

Sent Ones: From Peter the Unknown to Peter the Great
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
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Introduction

In 1994, moviegoers were treated to a very interesting film. The film was about a man named “Forest Gump”. It was based on a fictional novel by an author named Winston Groom. Note: There was never any real person named Forest Gump. However, there are still some interesting things we can glean from the film.

Forest starts life with several deficits. He has an IQ of 70, which is considered intellectually challenged. His father is never around. Forest has a physical handicap - He has to wear metal braces to help straighten-out his legs.

You would think with all those deficits, Forest would never be truly successful at anything. As is often the case in movies, that’s not who things work out.

Fortunately for Forest, the braces worked. He eventually outgrew them and even became an incredible runner. He became such a good athlete he received a sports scholarship to college and even became an all-American. What Forest lacked in IQ he made up for with heart and hard work. Even though his father was absent, his mother was caring and very faithful. She taught him about character and a positive attitude. She’s the source of the famous quote, “Life is like a box of chocolates - You never know what you’re going to get!” To make a long story short, Forest eventually became a fantastically successful person and even a celebrity.

The moral of the story, according to the film, is that if you have heart, people who care about you, and some luck, you can go from nothing to great success and fame.

Of course, that’s just a story. Do things like that happen in real life? Well, I think the reason the film was so popular is that we’d all like to think it **does** happen in real life.

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe. We’re working our way systematically through Matthew’s book about the life of Jesus.



In our last article, we started a sub-series called “Sent Ones.” Jesus had a message – a vital message: The Gospel. He wanted that message to go out into the whole world, and he needed some special people to make it happen. So, he chose 12 men he called the “Apostles” (The word “apostle” means “sent ones”). Last week, we asked the question, “What went into his selection?” Today, we’re going to ask the question, “Who were these men?”

Let’s read their names:

2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matthew 10:2-4)

There were twelve whom Jesus chose to be his sent ones. Should we have 12 separate messages, one for each? The problem with that approach is, for some of the men, we don’t know a whole lot. Others, we do. So, here’s what we’re going to do: We’ll have more than one message based on what we know for certain about these men, but not twelve. We’ll combine a few along the way.

In this article, we’re going to look at the first man on the list: The Apostle Peter (Also known as “Simon”). We know a lot about him, so we’ll give him a whole message.

Peter was a man who started out with a number of deficits. He was largely unknown when he met Jesus. Years later, he became the best-known of the apostles. His life and his role in the Christian faith inspired one of the most beautiful buildings in Europe: The Basilica of Peter in the Vatican. To this day, the name “Peter” is a popular name in western culture.

What changed this man from unknown to world-famous leader? Was it just like Forest Gump? Was it heart, hard work, and luck? Let’s find out.

I. Peter was relatively unknown and unimportant.

The first thing we know about Peter is that he was relatively unknown and unimportant. If you’ve been along for our journey through the book of Matthew, you know that Peter started out as a fisherman:

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-20)

Fishing was a respectable calling in the days of Jesus, just like farming, carpentry, tent-making, and other professions that we read about in the Bible. It just wasn't the way to become famous.

Later, after Jesus died, rose again, and went up into heaven, Peter wound up leading the 12 apostles. This made him very visible, and it got Peter into trouble. In the book of Acts, Peter and John were hauled before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of ancient Israel. After listening to Peter and John, this is how the leaders reacted:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

The top leaders of Israel all looked at each other and said, "who are these men? They're unschooled - They're ordinary."

How might you become famous and influential in the days of Jesus? Let's look at some different ways.

You could come from the right family. A family where you inherited wealth and power. That was the case with King Herod and other leaders. Or, you could be a great military man.

You could be a great athlete. The Greeks loved their athletes and gave them all kinds of recognition. You will recall the Olympic games - They were invented way back in the time of Greece.

You could be a scholar. Many who spend time in church know the name Nicodemus. He was considered the "teacher of Israel." There were others like him: People with names like Akiva, Hillel, and Shammai. Most people don't know their names today, but they were famous in ancient Israel. Some of those names are known to the Jewish people to this day.

Those are the ways you became famous and influential in the days of Jesus. Actually, those ways exist today. But fisherman? No. That's not how you became famous and influential.

