nothing that the grace of Jesus cannot take away.

Or maybe like Peter, you once told God: Lord, if you get me out of this, I'll always... Or, Lord if you will make this happen, I will never---- again... Ever made a promise like that to God, only to deny your relationship with Him later? That's what Peter did. But Jesus restored him and put him back into service. And he can do the same for you today.

Jesus knows our past, He knows our sins, He knows our faults and failures – and knowing that Jesus is willing to forgive us and pour out his grace upon us – how do we respond?

I think it takes two things: First it takes admitting that "I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior!" It takes accepting God's free gift of grace through faith, confession, repentance, and baptism. You gotta accept the gift.

And second, once we have accepted His grace, I believe it means we have work to do. God wants you to experience a renewed hope and purpose. Like Peter, he wants you to share His grace with other people. When we have experienced His AMAZING GRACE, we need to get committed to His purpose for our lives. We need to be committed to the church and to the reason we exist. We need to be committed to reaching out to others and to serving Jesus the rest of our lives.

Once we've experienced that grace, we can go boldly into this world. We can face dangers of all kinds. We don't need to hide out in the shadows anymore. We don't need to run in fear, because Jesus has promised us eternity.

And no matter what sins or failures from your past are haunting you, God can make you free and clean.

His grace is available for you today...

To forgive you

To restore you

To use you in his kingdom.

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