

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

Luke 22:54-62

"A New Lease On Life" - who does not need such? What would a new lease on life mean to you? If somehow in the midst of the circumstances in which you dwell, a brand new lease, a new change of situations should emerge, and you felt that things were looking up.

Of all the men who had a part in wounding and killing Jesus, Peter was least expected to do so. He was so sure that he never would. That he even warned Jesus that he would not do it.

There are men today who brag about their virtues. And some of them brag about virtues they do not possess. And there are those who condemn harshly others the vices that flourish within their own hearts.

Peter had been one of the three disciples closest to Jesus. He really loved the Lord. He did not want to hurt him. But he did hurt him.

It always hurts to be denied by a trusted friend. Surely the people who just pass by did not wound Jesus as deeply as would the denial of someone like Simon Peter. Like someone who was supposed to be his disciple and follower.

In our own day those who can hurt Jesus most are really not the skeptics. But professing Christians. His cause today is most seriously threatened. Not by those who announce hostility and those on the outside. But by those who claim allegiance to it.

The church is weakened most by those within its ranks. Not those who are on the outside. Ever since the time of Peter, the problem with Christianity has been that of gaining followers, and holding the devotion and loyalty of those followers. So many accept the matter of following in the foot prints of Jesus. It is easy to increase the membership, of any church, but it is harder to keep that membership loyal and active, and following in his foot steps.

Peter was blundering - he blew hot and blew cold in almost the same breath.

You know how it is with teen age girls who are going steady. She may not be very stable. So full of contradictions. And here was a man of combinations -- courage, cowardly, of faith and unbelief.

Think of one who would affirm Christ's deity and immediately follow that with "not so, Lord."

Think of a man who with sufficient trust could walk on the water. And then to begin to sink through lack of faith. Just within seconds.

Think of the man who refused the Lord -- thou shalt never wash my feet.) John 13:8. And then turn around and contradict myself - not only wash my feet - but my head, my hands in the 9th verse.

Think of a man who stood with the mob there and yet would before a little would not stand with Christ before the multitudes.

He was one that was wavering.

Now perfect people make us uncomfortable. We feel that more in keeping with the failures of Peter. However, we should not compare ourselves with Peter, in the day of his failure. Because we can judge ourselves by others to our own spiritual satisfaction. Now weak Christians feed their spiritual satisfaction by taking Peter at this problem time in his life.

But we need to think about Simon Peter when he was restored and had a new lease on life. And when he moved up boldly through the pages of the book of Acts and became a spiritual giant.

I think the major factor in getting a new lease on life was Christ's appearance to him that first Easter.

Sometime during that first Easter Day, the risen Lord contacted Simon Peter. Later that evening the disciples behind (closed doors) was talking about the news. The Lord is risen indeed. And hath appeared to Simon. Luke 24:34.

In his list of those whom Christ appeared, Paul places Peter first. He was seen Sephas - then of the twelve. I Cor. 15:5. Though Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the resurrected Saviour, Peter was the first of the Apostles.

Of all of the disciples, Peter needed this visit most. He needed this new lease on life. He was always first in the list, of Jesus' followers, because he asked questions. He was strong in affirming his loyalty. And yet he shamefully denies his Lord in the hour of his Master's greatest need.

His verbal faithfulness was inconsistent with the other disciples. It was really wretched. He probably was deeply bitter with remorse about his denial.

What a great relief it was when he sobbed out his forgiveness to the merciful Master and he got a new lease on life, that he needed.

Let us look at this situation tonight under three heads. First, there was a tug of war. V. 54. Second, warming by the Devil's fire. V. 55. And third, the look of love. V. 61.

These things tell the story.

I. THE TUG OF WAR 7 V. 54

The evening before his crucifixion, the Lord predicted that all of his disciples would forsake him. When he insisted on this, Peter began to insist on his fidelity. He said, even if all the others should flee, the Lord prophesied that very night, before the cock should crow twice - Peter would deny him three times. Then Peter boasted, Mark 14:31. If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee.

There is a familiar nursery rhyme says the little girl --

When she was good
She was very very good
But when she was bad
She was horrid.

Now Peter was very much like that. There were times when he rose to the new heights of blind faith. But at other times, he failed.

It was Peter who dared to walk upon the water, toward his Master. And successfully take the first steps. Then he faltered and began to sink.

It was Peter who could share with Jesus that (vision of Moses and Elias) on the mountain top. But could not see, as did the Master, that one must go down, from the peaks of high spiritual experience - to live and die amid and for those who lack such vision.

It was Peter, to whom the Lord could say at one moment, (blessed art thou Simon Barjona - for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee but my Father which is in Heaven.)

It was the same Peter to whom he could add almost immediately, get thee behind me Satan. Thou art an offense unto me. Thou understands not the things that be of God. And those that be of men. It was this upward and downward pull - this tug of war which went on in Peter's life.

