

## DISAPPOINTMENT DISPELLED



### INTRODUCTION

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I am particularly fond of the Apostle John and his writings. John wrote most of his letters and books at a very senior age. We have benefit of 5 books (the Gospel according to John, the letters 1 John, 2 John and 3 John and the very last book of our Bible Revelation). I have often wondered why there was not more written down about Jesus. John explained at the end of chapters 20 and 21 that Jesus did many more signs and did so many other things that he did not write down. He said: ***“Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”*** But he did say that what he has written down is sufficient ***“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name”***.

As a South African, chapter 21 is a particular favourite. Can you guess why? It is because John described one of our favourite cultural activities – braai! Please note, Jesus did not do a barbeque on a Webber with hamburger patties and pork sausages. He prepared a proper braai: ***“When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it and bread.”*** This kind of fish braai is very popular in the West Coast of South Africa, and it is indeed served with home baked bread and “moskonfyt” (a grape must jam made from a mixture of pressed grape juice, grape skins, seeds and pulp).

But John’s writings in chapter 21 is of much greater importance than the braai. John dedicated this last chapter to describe how Jesus dealt with Peter. Earlier, Peter denied Jesus three times. Can you imagine the regret, embarrassment, guilt, and disappointment that Peter must have felt?

Have you ever been disappointed in yourself, in someone else, or felt that someone was disappointed in you? I am sure that all of us have experienced disappointment. Disappointment is probably something we experience more frequently than we realise. One of worst things to ever hear from a loved one is: “You have disappointed me”.

What is disappointment? It is the gap between an expectation and the actual outcome. One way to avoid disappointment is to just expect very little or nothing. But that is also not realistic –

as the saying goes: “if you aim at nothing you are guaranteed to achieve it all the time.” So, was Jesus disappointed in Peter? Closer to home, is God ever disappointed in us?

## **PETER: FISHERMAN, TO DISCIPLE AND BACK TO FISHERMAN**

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Do you remember how the relationship between Jesus and Peter started? In Luke 5, we read that Simon (he was only named Peter later) was a fisherman. He had an unsuccessful fishing night and was cleaning their nets that morning. Jesus then instructed Simon to go back into the water and let down their nets for a catch. Not surprisingly, Simon’s response was: **“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!”**. Fortunately, he continued with: **“But at your word I will let down the nets.”**

The catch was so large that their nets started to break. Another boat came to help and both boats were soon filled to the point of almost sinking. Simon fell at Jesus’ knees and said: **“depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”**. Jesus responded: **“Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men [and women]”**.

What happened here? Simon probably realised that he must have disappointed Jesus with his initial response. His natural reaction was to ask Jesus to rather depart from him. He must have felt that he was not worthy and deserved rejection. But Jesus responded very differently. Jesus did not say: “why were you so arrogant?” or “you should listen to me next time” or “I told you so”. Jesus acted in a reassuring way **“do not be afraid”** and called Simon to action. In effect, Jesus was saying to Simon to learn from the mistake and **“from now on”** do differently. Simon immediately followed Jesus as a disciple.

Jesus already knew that Simon will become the founding father of the church on earth after His ascension to heaven. In John’s recording of Jesus’ first meeting with Simon, we read that Jesus renamed Simon: **“You shall be called Cephas”**. Cephas is Aramaic and it translates to Peter in Greek – both mean “rock”. Later, Jesus reaffirmed to Peter: **“and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”** Matthew 16:18.

So, there must have been great expectations on Peter. Jesus clearly identified and named him as the future leader of the church on earth. This probably explains some of his confident behaviour and bold statements. When Jesus talked about his death and departure, Peter was quick to say that he wanted to follow Jesus: **“Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay my life down for you”**. John 13:37. But Jesus answered him with the foretelling that Peter will deny Him three times. Peter probably rolled his eyes when he heard this.

On the day of Jesus’ arrest, Peter was still full of bravado. He drew his sword, struck the high priest’s servant, and cut his right ear off. Jesus instructed Peter to put away his sword and allow the Father’s will do be done. Then only hours later, when everything started to escalate out of control, Peter indeed denied Jesus in public – not once but three times.

Can you imagine what must have gone through Peter’s mind at that time. He, the rock on which Jesus is meant to build His church, the one who said he would lay his life down for Jesus, yes he

denied Jesus! All the high expectations came crashing down. The gap between the expectations and the reality of his denial must have left him with crushing feelings of disappointment.

Despite his feelings of disappointment, Peter did not run away or desert the other disciples. He and John were the two disciples who ran to the tomb after Mary Magdalene told them that Jesus was not in there. Peter was the first one to go into the empty tomb. He was there when Jesus appeared to ten of the disciples for the first time and the second time eight days later when Thomas was present.

John did not record exactly what happened between the second and third appearance of Jesus. One could only but wonder what was going through the mind of Peter. Why did he go back to where his journey started with Jesus – his old job of fishing? This could potentially have been disastrous for the church on earth and must have been the reason why Jesus specifically appeared at that moment.

