

Peter's Journey of Grace and Love

Miguel Luna

The Gospel of John tell us that Peter was one of the first disciples called by Jesus (John 1:35-45). His actual name was Simon son of John but Jesus changed it to Cephas (which means 'rock' in Aramaic) or Peter (which is from the Greek 'petros'). He is also mentioned first on the commissioning and instructions for the short term mission (Matt 10:2) and he was also part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples (Matt 17:1). Throughout the gospels it is possible to follow Peter's spiritual journey and to observe his weaknesses, difficulties, suffering and restoration. Peter was a disciple with an impulsive character since he was determined to assert his own opinions even with force. Although of such a character, he was honest and expressed sincere repentance because Jesus was leading his spiritual journey.

On an ordinary day 'Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:1-4).' Peter, a skilled fisherman, followed Jesus' instruction without any doubt. Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (Luke 5: 5). 'Can you hear the doubt, skepticism, and reluctance in Peter's response? In effect he said, Master, you don't realise we've just fished all night, but if You say so, we'll do this to humor You.' Not exactly an auspicious beginning of their relationship, is it? (Bridges, 54). So when he saw the manifestation of Jesus' power 'he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8).' Peter understood his limitations and weaknesses and accepted the invitation, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10) which indicates bringing people to Jesus and the kingdom of God.

It was Peter who proclaimed by revelation "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). However, as soon as Jesus predicted His death as the suffering servant, Peter did not hesitate to take Him aside and rebuke Him (Matt. 16: 22). 'Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt. 16:23).' Jesus clearly understood His mission as the suffering servant, as the 'Lamb of God'. In this context Jesus taught Peter and the other disciples the cost of such a discipleship. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). In other words, Peter 'must renounce himself, his own plans, his own desires; then he must be willing to bear any cross that duty calls him to take up, finally he must follow in the footsteps of Jesus' (SDABC, 5:435). Like Peter we must be converted and shaped by the Lord over and over again. It requires a transforming grace to become ministers of grace and hope.

At the last Passover meal Jesus predicted Peter's denial (John 13: 37, 38). Again, on the night of Christ's betrayal, Peter rushed to defend his Lord with the sword, only to be rebuked by the Lord "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11). At the High Priest's courtyard Peter denied Jesus three times (John 18:15-26). Peter's bitter grief at denying His Lord was aggravated by the reminder of his own proud and foolish boast (Matt. 26:69-75). Despite these shortcomings, Peter continued being the primary spokesman for the apostles. How was this possible? It was possible because of grace and love taught and practised by the Lord Jesus Christ.

After Jesus' resurrection and the miraculous catch of fish, Peter was reinstated by Jesus (John 21:15-25). John records the conversation between Jesus and Peter using very meaningful words. In this instance, the Greek the word 'phileo' means 'the love of a friendship, tender but not all-encompassing' (Stälin, 9:130-131; see also Tenney, 9:201-202); on the other hand the word 'agapao' means 'love without reserve, total and unconditional' (Stauffer, 1:47-48).

'In His first two questions Jesus used *agapao*, and Peter replied with *phileo*. The third time Jesus used *phileo*, and Peter replied, as previously, with *phileo*. If the two words are to be distinguished, Jesus asked Peter twice whether he loved Him with the higher form of love, *agapao*. Peter, however, admitted no more than common friendship, "you know that I love you." The third time Jesus used the word Peter had twice employed and asked him whether he really love Him as a friend, *phileo*, which the apostle had already

twice admitted' (SDABC, 5:1071). The use of the word 'agapao' in John 21 suggests the expression of such a love Jesus was expecting the night Jesus was betrayed (John 18: 25-27; Shepherd, 129: 777-792)).

Simon Peter understood that his poor love was enough for Jesus, it was the only one which he was capable, and nonetheless he was grieved that the Lord spoke to him in this way. Peter replied "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you" (John 21:17). Jesus put Himself in the level of Peter, rather than Peter in the level of Jesus. That is amazing grace and hope for a disciple who experienced the pain of infidelity. From that new beginning Peter followed Jesus to the end with the awareness of his own fragility, but this understanding did not discourage him. He could count on the presence of the One who has risen.

He was the primary spokesman on the day of Pentecost and had the privilege of preaching the first sermon by which three thousand people accepted the message and were baptised (Acts 2:14-40). He was the one who made the decisive statement at the council of Jerusalem that turned the tide against the Pharisee believers who were demanding that new Gentile believers be circumcised (Acts 15:6-11).

Later in Peter's ministry he performed with hypocrisy and was rebuked by Paul. In Antioch he compromised himself in fear of the circumcision group and played the hypocrite, and thereby earning a justified public rebuke by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14). But the story does not end there.

Peter is the author of two universal epistles. In one of the epistles he refers to God as 'the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast (1 Pet. 5:10). In his second epistle he again mentions the grace of Jesus, 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever' (2 Pet. 3:18). Peter experienced the meaning of grace in his own life and as such he was able also to impart grace and hope to others.

In order to become ministers of grace and hope, we need to experience that amazing grace of Jesus day by day. Indeed, 'it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do' (Eph. 2:8-10).

Works Cited:

Bridges, Jeff
 2008 *Transforming Grace*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Nichol, F.D., ed.
 1978 'John.' *SDA Bible Commentary*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
 1978 'Matthew.' *SDA Bible Commentary*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Shepherd, David
 2010 "'Do you Love Me?' A Narrative-Critical Reappraisal of ἀγαπάω and φιλέω in John 21:15-17.' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129: 777-792.

Stälin
 1974 'φιλέω'. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 9. Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Stauffer
 1964 'ἀγαπάω'. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 1. Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Tenney, Merrill C.
 1981 *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, John and Acts*. Vol 9. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

About the author:

Miguel Luna, PhD, is Dean and Principal Lecturer in Theology in the Faculty of Religious Studies, Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand.