4. PETER THE WAY BACK

During the Second World War an U.S.A. submarine was torpedoed by a Nazi U boat off the coast of England. A distress signal was sent out from that sinking submarine. The Allied forces picked it up and immediately a rescue ship was dispatched. When the rescue ship arrived at the scene, they found an oil slick and some floating debris to mark the place where the submarine had been attacked. Immediately the ship sent divers down to the sunken submarine to see if they could find any sign of life. When the divers got down to the submarine they began to swim around it. They took out their knives and with the hands of the knives they began to tap on the steel wall, thinking that perhaps they could get a response from someone who might still be alive. As one of the divers was tapping on the side submarine he heard a tapping from inside. He grew excited and he began to tap again. Again he received a tap from inside. Then the diver noticed that there seemed to be a pattern to the tapping. He recognized it was Morse Code. Someone inside the submarine was tapping out a message in Morse Code.

These are the words that the person in the submarine tapped out. “Is there any hope? Is there any hope?” Is this not exactly the question we need to ask as we come to this stage in Peter’s ministry? Is there any hope for Peter? Is there any hope for me? For you? Are failures always final? My… if there is no hope for Peter, then is no hope for us once we have fallen. But if there is A Way Back for Peter, then that message needs to be echoed in the body of Christ today. Now do you recall we have divided Peter’s life into four parts? We took a look at Peter in what we called The Way Up, when he first met the Lord Jesus. We watched him in his walk with the Lord Jesus when he first met Christ at Bethabara beyond Jordan until he confessed the Lord at Caesarea Philippi. Everything was glorious. He had met Christ, he had become a follower of Christ and he had confessed Christ. Then we took a look at Peter on The Way Down. Chronologically, it took Peter from Caesarea Philippi to our Lord’s death on the cross. Peter began to question the truth, then he compromised the truth and Peter ended up denying the Lord Jesus.

Here is Peter now a man with a broken heart, a backslidden life, a man with bitter tears, and a man with a bruised ministry. I mean Peter never intended it to be that way and we never intended it to be that way, but suddenly it seemed as though we came face to face with our failures. Is there a way back? Is there a hope? How does the Lord Jesus deal with one who is fallen? Well, have a look at (22:31-32) and notice here an important statement made by the Lord Jesus. I want to suggest that Peter is,
Now we are talking here about the Lord Jesus just hours before the Cross. (Jn 2:25) Peter’s failure is immediately ahead. He has not denied the Lord yet. Here is Christ’s heart so full with His coming death, yet in the midst of that He says. (22:31-32) (1) My … whenever we become aware that a brother or sister in Christ has fallen that is a clarion call from God not to criticize but to pray. Is there not sometimes the tendency to rejoice secretly when a Christian has fallen? We say it serves them right. But when a believer stumbles it’s a call for us to pray. You see here Peter (1) Will you notice here,

(a) THE PLEA OF THE DEVIL:

Look at (22:31) A.T. “Satan has asked to sift you all as wheat.” I want you to see here,

1. Satan’s INTENTION:

The word “you,” here is in the plural. Here is Satan’s purpose not just for Simon but for all the disciples. “Simon Satan has claimed the right to put the loyalty of you all through the mill.” Do you older folk remember buying flour for baking bread or biscuits? The younger ones won’t know what I am talking about for they have got Marks and Spencer. But sometimes that flour was lumpy. So you had to put it through a sifter and shake it back and forth to get the lumps out. Sifting was used in Bible times to describe the winnowing process of separating the chaff from the wheat. Here is Satan wanting to sift the whole company of the disciples not to get rid of the chaff in them but to get rid of the wheat and leave only the chaff for Christ. You see, when God tests us He does it for our good to get rid of the chaff in us. But when Satan tempts us he does it for our harm to get rid of the wheat in us, to destroy the work of God in us. The hymn writer puts it like this,

Oh for not for Thee my weak desires
My poorer baser self
Oh, for Thee my fading fires
The ashes of my heart

My … do you realize that this is Satan’s intention? He wants you as a Christian to waste your time and talents on other things, so that you have nothing left to be employed for the Lord. He wants to strain out your wheat.

