

Not Different but Opposite

The work of God within us is a hidden work. Sometimes the Lord gives us a glimpse of what He is doing, but mostly we are left to wonder about the trials, the perplexities, the strange lands that we suddenly find ourselves in. Sometimes the Lord is near and sometimes He is away. Sometimes everything seems the same, yet when we look back we see that everything is different. Then we know that we have changed and are moving on and it is His doing, and though not seeing the inner workings yet feeling them, we, like the apostle Peter, commit the keeping of our souls to Him as unto a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4.19).

Before he was the apostle Peter, Simon son of Jonah was a common Galilean fisherman. A look at his life gives an appreciation of the vastness of the change – one might say the metamorphosis – that took place in him. On his being brought to Christ, the Lord first beholds him and prophesies that *“Thou art Simon the son of Jonah: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone”* (John 1.42). At this initial stage, though carnal, his desire is to follow Jesus. Looking at these two men, Jesus and Simon, we see such a disparity. The one desiring to follow is most unlike Him whom he follows. And the more he follows and the closer he gets, the more seemingly unlike Christ he is. The very nearness to the Lord brings out his foolishness, his sin, his Adam-ness. But he is a true disciple who despite all failings yearns to be near the Messiah and be like Him. And we who know the end of his story know that he was indeed a true disciple.

Nominal Christians will little value the extraordinariness of the change in this chosen vessel, and even less understand the wonder of the work of God in re-making the entire being of this man. God’s work is mysterious, deep – in that man and no less in us.

It is in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, far from Judea and the religious crowd that Simon Bar-Jonah first begins to see who he really is, as Jesus had foretold those many months before.

And he only sees it when he sees something else – Someone else – first! Let us look at the scripture in the 16th chapter of Matthew’s gospel:

¹³ When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

¹⁴ And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

¹⁵ He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

By revelation Simon sees who Jesus is: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. The Lord replies that he is blessed because he is given this truth by revelation from above, and not by any natural ability. By natural ability we may know about the historical Jesus, the man Jesus, His miracles, His teachings etc but it is only by the Spirit that we can see and know the Lord Himself and know who He really is. Simon Peter and we are very blessed when we see truth by revelation because revelation by the Spirit is the rock in our lives that can never be moved. We may hold certain beliefs in high regard, in high degree of probability. They may well be truth, but insofar as they are not revelatory truth they must always be defended and supported. That which is received by revelation requires no defence, no support, and is the rock of all calmness that can never be moved, and is that only upon which the Church is built and will be built. (vs.18). And the building work of the Church is in its members, in you and in me. The Word by revelation is what builds us and thereby the Church.

But Simon is doubly blessed because he sees who Jesus is. In seeing who Jesus is he is about to receive another revelation, for when the Lord sees what Simon sees He says to him: Now that you see who I am, now I will show you who *you* are. *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter...*(vs.18) We will never know who we are until we see who He is. He shows us, as Simon, our true identity which is not son of Jonah – not a son of Adam – but of that Rock which is Christ. Until we know Him and know ourselves in Him as, like Him, Son of God, we do not know ourselves at all and the building work of the Church is in suspense. The Lord is saying: Upon the *revealed* Word I will build my Church. (We may note in passing that the unanointed, carnally interpreted, dead letter word, is that upon which Babylon, the false church, is built.)

The revealed word here gives Simon the first recognition of who Jesus is whereupon the Lord tells Simon the ramifications of this. “On this rock I will build my church.” It is HIM *and* the revelation – progressive – of Him which will build the church, His church. Note how important this question of identity through revelation from God is – of Him, and we in Him! Not just to individuals, but to God too, to the work of God, to the building of the Church, and eventually to the world – to the bringing in of the Kingdom and the salvation of the world. The church is built on the progressive, unfolding revelation of Jesus Christ and who He is IN us. The coming forth, the growing up, the forming of Christ in us is the whole story of redemption particularly unveiled in the Book of Revelation. It is the revealing of an inner kingdom.

When the Lord showed Simon who he was, He said: *You are Peter*. Lest we lose the significance of this let us first consider who was Simon Bar-Jonah. This name shows who the man was in nature, in himself, before the Lord encounters him. In Hebrew, ‘bar’ or ‘ben’ means ‘son’, and jonah means a dove or pigeon. In the book of Hosea this bird is called a silly bird and a trembling bird. So this natural man, Simon, son of a pigeon by nature, is feeble, fretful, a flutterer, easily flustered and impetuous (albeit well-meaning). With every bit of his flesh he would serve the Lord – or so he thinks. Simon must learn (and he has the best teacher) that the flesh profits nothing, no matter how good its intentions.

The name Peter tells who this man really is from the foundation of the world. It is this one into whom Simon is being transformed by the Spirit.

