

“Peter, My Brother”

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Today I wish to talk about my brother, my colleague, my fellow-apostle—Simon Barjona or Cephas or Peter the Rock.

Some time ago a newspaper in a distant town carried an Easter Sunday religious editorial by a minister who stated that the presiding authority of the early-day church fell because of self-confidence, indecision, evil companions, failure to pray, lack of humility, and fear of man. He then concluded:

“Let us as people, especially those who are Christians and claim to abide by the Word of God, not make the same mistakes and fall as Peter fell.” (Rev. Dorsey E. Dent, “A Message for This Week.”)

As I read this, I had some strange emotions. I was shocked, then I was chilled, then my blood changed its temperature and began to boil. I felt I was attacked viciously, for Peter was my brother, my colleague, my example, my prophet, and God’s anointed. I whispered to myself, “That is not true. He is maligning my brother.”

A Man with Vision

... I remember his sad, triple denial of his acquaintance with the Lord in those terrifying, frustrating moments. I recall his tearful repentance. Many times he was rebuked by the Master, but he learned by experience and never seemed to make the same error twice.

I see a lowly fisherman, untaught and untrained, climb gradually under the tutelage of the best Teacher to the high pinnacle of great faith, bold leadership, unwavering testimony, unparalleled courage, and almost limitless understanding. I see the lay disciple become the chief apostle to preside over the Lord’s church and kingdom. I hear him breathing heavily as he laboriously climbs the steep Mount of Transfiguration. Here he sees and hears unspeakable things and has the transcendent experience of being in the presence of his God, Elohim; Jehovah, his Redeemer; and other heavenly beings.

... But this sectarian minister belittled him, unmercifully undercut him, and downgraded him.

Much of the criticism of Simon Peter is centered in his denial of his acquaintance with the Master. This has been labeled “cowardice.” Are we sure of his motive in that recorded denial? He had already given up his occupation and placed all worldly goods on the altar for the cause. If we admit that he was cowardly and denied the Lord through timidity, we can still find a great lesson. Has anyone more completely overcome mortal selfishness and weakness? Has anyone repented more sincerely? Peter has been accused of being harsh, indiscreet, impetuous, and fearful. If all these were true, then we still ask, Has any man ever more completely triumphed over his weaknesses?

... If Peter was frightened in the court when he denied his association with the Lord, how brave he was hours earlier

when he drew his sword against an overpowering enemy, the night mob. Later defying the people and state and church officials, he boldly charged, “Him [the Christ] ... ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (Acts 2:23.)

To the astounded populace at the healing of the cripple at the Gate Beautiful, he exclaimed, “Ye men of Israel ... the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate.... ye denied the Holy One.... And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.” (Acts 3:12–15.)

Does this portray cowardice? Quite a bold assertion for a timid one. Remember that Peter never denied the divinity of Christ. He only denied his association or acquaintance with the Christ, which is quite a different matter.

Could it have been confusion and frustration that caused Peter’s denial? Could there still have been some lack of understanding concerning the total unfolding of the plan? Being a leader, Peter was a special target of the adversary....

Peter was under fire; all the hosts of hell were against him. The die had been cast for the Savior’s crucifixion. If Satan could destroy Simon now, what a victory he would score. Here was the greatest of all living men. Lucifer wanted to confuse him, frustrate him, limit his prestige, and totally destroy him. However, this was not to be, for he was chosen for and ordained to a high purpose in heaven, as was Abraham.

...Is it possible that there might have been some other reason for Peter’s triple denial? Could he have felt that circumstances justified expediency? When he bore a strong testimony in Caesarea Philippi, he had been told that “they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.” (Matthew 16:20.)

When the three apostles came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they were again charged implicitly, “Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.” (Matthew 17:9.) Could Peter have felt this was not the time to tell of Christ? He had been with his Lord in Nazareth when the Savior was taken by his own people to the brow of the hill, “whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong But he passing through the midst of them went his way.” (Luke 4:29–30.) Surely Peter did not think of this escape as cowardice but as wise expediency. Christ’s time was not come.

The Approaching Crucifixion

...At the risk of death he had struck the contemptible Malthus and sliced off his ear. But this act of bravery and personal disregard was stopped by the Lord ...

What more could Peter do? How else could he show his loyalty and courage? Could it be that in these last hours Peter realized that he should stop protecting his Lord, that the crucifixion was inevitable, and that regardless of all his acts, the Lord was moving toward his destiny? I do not know. I only know that this apostle was brave and fearless.

... He boldly and meaningfully postulated to the Savior, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." (Matthew 26:33.) To which the Lord replied, "This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." (Matthew 26:34.)

This was a critical moment. Peter's act of protection with his sword-slashing had been after this prediction was made. He had tried. He had seen one apostle betray his Master with a kiss, and his Master had not repulsed him. Peter had been reminded that angels could be summoned if protection was needed; he had been commanded to put away his sword. Even now he did not desert his Master but followed sorrowfully behind the jeering crowd. He would remain to the end. He likely heard every accusation, saw every indignity heaped upon his Lord, felt all the injustice of the mock trial, and noted the perfidy of false witnesses perjuring their souls. He saw them foully expectorate in the face of the Holy One; he saw them buffet, strike, slap, and taunt him. He observed the Lord making no resistance, calling for no protective legions of angels, asking for no mercy. What was Peter to think now?

A smart aleck damsel accused Peter, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee." (Matthew 26:69.) What would his further defense of the Lord accomplish in this situation? Would it displease Jesus? Would it only destroy Peter himself without beneficial effect? Would Christ want him to fight now, when he had denied him that privilege earlier that evening?

Then another maid announced to the bystanders and villains, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth." (Matthew 26:71.) Peter replied, "I do not know the man." (Matthew 26:72.) And others, recognizing his Galilean accent, declared, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee." (Matthew 26:73.)

What was he to do? Could he do more? What would have been the result had he admitted his connection? Would he have lived to preside over the church? Peter had seen the Savior escape from crowds many times and hide from assassins. Is it conceivable that Peter also saw advisable advantage to the cause in his denial? Had Peter come to fully realize the hidden meaning in the oft-repeated phrase "Mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4), and did he now understand that "now is the Son of man glorified" (John 13:31)?

I do not pretend to know what Peter's mental reactions were nor what compelled him to say what he did that terrible night. But in light of his proven bravery, courage, great devotion, and limitless love for the Master, could we not give him the benefit of the doubt and at least forgive him as his Savior seems to have done so fully. Almost immediately Christ elevated him to the highest position in his church and endowed him with the complete keys of that kingdom.

Simon Barjona did not have long to consider the matter or change his decisions, for he now heard the cock crow

twice and was reminded of Christ's prediction. He was humbled to the dust. Hearing the bird's announcement of the dawn reminded him not only that he had denied the Lord but also that all the Lord had said would be fulfilled, even to the crucifixion. He went out and wept bitterly. **Were his tears for personal repentance only, or were they mingled with sorrowful tears in realization of the fate of his Lord and Master and his own great loss?**

... Peter was full of faith. He never faltered. From the day he forsook his nets and boats, his feet never turned away. Even in his moment of denial, he was a near to his Lord as he could be. Let him who would be critical of this apostle put himself in the same place—among the bitterest enemies, persecutors, and assassins—with a growing knowledge of the futility of defending his Lord, whose hour had come. He who had forgiven his crucifiers [see JST Luke 23:34c footnote] also forgave Peter who had denied him.