Perhaps, this is because you feel something within your own soul - this tug of war between the good and evil that we love. We know what it means to be drawn in opposition directions. We know how it feels to succeed at one moment and to fail the next.

We know that sometimes the lamp of faith within us lights up our way. And at other times, it almost flickers out. But knowing these things, we ought not to repeat the mistake of Peter. And think that in winning one single battle, we have won the entire war.

Now to be self-complacent and to trust one's self too much - this may have been part of the tug of war going on in the heart and life of Simon Peter.

It is not unusual for those who make loud protestations, often follow with low performance--sometimes the biggest braggadocio in the camp may turn out to be the biggest coward in the conflict. Sometimes the best swimmer may be in greatest danger of drowning. Over confidence may lead to carelessness.

Now had someone said to Peter in advance of the details of his denial, he might have said, am I a dog that I would do that. As the battle ebbed and flowed over the field at Waterloo, Napoleon, strongest in guns, materials, officers, and in every way sent three messages to Paris stating that he had won the victory.

Now Peter's sad experience is too often your experience and mine. And this experience led Peter to write years later, I Peter 5:5, be clothed with humility. In other words Peter knew what Paul meant when he wrote, wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed - lest he fall.

William Cowper wrote, "Beware of Peter's word nor confidently say, I never will deny thee Lord, but grant, I never may."

Spiritual negligence followed Peter's first assertion. A little later at Gethsemane's garden the Lord asked the three - Peter, James, and John, to watch and pray. This was a terrific tug of war. But while their Master agonized amidst the olive trees, they slept. After such a warning about his denial, Peter should have zealously thrown himself in supplication for divine help. But, instead, he slumbered physically and spiritually.

I think the Lord spoke to them just like he speaks to some of the boasters today. What, could you not watch with me one hour? Matt. 26:40.

Suddenly, in the distance, there were flashing torches. As they approached and a mob seemed to gather. Now Peter was ready. In fact, he drew his sword and recklessly swung it at the nearest enemy. Intending to make two out of him. But instead he severed the right ear of Malchus, the servant to the high priest. Jesus rebuked Peter. And then he healed the servant's ear. And Peter ran. This desperate deed failed to halt the course of terrible danger to Jesus and to his followers. From that moment, Peter began to timidly follow at a distance. He had a tug of war going on within. It says he followed a far off.

II. THE DEVIL'S FIRE - V. 55

Minutes after this incident with the sword, the flickering torches made their way across the brook and on up the mountainside, where they were heading to the house of Annas. Peter realized they were taking away Jésus and he stumbled back to the path. Between stinging him in the face and ripping his robe, he hurried to catch the procession - but he kept his distance. He was not anxious to get too close after wounding the high priest's servant.

The crowd headed for the house of Annas. At the gate, a maid scrutinized those entering. To Peter's surprise, he found a friend there. Probably John, whose influence successfully succeeded in getting both of them in.

It was the coldest hour of the night - the hour that precedes the dawn and the servants and officers had kindled a fire at the end of the hall. And now Peter did not wish to be recognized. And he thought the best way to preserve

his incognito was to put on a gold face. And to act as if he was one of those in the band that captured Jesus.

Now it is strange how circumstances bring out the real qualities, of a man sometimes. We think we know ourselves. We think we know other people, but when the circumstances change and new qualities do emerge, then what a revelation.

Now it is not very difficult to be brave when one is numbered among the brave. But courage - it takes real courage to stand alone against the crowd. To hold the truth that others fail to hold up. To rebuke error. To suffer for what appears to be a lost cause.

There are many people who do not have the courage to face public opinion. They are too proud to fight - to make an expression.

The woman who kept the door was standing nearby. And in the light of the fire, her eye fell upon Peter. She looked at him. She had of first impression - this is John's friend. That Galilean friend of hers. And no doubt he is a friend of Jesus. She caught his eye and she said, (art not thou also one of his - this man's disciples.

This was a short, (unexpected challenge) It entirely surprised Peter and really threw him off guard. There they are - the eyes of all those men. And they sort of turn and look upon him as she asked him the question. Perhaps she had noticed him as he passed through the porch.

Peter said, woman, I am not one of this man's disciples. I know him not. That was Peter's first denial of Jesus.

Now most of us continue to be like Peter, rather than like Jesus. We are afraid of what will happen to us. Of what people will think of us, and what people will do to us, and what people will say about us.

I sometimes think that we are more afraid of what people will think of us than what they will do to us.

We do not have enough moral courage to follow him in ways that may diminish our popularity or may even subject us to the ridicule of fools. Which may bring upon us the criticism of the shallow minded people.

Some people do not have enough courage to live, in the presence of the neighbor's eyes. Others are afraid to speak, against unrighteousness - they are too timid, to stand up for things that are right.