2. Satan’s ATTENTION:

For while Satan has his eye on the twelve generally, he has got his eye on Peter especially. Do you see the Lord’s words to Peter? “But I have prayed for thee,” and the “thee,” here is singular denoting Peter alone. Now why should have the Devil have a special purpose in attacking Peter or any other believer for that matter? Sometimes it’s because of,

A Man’s Past Glory:
In this case Satan is interested in attacking Peter because Peter has been given special privileges. (Matt 16:17) This is the man to whom Christ has entrusted “the keys of the kingdom.” Think of how many people Satan could keep away from Christ by casting a cloud over Peter’s past glories. My …. has the Devil’s tactic’s changed ? Has he not got special designs on those who have risen to high places of spiritual usefulness and service ? That’s why you the people of God need to pray for the servants of God privately and publicly. Charles Hadden Spurgeon was remarkably used by God to the salvation of sinners, the edification of believers and the defence of the faith. On one occasion someone asked him, “What do you attribute your fruitful ministry to?” Do you know what he said ? “My people pray for me.” Do you pray for the servants of the Lord ? Sometimes Satan concentrates on one person because of,

**A Man’s Present Position:**

You see, the Devil usually does not waste his time on those who do not usually threaten his kingdom. Why should he ? There is no point in attacking people who are not attacking him. Rather Satan is aiming his energies at those who are actively speaking against his interests, those who zealously support the cause of Christ. Sometimes Satan may concentrate on someone because of,

**A Man’s Potential Value:**

As a future leader in the church of Christ. He will concentrate on lessening our potential as servants of God be it by foul means or another. Tell me, are you a threat to Satan’s kingdom ? Are you seeking to liberate his captives ? Do you have gifts by nature and by the Spirit of God ? Are you aware of your capacity to lead people, to give spiritual food and direction ? Then don’t be surprised if the Devil is concentrating on you. (a) (b) Can you see,

**3. Satan’s DETENTION:**

For Christ says “Satan hath desired to have you,” Or “Satan has asked to sift you all as wheat.” You see, all the Devil does in our lives he does with the Lord’s permission and for the fulfilling of the Lord’s purpose. The Lords lets but the Lord limits. Isn’t it comforting to know that the Lord is sovereign in every situation ? Isn’t it encouraging to know that if God allows us to be placed in Satan’s sieve then the testing that follows must have the capacity to do the good that God that plans and not the evil that Satan purposes. Is this not what Paul had in mind when he wrote, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor 10:12) So you can see here (a)

**b) THE PRAYER OF THE LORD:**

Look at (22:32) Peter is remembered by an Omniscient Saviour. Now when Christ said to Peter “I have prayed for thee,” he indicated that he understood that Peter would come back. The word “converted,” means “turned back
again.” Peter was already saved but he was going to fall but Christ anticipates his restoration. ( Jn 21:16 1 Pet 5:2 ) It is not “ if,” but “ when,” “ Simon, Simon I have prayed for thee and when thou art converted …,” there is no doubt in the heart of Christ that those who belong to Him Satan cannot ultimately claim (1) Are you not glad that you have an Intercessor who is seated at the right hand of the Father who is praying for you ? Paul says “ Christ … who is even at the right hand of God who also maketh intercession for us.” ( Rom 8:24 Heb 7:25 ) Bless God for such a great High Priest. He is the One who is “ able to succour,” in the hour of temptation. ( Heb 2:18 ) My …. never forget that in the midst of your difficulties the Lord Jesus is praying for you. ( Jn 17:1 ) We are in his prayers.

I heard about a little boy who had misbehaved one time and they were sending him to bed early. Mom put him in the bed and said, “ Son, say your goodnight prayers.” Well, he prayed for Daddy, his brother and sister, his neighbor buddies. He prayed for everyone imaginable. Then he said “ Amen.” Then he looked up at his mother triumphantly and said “ I guess you noticed you weren’t in it.” My …. I’ve got good news for you. Christ is in heaven and He is praying for you this morning and He knows all about the temptations you are facing. Oh, after Peter had fallen there would come back to his own heart the remembrance that Christ had prayed for Him. (1) But notice Peter is,

