

## The resurrection appearances – Simon Peter. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 6 February 2013.

This morning we are continuing with our series of talks on people who were involved, one way or another, in the resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus. This week we are considering the apostle Peter. We know that Simon Peter (to give him his full name) met the Risen Lord many times during the forty days between our Lord's resurrection from the dead and His ascension to heaven. But this morning we focus on two occasions when the apostle had direct and *personal* dealings with Him.

Interestingly, although the first occasion is mentioned twice in the New Testament, we know next to nothing of what actually took place at the time. Let me quote what the apostle Paul wrote a little over 20 years later to the Christians at Corinth, 'I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you ... by which you are saved ... that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas ('Cephas' being the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek name 'Peter'), then by the twelve (the whole apostolic band, that is)'.

Paul made it clear that the Christian gospel rested on a double foundation ... namely, that, as he said, 'Christ died for our sins', and that 'He rose again the third day'. It was said of the temple of Dagon which Samson caused to fall on several thousand Philistines at the time of his own death ... a case, if you like, of the last act which brought the house down – quite literally ... it was said of the temple of Dagon that there were 'two middle pillars which supported the temple'.<sup>1</sup> So too, metaphorically speaking, the gospel rests on two great central pillars – the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul added two statements (that He, our Lord, 'was buried' and 'He was seen') as supporting evidence for what he had claimed. 'Christ died' – and one of the ways we *know* that He died is that *men buried Him*. He rose again – and one of the ways we *know* that He rose again is that *men saw Him* ... and Paul selected six examples of men who did just that ... stretching from Peter first to himself last.

Paul is therefore on record as vouching for the fact that the first man to 'see' the Risen Lord was the apostle Peter – although, as we have learnt on previous weeks, the Risen Saviour had earlier been seen by several lady disciples.<sup>2</sup>

I said that the first occasion when Peter encountered the Risen Lord is mentioned *twice* in the New Testament. The other mention comes in the closing chapter of Luke's gospel, which also records another of our Lord's resurrection appearances – that to two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. Although that appearance is Graham's subject for next week, I'm sure he won't mind me quoting one brief extract from the story. Speaking of those two disciples, Luke says, 'they ... returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!'

When these two disciples travelled back to Jerusalem late in the evening, they believed themselves to be the bearers of earthshattering news – namely, that Jesus had risen, as witness the fact that they had spent no little time with Him ... only to learn from the apostles that they already knew of the Lord's resurrection – for, as they said, He had previously 'appeared to Simon'. I should like to have seen the faces of the two disciples ... they must have been a picture!

But what may well seem strange to us as readers of the New Testament is that we are not told *anywhere* – by Luke, or Paul, or anyone else – what was said, or what took place when Peter met the Risen Lord – as we are in the case of all other resurrection appearances that memorable day ... whether we think (as we have in previous weeks) of the women on their return from the empty tomb, and of Mary Magdalene, or (as we will hear, God willing, in coming weeks) of the two disciples on the road, and of the apostles met together, as they were, behind closed doors that evening. We are told only, courtesy of Paul, that our Lord 'was seen by Cephas', and, courtesy of Luke, that He 'appeared to Simon'.

The reason that no details are given lies in the past. Last Wednesday, Mervyn spoke to us of Mary Magdalene, whose heart had been well and truly broken by Jesus' death – leaving a void which neither apostles nor angels could fill. But there was *another* disciple who was very much 'under a cloud', as we speak – although for an altogether different reason. And, yes, you have guessed, that disciple was Peter.

For the very last time that he (Peter) had seen the Lord Jesus was when, following our Lord's trial before the Jewish authorities, he (Peter), standing by a coal fire kindled by the servants of the Jewish High Priest, had denied ever knowing the Saviour – and that three times – and that with swearing and cursing – following which, the Lord having turned and looked on him, Peter had gone out and wept bitterly. It was not a happy memory! And only Peter knew what agony of soul and self-reproach he had suffered since that horrific experience.

And it was therefore a lovely touch when, in announcing the Lord's resurrection to the women who visited the then empty tomb early that very morning, the angel had told them, 'Go, tell His disciples *and Peter*, He goes

before you into Galilee; there you will see Him'.<sup>3</sup> How important was that addition, 'and Peter', for, without it, Peter would likely have assumed that, on account of his sad and inexcusable lapse, he had forfeit the right to be regarded any longer as a disciple, and that he was therefore excluded from the Lord's instruction and promise. But no, 'tell His disciples *and Peter*, He goes before you into Galilee' were the words. And now, before Peter or any of the other disciples had the opportunity to leave Jerusalem for Galilee – and, indeed, before that very day was out – our Lord, in His boundless mercy, met with Peter alone.

And we have no way of knowing what transpired between them in that private interview. For the Holy Spirit has shrouded – has drawn a veil – over everything ... over Peter's blushes ... over any contrite confession on his part of his sin and sorrow ... over any expression by our Lord of His continued love and of His forgiveness ... over everything!

What we know is that, when the Lord met Peter again, in the company of the other apostles later that day, there was no barrier – no shadow – between Peter and the Lord – nothing to hinder Peter from enjoying the Lord's presence and company. Well has one written :

Though failure prostrates in the dust  
And tear's hope's empty cup may fill,  
This helps the contrite heart to trust:  
He loves me still: He loves me still.<sup>4</sup>

In one sense therefore, everything about Peter's denials was settled by that private interview. But in another sense all was not yet over.

You may remember that at the outset, I said there were *two* occasions when the apostle had direct and personal dealings with the Risen Lord. And, in connection with the second, I quoted just now the words of the angel to the women at the empty tomb, 'Go, tell His disciples and Peter, He goes before you into Galilee; there you will see Him'. And that they did.

'After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias', we read – 'the Sea of Tiberias' being another name for 'the Sea (or 'Lake') of Galilee. And if it was once by a coal fire in the court of the High Priest that Simon Peter had denied the Lord three times, so it is now by another coal fire – this time on the shore of the Lake – that three times Jesus asked him, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me' – and that, far from rejecting or disowning Peter on account of his previous failure, in response to Peter's threefold affirmation of his love and allegiance, the Saviour allocated to him a new role and work in His kingdom.

And so, if in his *private* meeting with the Lord Jesus, Peter was restored to the Lord's *fellowship*, in his *public* encounter with Him, Peter was restored to the Lord's *service*. What a wonderful Lord and Master we have.

Without a doubt, Peter is the classic case *in the New Testament* of someone who failed the Lord badly, but who was subsequently fully restored – both to the Lord Himself and to His service. I close with words which we owe to the man who is, without a doubt, the classic case *in the Old Testament* of someone who failed the Lord badly, but who was fully restored ... I refer, as you may have guessed, to King David, and to the very well-known words of Psalm 23 ... 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul'.

I can almost hear Simon Peter's heartfelt 'Amen' to those last words.

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<sup>1</sup> Jud. 16. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we learn from the gospels that Peter was also the first man to enter our Lord's now empty tomb.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 16. 7.

<sup>4</sup> I Y Ewan.