When Peter made this denial - we stand aghast. Weren't you with the Lord for three years, we say. Haven't you just taken the Lord's Supper, we say? Don't you remember the day that he commanded you to cast your net down and you couldn't handle all the fish because there were so many. Has all of this shock really blotted out your memory.

The night was frosty - the servants lite a fire. And Peter hovered near the fire. His inner nature was with sympathy for Christ. But he wanted all of those around him to believe that he was indifferent to the prisoner.

The conversation ran from coarse jokes to the latest news from Rome. But Simon was jolted to reality. He was not daydreaming when that maid walked up to him and poked a lantern into his face and exclaimed - this man was with him. No doubt, others joined in her accusations. Immediately he responded, I

Perhaps an hour elapsed to cover his nervousness. Peter joined into the chatter. And perhaps gave his consent to what was being said.

V. 59 - Another confidently - a man who was certain - said of the truth -- this fellow was also with him. For he is a Galilean. Then Peter let forth with swearing. For the third time, he denied that he knew Jesus. In the Garden he had let loose with his sword. Now he lets loose with his tongue - swearing.

At that moment the soldiers were leading Jesus away. And Peter's voice no doubt carried through the courtyard, echoing it's denials and curses. And as his oaths came to silence - the cock crowed the second time.

Something struck home to Peter's conscience. He remembered the Lord's prophesy. Just at that moment, Jesus turned and looked his way.

III. THE LOOK OF LOVE - V. 61.

He looked upon Peter and what a look. The Lord heard every blistering denial, every fowl oath, their eyes met for one moment. Then hot tears flooded Peter's eyes, blurring his vision. He turns and rushes into the cool night air weeping bitterly.

Peter slept very little that night. The next day, he wept again and again. He could not forget that look. That gilt burned his soul. The falsehood and the ingratitude, the profanity, the great privilege that had been his for three years being in the presence of Jesus. As first among the disciples and after the solemn warnings by Jesus, and in the hour of Jesus' greatest need -

this once eager and devoted Apostle was letting life crush him down. He was nursing his shame. He was almost beside himself with despair. How he needed a new lease on life.

Now except for the bare mention of the meeting of both Jesus and Peter by Luke and Paul - no record exists of this interview. It must have been a sacred private one.

Yet of all those desperate days, the Lord's eyes followed Peter, whom he loved despite his failures. Then early that first Easter came the word from the Lord - he sent to cheer Peter's fallen spirit. An angel at the tomb had given the women the message "He is risen!" Tell my disciples and tell Peter. Mark. 16:6-7. This special message named Peter specifically removed some of his anguish - his Master still cared for him. There was going to be mercy in the place of his misery. Perhaps he could be forgiven after all. As soon as they brought word to Peter - he and John hurried to the tomb. John out ran Peter not only because of his youth, but because Peter was yet full of mourning.

Later, either that morning or afternoon, Christ confronted Peter, because Peter had been in John's company. Some suggest that on the night of bitter weeping, he had been found by John and took the broken hearted Peter home with him. In this private interview with the Lord, all the shame of the denial - Peter made a full confession and received remission.

Perhaps Jesus spoke something like this -- Simon, remember how I told you I must die. And the third day rise. You were so upset about the cross that you never understood about my arising again. Simon, do you remember that I warned you that you would deny me but I told you that I would pray for you - that your

faith would not fail. Simon, I went to the cross for your sins. Now I am the living Lord. Your denials are forgiven. Grieve no more.

Christ had prayed for Peter. He had also forgiven him. Such a look that Peter went out to weep bitterly. Now he had privately rehabilitated him.

Now his denial had been made public. Now Jesus made arrangements for him to receive public restoration.

Now this is where the true look of love came in. Now his tears had not washed away his guilt and his grief. There must be repentance.

Dr. Henry Link once said that a great many people in their quest for happiness - they should use their head less, and their feet more.

Now Peter was going to re-discover something here and repentance for his wrong doing, consisted more than just being sorry in his mind. Judas repented but it was not the kind that Simon practiced.

We know that Thomas had made his confession - my Lord and my God. He had made a public affirmation of his restoration.

And there is no more story that is so precious than the restoration of Peter. If this incident had been omitted. We might have been puzzled as to Peter's leadership in the Upper Room. And also his ability to preach the sermon on the day of Pentecost. If we had been left with the view that he had denied

Christ and left with that failure, then the last chapter would have been very dark. But the veil was not drawn over this last meeting. We do not know what the private meeting was about. We know that sometime later, not long after the resurrection on an evening with the breeze blowing along the shore, Peter said I go a fishing. Chapter 21:3. And the same leader is joined by several of the men in the same occupation, using the same boat, on the same lake. To suffer the same failure they had suffered a few years back. When they had toiled all night without a catch. On the shore stood the same Master who performed the same miracle - showing them that without him, their usual occupation was fruitless. He told them to cast on the right side - and they were able to draw the haul and numbered 153 fish. With a flash of recognition, Peter plunged toward the shore, waiting for no one.