(2) REBUKED BY AN OMNIPRESENT SAVIOUR

I mean the Lord Jesus is always with us. ( Matt 18:20 ) Now Peter was in the actual, literal presence of Christ. Did you notice what had happened ? ( 22:60-62 ) Do you see the way the Lord dealt with Peter ? This was a loving rebuke from a loving heart. You see, true friendship does not ignore sin in the life of a believer. A true friend will rebuke in a gracious way when he see’s that there are danger signals in another Christian’s life. You see, Christ loved Peter enough to tell him the truth about himself. My …. do we not need to do that ? We need to love one another enough to rebuke one another in Christ. Do you know what the Book of Proverbs says ? “ Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” ( Prov 27:6 ) Now how did the Lord Jesus rebuke Peter ? Well, implicit here is,

(a) THE WORD THAT CHRIST HAD SPOKEN:

Look if you will at ( 22:61 ) How did Peter remember the word of the Lord ? Peter heard the cock crow. I heard about a preacher who has a sermon entitled “ What if Peter had killed the rooster ?” But my …. when Peter heard the cock crow he remembered the word of the Lord Jesus “ Peter the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.” ( 22:34 ) And Peter found his heart broken before Christ and the conviction of God bit deeply into his soul. That was part of the reason he went out and wept bitterly. You see, no one comes back to the Lord in restoration apart from a Praying Saviour and a Powerful Word. Can I gave a word of personal testimony here. I remember well when like Peter I dishonoured His name. Do you know something ?
The Devil is expert at setting traps for young believers. He certainly caught me. For there was a time in my experience after I trusted Christ as a young boy when I changed school and company. Company is everything. My companions were godless and my conduct was sinful. But don’t we have a gracious Saviour? It was an ordinary Sunday evening and so oft I went to the Sunday evening service. It was January 1968 and just as usual I took my place in the gallery in the back seat so that I could twist and turn and talk and chatter without being noticed too much. But the Lord had his eye on me that evening for as Pastor Simpson preached on the Prodigal Son the Spirit of God took hold of me and God began to talk to me personally, and when the Lord speaks, you listen.

My … the Lord looked on me that evening and I went out of the building weeping bitterly but those tears of repentance marked the beginning of my way back. I wonder, are you just like me? Have you professed faith in Christ, but are you backslidden in heart? Will you return to the Lord this …? (a) But there was,

(b) THE WAY THAT CHRIST HAD LOOKED:

“And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.” (22:61) Now do not miss this. When Christ came out from the place of His interrogation, it was not Peter who was looking for Jesus, it was Jesus who was looking for Peter. “And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.” (22:61) Now Peter had walked with the Lord Jesus for three years. He had seen Christ in many different ways, in many different circumstances, and he had seen Christ look at

many different things, and he had seen Christ look in many different ways, but he had never seen Christ look like that. It was not an “I told you so,” look but a look of such love and forgiveness that it broke Peter’s heart. Suddenly, the truth came home to Peter that he had hurt the heart of Christ more than he had hurt his own heart.

“And Peter went out and wept bitterly.” (22:62)

Rebuked by an Omnipresent Saviour. In the Word Christ had Spoken and the Way Christ had Looked. Tell me, how do you minister to others? Do you minister to them with the eye of Christ? One of the best definitions of compassion I have come across is this, “Compassion is when I feel your pain in my heart.”

You see, we cannot offer the rebukes that we need to in the light of what Christ taught us in (Matt Ch 7) unless we are walking with the Saviour and we are rebuking with a heart filled with love. Do you know something? The army of Christ is the only army in the world that shoots its wounded. Too many times when our brothers and sisters are out there in the dirt, we have a tendency to step on the back of their heads and grind their faces even further into the soil rather than to get down on our knees, to pray for them, lovingly rebuking them. But that is not all. (1) (2)

(3) RESORED BY AN OMNIPOTENT SAVIOUR

I mean “is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen 18:14) You see, here is Peter restored by an omnipotent Saviour. Now we don’t know where Peter went when he walked away with a broken heart and bitter tears. We do know that he was with John on resurrection
morning but we don’t anything that happened to Peter late on Friday afternoon, all day Saturday and then as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, but we do know things that did take place. You see, this message of restoration that comes through the gospels is a message of triumph and joy. When we talk about the restoration of a Christian what do we mean ? Well, look at Peter and notice there was,