And just like the first time, Peter and the others caught nothing during the night. At the break of day, Jesus was standing on the shore, but they did not recognise Him. He asked if they caught anything and, like 3 years earlier, they said no. In a similar way, Jesus instructed them to cast their nets one more time. And again, against all odds, they landed a record catch. John immediately realised that it was Jesus standing on the shore. When Peter heard it was Jesus, he threw himself into the sea to get to Jesus. What a déjà vu moment that must have been for Peter.

## DISAPPOINTMENT?

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After their famous “South African” fish braai, Jesus engaged in a one-one-one conversation with Peter. What would you have done if Peter, your close ally, denied you three times? Would you have expressed disappointment? But Jesus’ approach is truly Godly. He addressed Peter by his original name – Simon, son of John. Jesus asked him three times: “do you love me?”. After each answer, Jesus then called Peter to action and reaffirmed his calling to the ministry to service Jesus: “***feed my lambs, tend my sheep and feed my sheep***”.

Interestingly, Peter was grieved by the repeated question from Jesus. He must have wondered whether Jesus did perhaps not believe him. But clearly, Jesus was reaffirming and reassuring Peter, not doubting him. And why would Jesus doubt him if He can see into one’s heart? The three questions and instructions must have been to erase the disappointment Peter felt of the three acts of denial.

Did you notice that none of Jesus’ questions were “why did you deny me” or “why are you not apologising to me” or “are you going to disappoint me again”? Why would that be the case? Could it possibly be that Jesus was not disappointed in Peter, and that God could never be disappointed in us?

When measured by the ten commandments and the law, surely we must disappoint God all the time with our “under achievement” of His standards? Humanly speaking, we often refer to “good people” and “bad people”. But Isaiah said: “***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned –***

*every one - to his own way...*" Isaiah 53:6. Does this mean we are all one constant disappointment to the Lord by virtue of not being able to meet His expectations?

A long time ago, it was already clear to the Lord that we could never meet the expectations. By His great mercy and His unmeasurable love, the Father sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to fill the "expectation gap". Jesus died for all our sins on the cross, He paid the price and brought the perfect sacrifice, once and for all. When we accept Jesus as our Saviour, God no longer sees the "expectation gap". God looks at us through the redemption of Christ and sees us as righteous and justified. Therefore, when we are in Christ, there is no longer an expectation gap and God cannot be disappointed in us.

Furthermore, God is all knowing. He is not limited by time and space. God knows our yesterday, our today and our tomorrow. God also sees beyond our actions and words, through to our hearts and our hidden thoughts. So, in relation to each one of us, we cannot disappoint God if our future actions are already known. That does not mean that our wrong actions and sins are acceptable to God. It also does not mean that we should not repent and continue to live in sin.

When we know that we have disappointed someone, we often withdraw from the person and avoid contact. This is exactly what God does not want us to do when we continue to make mistakes and sin from time to time. Unfortunately, it is what the Evil One wants and you may hear voices saying: "there you go again", "you are such a disappointment", "you are not good enough", "you might as well give up". This is what may have happened with Peter: "you might as well go back to your old ways of just fishing for fish".

The fact that we cannot disappoint God, liberates us and sets us free! Therefore, we must always turn to God for love and comfort, particularly when we experience feelings of disappointment. Zephaniah said so encouragingly: "***The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.***" Zeph 3:17. Jesus promised that He will always be with us through the Holy Spirit, our Helper, who dwells within us. In our Psalm of today, King David also encouraged us to always turn to God for help and then he said to the Lord: "***You have turned for me my mourning into dancing...and clothed me with gladness.***"

## FOLLOW ME

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God is always there for us. But our relationship with God must be reciprocal. We cannot just take and never give back; be loved and never love back. Jesus was clear in His instructions that if we say we love Him, we must follow His commandments (love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your mind and all your strength; and love your neighbour as yourself). This is why we still confess the sins we commit, we repent and strive to live more and more like Jesus. Fortunately, we are never alone – we always have the Helper with and in us for this journey of sanctification.

Jesus' final recorded instruction to Peter on the beach was: "***Follow me***". Peter headed to the call and turned from being a fisher of fish to Jesus' original calling to be a fisher of people. May

we all also head to the call to follow Jesus and, just like Peter, be the light, the salt and fishers of people in the Isle of Man and where ever life leads us. **AMEN**

*Collect (Prayer before the readings): Almighty Father; who in Your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord; give us such knowledge of His presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by His risen life, and serve You continually in righteousness and truth; through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*

Readings: Old Testament: Zephaniah 3:14 - 20  
Psalm: Psalm 30  
Gospel: John 21:1 - 19

Hymns:

1. 202 (Common Praise): Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNrbDR8TxYI>
2. 170 (Mission Praise): Give thanks with a grateful heart  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2inhx3kytGQ>
3. 1072 (Mission Praise): In Christ Alone  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn9-UNer6MQ>
4. 622 (Common Praise): Will you come and follow Me  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o469PRLdbHU>