Apparently, when Peter and John were examined by the ruling elite of ancient Israel, only one thing stood out: *They had been with Jesus.* That started years earlier. Right after we learned that Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen, we learned that Jesus invited them to follow him:

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

So, Peter was one of a group of men who spent time with Jesus - Lots of time. And notice something here: Jesus invited these men to follow him. What did he offer as a reward?

What was the motivation that he gave to these men? Did he say, "Follow me, and I will make you famous!" Did he say, "Peter follow me, and I will change you from Peter the unknown to Peter the Great!" No, he said, "Follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people." That was enough. These men didn't leave their nets expecting a pathway to greatness. I'm not sure they even fully understood what Jesus was offering. They just knew that they were getting a personal invitation to spend time with Jesus. And that was enough.

Friends, Jesus invites us all to spend time with him. Today, we spend time with him by coming to church and worshipping him. We spend time with him when we listen to messages in church. We spend time with him when we listen to messages of Christian leaders on the radio or TV. We spend time with him when we read his Word, the Bible. We spend time with him when we pray.

If you spend time with Jesus, you may be rewarded with something on this earth like fame. Or you may be rewarded with a deep knowledge of his great love for you. For many people, that's enough.

Let's learn more about Peter's change from unknown to great.

II. Peter lacked Courage.

As you read about Peter, you find that he was a man who lacked courage.

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" (Matthew 8:23-25)

We went into this story in detail a while back. For now, let's just that that this story tells us that Peter was not a courageous person. He saw a storm blow up on the lake. Granted, it was a bad storm. However, it's clear that Peter, as well as the other disciples of Jesus, was scared to death.

Think about your typical action movie hero. They would shake their fist at the clouds and fight to the last breath. Peter was not like that.

And it got worse. Let's look at the night Jesus was betrayed.

31 Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

33 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

34 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

35 But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”
(Matthew 26:31-35)

So, Peter was a brave guy - In his own estimation. Jesus said, “So, you think you’re brave. Let me tell you something, Peter. We’re about to go into a scary situation. Before the night is over, you will deny that you ever knew me - And you’ll do it three times.”

This is one of the most famous stories in the Bible - and perhaps one of the saddest. When the soldiers showed up to arrest Jesus, the apostles and disciples all fled. Including Peter.

He followed from a distance as Jesus was taken away and got as far as the courtyard of the High Priest during the trial. There, Peter was identified as one of the followers of Jesus. And sure enough, he denied Jesus - Not once, but three times.

How did Peter react to his failure?

Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:75)

Peter realized he had failed; and failed miserably. He let down his best friend. And he let him down after following him for years. Peter saw Jesus display incredible acts of supernatural power. But he still failed. He was a coward.

But later, something happened. Recall what we read earlier when Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin. Let’s read that again:

When they saw the **courage** of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13 emphasis mine)

Imagine this: This is a few months after the death of Jesus. Jesus had been taken before the Sanhedrin. They ran a mock trial, found Jesus guilty, and sent him off to be crucified. The same thing could happen again, only this time with Peter. Yet, Peter spoke before this group boldly. He was so bold, he showed such courage, that onlookers were astonished.

Something changed Peter from a cowardly man into a courageous man. What was it? To understand this, you have to ask a question: ***At what point did Jesus know that Peter would fail him?*** Jesus knew it at least as far back as when he made the prediction that Peter would deny him three times. But could it have been even earlier?

In a recent series, we looked at something that King David wrote in the book of Psalms:

15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

(Psalm 139:15-16)

God is aware of our deepest, inmost being. He is aware of everything about us - And he's aware long before we are born.

And Jesus was God visiting the face of the earth. Jesus knew who Peter was before he called him to follow. That means he knew about any strengths Peter had. That means he knew about any weaknesses that Peter had. That means Jesus knew ***before Peter was born*** that he would fail.

So, why did he call Peter? Why not pick someone with more courage? Because of a principle we learned in the last session:

***Jesus doesn't call people based on their earthly gifts and accomplishments.
Jesus calls people based on what they can become
if they will give themselves over to him.***

This is important: For Peter, the point wasn't that he went to the courtyard and failed. The point is that *he went to the courtyard*. There, he learned something very important: He learned that he was a weak man. He learned something that the apostle Paul wrote about at a later time. Paul had a problem that he called his "Thorn in the flesh." It was something painful that he couldn't beat. So he prayed that God would take it away. Here's how God answered the Apostle Paul:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (II Corinthians 12:9)

Look at that: “My power is made perfect in weakness.” Before Peter could truly experience God’s power, he had to understand that he himself was weak. Before he could be courageous, he had to realize that by himself, he was a coward. Learning that required a painful experience.