(a) **A REPENTING MOMENT:**

Look at (22:62) Do you believe that repentance is absolutely necessary for restoration? I do. *Because repentance involves a change of mind with a corresponding change of behavior patterns.* My …. God deliver us from the easy kind of a cheap response that says “God forgive me now, but in my heart I know that I’ll do it all over again later on.” That is not repentance. There needs to be that sense of brokenness before God and a sense of godly sorrow for the sin I have committed and for the way that I have dishonoured the name of Christ. I wonder do you need to be restored **personally**? Have you grown cold in fellowship with the Lord? I wonder do we need to restored **corporately**? My …. if revival is to come to the church there must be a sense of brokenness by the church and a sense of brokenness in the hearts of God’s people. For Peter there was that Repenting Moment, but there was something else. There was,

(b) **A REASSURING MESSAGE:**

The Lord Jesus died on the cross, was taken down from the cross and buried in the tomb. Peter was broken-hearted but to whom could he go? He would love to go to the Saviour but he cannot because Christ has died. He has been buried. He lies there in the tomb, so to whom can Peter go? Do you realize that Peter has never experienced a darker time? But then as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week the women went to the tomb and the message came loud and clear. “And he saith unto them be not affrighted. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified, he is risen he is not here, behold the place where they laid him. But go your way tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee there shall ye see him as he said unto you.” (Mk 16-7)

“**And Peter.**” Make sure that Peter gets this special delivery message. The Risen Lord wants a meeting with Peter. “**Go tell his disciples and Peter.**” Did that not come as a reassuring message from the heart of Christ? Christ still loved Peter with an everlasting love and that reassuring message is followed by,

(c) **A REUNITING MEETING:**

You know if you look at what took place on Easter Sunday you’ll find something that is stated in Scripture about which no information is given. Do you recall that the Risen Lord walked with two despondent disciples on the way to Emmaus? He entered into their home and they recognized Him. Do you know what they did? They went back the whole way to Jerusalem and told the disciples “**The Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon.**”
Where they met, and when and what was said, all this is hidden in the heart of Christ and Peter. That this private meeting did take place is absolutely certain, for Paul tell us in that great resurrection chapter, “that He the Lord Jesus rose again the third day according to the Scriptures and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.” (1 Cor 15:5) We can probably assume that when the Risen Lord and Peter met, the big fisherman was so broken with shame and failure, that he opened up his heart and confessed his sins to the Risen Lord, and the blessed crucified Saviour turned to him, and showed him His wounds, and assured him of His forgiveness, and the possibility of a new beginning.

My …. do you need to have that meeting with the Risen Lord? Harry Ironside said “If you were ever closer to the Lord than you are now then you are backslidden.” Are you backslidden? Have you grown cold? Wayward? Disobedient? Lukewarm? Yes, Peter was Restored by an Omnipotent Saviour and in that restoration process there was (a) (b) (c) and finally there was,

(d) THE RESTORING MERCY:

Will you listen carefully? There is more mercy in the heart of Christ toward Peter than there is sorrow in the heart of Peter toward Christ. Isn’t that glorious news? When we see Peter the next time we’ll see how the Risen Lord takes Peter up from here. But three times the Risen Lord asks Peter “Lovest thou me more than these?” (Jn 21:15) What did Christ mean? I wonder did Christ gesture toward the other disciples and say, “Do you love Me more than these?” For Peter had loudly protested that although the rest of the disciples should fail (Mk 14:29) that Peter would not disappoint the Lord Jesus.

Do you remember what the Lord said to Peter? “Feed my sheep.” (Jn 21:16) You see, the Son of God does forgive sin. Do you recall what the psalmist says? “He restoreth my soul.” (Ps 23:3) Like Peter have you failed the Lord? Are you drifting spiritually? Is your daily walk with God not what it used to be? Do you need to be restored? Have you to acknowledge this ….

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word

How are you and I to act toward a fallen believer? The way Christ acted. Remember him in prayer. Rebuке him in love. Restore him in mercy. My …. there must never be a weakness toward sin. We must never condone sin. But may the Lord give to us healing ministries, where repentance has been exercised, where the Spirit of God has properly done His work, where I remember the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another.” (Jn 13:35)