

Third Quarter 2008

Adult Sabbath School Lessons

Special Insights No. 8

(Produced by the Editorial Board of the 1888 Message Study Committee)

From Folly to Faith: The Apostle Peter

Our lesson this week is about how Jesus was able to transform raw disciples into powerful church leaders and witnesses for the Kingdom of heaven. The focus is on Peter but I would wish to beg your indulgence and include more of the disciples. Not everyone identifies with the personality of Peter as they might with other disciples. More importantly, Jesus' method of developing missionaries applies to all types of characters, thus allowing our insights to include not only Jesus' ability to transform individuals but diverse groups as well.

Just who were these disciples that Jesus called to become His leaders? Peter clearly is the most well known. He is described as "brash, presumptuous, and prone to violence, collapsing under pressure" (adult lesson, p. 66; teachers' edition, p. 92). The other disciples were just a colorful. James and John had quite the temper and the mouths to go with it. Phillip was an earnest inquirer after truth that led him to study the scriptures for the promises concerning the Messiah. There is Nathaniel who was without guile, was not double-minded, and who was of a gentle and meditative spirit. Thomas was known as the one who had a hard time believing, yet had a warm heart and was ready to die with his Lord. Then there was Matthew the tax collector, who thought nothing of the consequences of having a feast to celebrate his conversion and to invite his publican friends to meet the Savior. Surely he and Simon the Zealot had their moments, the first being a former tax-"lover" and the latter a tax-"hater"! To round out the group there was Andrew, Peter's brother who seems to be the first to bring others to see Jesus. James the son of Alphaeus and James the Lesser, are not characterized in the Bible. That leaves Judas the Traitor. What differing individuals! What a group as a whole to transform into effective missionaries! How will He do it?

To answer the question we need to notice that although this group seems too divergent to develop into a cohesive, supportive missionary band, they held several values and desires in common. This was a group of pious men who sought the fulfillment of God's promises and the hopes of devout men. The fact that they were with John the Baptist suggests that they hungered for real righteousness, being sick of what they saw in God's house of worship. John's exposure of hollow worship, and a desire for revival, reveals they wanted to put right those things that were wrong among God's people. Such character would not be afraid of sacrificing all, giving up convention, and accepting correction.

So how does Jesus begin the transformation of these men? His first words to the disciples were, "Come and see." Challenging this group of seekers, given John's identification of the Messiah, was enough. Notice there is no sermon per se. Jesus is confident that (1) He is the Truth they seek, and (2) they will recognize that Truth when the Holy Spirit brings it to their hearts. Thus when it is done each man can say with personal conviction as did Phillip, "Come, we have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:45) Even with Nathaniel's query, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?," Phillip will respond in the way of the Savior, "Come and see." The first step in transformation was that Jesus drew each man to observe Himself as He was promised in scripture and how He fulfilled those promises.

There is a gradual knitting of the disciples to Jesus. In the beginning, the disciples occasionally accompanied Jesus, later they devoted their attention full time to following Him wherever He went. Finally, in approximately the last year of His earthly ministry, Jesus actively recruited the twelve for specific instruction. All this comprises the general framework of the disciples' education. But this only accounts for their exposure to the principles of the Kingdom of God and not their personal transformation of character.

If these men are to witness to the world of Jesus' power to save from sin, they need a personal experience. This Jesus gave them as He ministered to the needs of others. Whether it was healing the sick or discussing with the Pharisees, He used the opportunity to teach, comparing and contrasting the misconceptions of truth of His kingdom with its realities. Here is where Peter learned about the true mission of the Messiah (Matt. 16), where the disciples saw what true faith in God could do in a violent storm (Matt. 14), and where their cherished expectations of the Messiah were far from being true when Jesus responded to their final questions (John 13:36-38). Given all this, one might think they were prepared to go to all the world but they weren't. They needed one experience that would seal their education.

The one thing that distinguished true followers of Jesus was that they were willing to be corrected. This led to repentance. Many heard Jesus gladly and were impressed and inspired but they were not willing to give up what was holding them back from receiving the blessings of salvation. The disciples had given up all it would seem, and yet they were mystified in the upper room as to what the kingdom was truly like. It was not until the cross, where they saw their Messiah die, that they were ready to see the truth, including all their cherished expectations of grandeur. In the room on Sunday evening Jesus appeared to them in a totally different way because all their presuppositions were gone. When He repeated what He had taught them in the past THEN THEY GOT IT! In forty days they were out preaching with power because Jesus had replaced their misconceptions with the truth and the truth made them free to share with others what He had modeled and what He had done.

The same transformation of the disciples is what Jesus wants to do in our lives. In our recognition that we are as the disciples, both individually and collectively, in need of change, being willing to be corrected and freely repenting of error, the truth that Jesus has for the final preparation of His second coming will be even more glorious than Pentecost.

"Unless he makes it his life business to behold the uplifted Saviour, and by faith to accept the merits which it is his privilege to claim, the sinner can no more be saved than Peter could walk upon the water unless he kept his eyes fixed steadily upon Jesus. Now, it has been Satan's determined purpose to eclipse the view of Jesus and lead men to look to man, and trust to man, and be educated to expect help from man. For years the church has been looking to man and expecting much from man, but not looking to Jesus, in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. Therefore God gave to His servants [Waggoner and Jones] a testimony that presented the truth as it is in Jesus, which is the third angel's message, in clear, distinct lines" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 92).

—Robert Van Ornam

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