Now when the disciples had built a fire and gathered around it - you remember there was a fire when he denied Jesus. And they are preparing to eat a meal and to handle the unfinished business. And Peter had publicly denied the Lord, and now he must publicly be restored. And the gracious Lord had dealt with Peter in privacy and after that private reconciliation - here is a public re-instatement.

The scene exhibited several similarities. The denial came after eating the Lord's Supper. Now they had just dined. Denials were made around the fire in the court yard. Now they sat around burning coals. Before the denial - reference had been made to a smitten shepherd and scattered sheep. But now the command will be, feed my sheep. Three denials had been made. Now three affirmations must be given.

So the silence was broken by the heart of Jesus, which he directed straight to Simon Peter. He asked, Simon, lovest thou me. Perhaps Jesus using his old name, Simon, was designated to remind him of his old nature. And here was a heart

that was hungry for restoration. Here was a heart that was hungry for a new lease on life.

Now this is the same thing that a father today experiences - he is refreshed when he receives a token of love from his son. A mother today, her heart beats faster and her eyes are brighter when her child manifests some real love for her in a simple way of evidence.

The story of a mother who stood watching her little child in his bed while he was asleep because of the tragic handicap of the child, she observed him with deep pity and yearning. She said, mother would give her very life, precious child, if just one time you would open your eyes and your lips and knowingly recognize and say "Mother".

Since God is love, this is what Christ needed to hear. And of course, this was the thing that was the real center - when he said, lovest thou me. Love is so misplaced today in this world. So many idols, so many substitutes. All take the place of love.

It is easy enough to affirm love when the pathway is smoothe. When friends are many. When the enemies accuse us along the way. There is slandering gossip, financial reverses, all of these.

Three times Peter answers in effect, yea Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Before his denial, he had boasted love and exceeded the devotion of others. Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Matt. 26:33. Now no protestation of superior love escapes his lips. Rather a humble, and sincere - thou knowest that I love thee.

At this point, Peter is not bragging. He uses milder words to pledge his love to Jesus. And Jesus employed in these questions - the third time. The Lord descended to Peter's words -- and he told Peter he would pay for his love with his life. Now tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down. At his own request, because he deemed himself unworthy to die like his Master.

Now through the pages of the life of Simon Peter, many truths have been brought forth at this denial experience has provided the back drop, and the display of the restoring mercy of God. Because Peter failed as he did, we know that God's grace is forgiveness.

An Army Chaplain heard a knock on the office door. A man, a picture of misery entered. "I have hauled down the flag, sir." The soldier standing before the Chaplain was his right-hand assistant. Who constantly invited servicemen to the chapel. And was a strong influence for good in the barracks. He could always sing a solo. He went on to say, I was out with the boys last night and they got me drunk. They had to carry me back to my quarters. I am ashamed of myself. I have hauled down the flag.

Trying to hide his disappointment, the chaplain countered, even if you hauled down the flag - you know enough about the mercy of Christ and his power, to haul the flag up again.

But sir, I have confessed to God and I know he has forgiven me. But how can I ever face the boys again. The chaplain stood to his feet, we are going to kneel down right here, both of us, and consecrate our lives anew to Christ. Tonight we will have the regular service and I want you to sing a solo. It will be hard, but don't fail to turn up. That night when his name was announced to sing, everyone gasp. Some smiled, what an old hypocrite. The soldier began.

Boys, you know all about me and the chaplain knows. I hauled down the flag last night. But by God's grace, I have hauled it up again. He told how he had confessed his sin to God, and the wonderful love of Christ welcomed him back. He concluded, will you let me sing to you again. There were muffled murmurs giving consent. The soldier sang, when I fear my faith will fail - Christ will hold me fast. When the temptor would prevail, he can hold me fast.

The next day one of the soldiers asked to speak with the chaplain. I was one of the men who tempted your soloists to drink the other night. I thought it was a joke. But I'll tell you when I heard him sing last night, I called on God to forgive me. From now on, I am going to live for him.

There is an old story that Peter never heard a cock crow without falling on his knees to weep. One tradition says that he was accustomed to wake daily at cock crow to spend an hour in prayer. The fatal hour in which he had failed his Lord, though without basis in fact, these traditions do suggest that Peter's life was stronger because of his fault.

Seeing him on the day of Pentecost, facing thousands of people, saying him ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up. Acts.2:23.

Hear him after healing the lame man at the gate beautiful. That God hath raised him from the dead, where of we are witnesses. Acts 3:14. Listen to his address - the same council that brought death to Jesus. Be it known unto you. Acts 4:10-12.

What made Peter a new man?