Once Peter understood this, he was on the way to becoming courageous.

Let’s stop for a moment - Have you ever had a time in your life where you tried something, but you failed? As far as God goes, failure isn’t such a big problem. He loves you. He knows you. If you failed because of sin, ask God to forgive you. He will gladly do it. If you failed because you didn’t know something, ask God to teach you. He will gladly do it.

Or, how about this: Have you ever had a time in your life when you wanted to do something? Something good? Something important? Something meaningful? But, you didn’t even try. You didn’t even try because you thought you might fail.

Well, sometimes, we fail. With God, that’s not a reason to give up before we even start. You know the standard warning: This doesn’t mean do something foolish or stupid. But, if you’ve given it thought, and it’s something you should try, maybe you should give it a try. Why? Because God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Until we know we are weak, we can never truly see God’s power.

And for Peter, there was a lot more weakness to go.

III. Peter was not a highly intelligent man.

Peter was not a highly intelligent man. We saw this last week. Jesus spoke on a number of occasions in parables. One time, Peter didn’t understand.

15 Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.” 16 “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. (Matthew 15:15-16)

Wow! That was cold. “Are you still so dull?”

There’s a well-known saying: *Wisdom is not always about knowing a lot. It’s knowing what you don’t know.*

Peter eventually became a great teacher. But before he could do that, he had to learn that there was a lot he didn’t know.

IV. Peter was a prideful man.

Peter was a prideful man. This is a big problem when you learn how much God values humility. We learned about one demonstration of Peter's pride when he announced that he would never deny Jesus. And then, only a few hours later he did it three times. Sometimes, to learn humility, prideful people need to fall hard.

Another event showed the extent of Peter's pride, and how much he needed to be warned. Jesus told his followers on one occasion that he would have to go to Jerusalem. There, he would be crucified. Peter didn't like the idea and thought he would straighten out Jesus. Here is the famous reply of Jesus:

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." (Matthew 16:22-23)

Understand what's happening here: This is Peter. He is the man who will one day lead the apostles in sending the message of Jesus out into the world. And Jesus is warning him that it's possible for him to be influenced by, if not controlled by Satan. There was no point in Jesus even pretending he was talking to Peter - He's talking through Peter to the enemy!

This is what happens when pride overwhelms a person. And it's a warning for us all. If the Apostle Peter can find himself in a state where he's under the influence of Satan, how much more can any of us?

Pride can be a terrible thing. But, there's something that can cure a prideful heart. There's something can make up for all kinds of deficits. And Peter needed to learn about it.

V. Peter needed to learn to love.

Peter needed to learn to love. After Jesus died and rose from the dead, he had a few more words for Peter.

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17)

After all he had been through, Peter was now ready to learn one of his most important lessons: He needed to grow in love. One of the premier signs of loving Jesus, is when you love his sheep. These are the people that Jesus died for. **He** certainly loves them. How much did Jesus love his sheep? He was willing to die for them. So, he had some final words for Peter:

Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” (v 18)

What did Jesus mean by all this?

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” (v 19)

Jesus is telling Peter that it’s love that carries you through all the other things. It’s love that makes a person courageous. Love diminishes the power of pride. Love gives you the ability to follow Jesus even to death. And that’s what Peter was called on to do one day. Like his Lord, Peter died by crucifixion.

Peter wrote about this in one of his letters to his friends:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
(1 Peter 4:8)

Let’s pull this all together.

Conclusion

Today, we’ve met a man who started as an unknown, but whose name is remembered as one of the most important leaders in history. How did it happen? Was it like Forest Gump, where heart, and hard work and luck allowed a man to overcome his deficits and wind up a successful celebrity?

No, it was not luck at all. Peter was a man who started with many deficits. What mattered was that he accepted the invitation of Jesus Christ. He spent time with Jesus. He let Jesus show him his weaknesses - Because it’s in weakness that God can show us his power. He let Jesus show him how to love. And it’s love that covers a multitude of sins.

The message for us? Accept the invitation of Jesus. Follow him. Spend time with him. Let him show you your weaknesses. Let him show you how to love.

Maybe you'll be changed from an unknown to a celebrity? But more likely, you'll be rewarded with a deep knowledge of God. And in the end, that's the greatest thing of all.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:
PeaceWithGod.net