Peter, the stone is part of the great Rock, Christ, and though smaller in size is of the same substance and nature. Peter and we as living stones are built up into Him, the same substance as He, a temple of God in the Spirit. As Peter later writes in his epistle: *“living stones built up a spiritual house...”* (1Peter 2.5). The stones, though the same substance and nature of Christ, differ one from another in particular attributes and expression and function. What’s more, they are in their nature, facets and attributes, diametrically opposite to the old creation man dead and buried.

No one else, dear One, is the exact expression of Christ in God that you are. This is your identity, the reason you were made. In this you find out who you are. The Father has only unique Sons. Ah! But with a family resemblance.

If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. (2Cor 5.17). He is not the old man disciplined, or cognitively restructured, or behaviourally redirected, all these being changes to the outward man. He is a brand new man because regenerated at and from the centre of his being. Everything is new. And we come to discover in our own lives and the lives of bible saints that the new is also the opposite. The early church could only turn the world upside down because individually they had been turned upside down.

Consider the opposites in Simon and Peter. Do we not even commonly say “as light as a feather; as solid as a rock!” The one, impetuous; highly emotional; with carnal understanding: “Thou shalt never wash my feet”(John 13.8); self confident: “Though all men deny thee, yet will I not deny thee”; headstrong: “shall we smite with the sword?” but before comes the answer, out comes the sword, and off comes the ear. (Luke 22.49,50). In the gospels the stories of Simon are numerous. All of these characteristics of bar-Jonah, ben-Adam must be tried and found wanting, and be brought into death.

Then we see Peter. See him in Acts 2 leading the apostles, addressing the multitude, and God mightily anointing his word. In Acts 3&4 being used of God in miraculous healing and in preaching boldly and defying the secular powers. This man is a rock of the early church. And from a rock he goes on to be a pillar of rock. The apostle Paul says: *“the gospel for the circumcised was Peter’s... God who had done such great work in Peter’s ministry for the Jews...therefore James, Cephas (Peter) and John...were the recognised PILLARS of the church...(Galatians 2.7-9)(Phillips N.T.).* What Peter is, Simon, as Simon, could never be.

Indeed, Peter is not Simon with a makeover. Peter is Simon dead and resurrected. Lest we should think Simon gets better, gets improved on, he doesn’t. He dies. But Peter rises. All the great failings of Simon – these very things – are the great strengths of Peter. If we were to look at Simon’s weaknesses – every one – we would see that each one becomes its opposite in Peter. The daily death and resurrection, which is the inner work of God in us, effects this transformation. This indeed gives us hope and gives us reason to say, as Paul, “I glory in my weaknesses” (2 Corinthians 12.9).

Our present temporary, often troublous state is that we, as Simon Peter was, are in a transformative/transitionary process from one species of being to another species of being. We are exiting our “Simon” and entering into our “Peter”. As we become more into Christ, sin and failings will become less and less. The creature in the cocoon that is half way between a caterpillar and a butterfly will still exhibit some features and deeds of the grub, and these becoming less and less, and the butterfly becoming more and more as the change continues. The grub ever minds the things of the dirt; the butterfly, the things of the heavens.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (Romans. 8.5).

And the process is one way and unstoppable. Never do butterflies turn into grubs. But the organism must remain (abide) in the cocoon for the metamorphosis to be complete.

Even so must we abide in Him. Simon Peter did that, despite all his failings which were many. Many were his repentances; many were God’s forgivenesses. He was humbled much; he was promoted much. He loved Jesus much, and *“The one who loved much is forgiven much”* (Luke 7.47).

Although John, his comrade in arms, was “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, Peter is, I believe, “the disciple who loved Jesus” – *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee!* (John 21.15).

The cross, the death, the resurrection, the abiding life are God’s one-way passage to the new creation, or Man in the image of God.

Dear One, you know that in your Adamic heritage you have failings, shortcomings, sins that beset you from time to time. Realise that in Christ – in these very areas – lie your greatest strengths. And in these very areas, whether or not it is clear to you, there lies your coming ministry. Where in you there is anger, there will be gentleness. Where there is intolerance there will be patience. If you have problems with lust, God is transforming this into its opposite which is love. Purity will be your strong point. Truly, as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (1Cor.15.49), and it is happening progressively through the inner work of the Holy Spirit, daily, now.

And for this to happen, what now must we do?

And now, little children, abide in Him.
(1John 2.28).

Amen, Lord.

Prayer:

Lord, that I may know Thee..

Lord Jesus, let me know who You are that I might know who I am.

And, Lord, let me be who I am, and let me be not who I am not.

Addendum

THE CENTRE

In the days when I was a young Christian the Spirit spoke to me saying 'The opposite of love is not hate'. As I thought on this, the Spirit of the Lord continued 'The opposite of love is lust'.

As I've meditated on this over the years it is clear – love and hate are both outward going forces seeking to touch their object, certainly in different ways, but lust is an inward moving force seeking to bring in the object to itself to use (and abuse) and ultimately to devour it.

The difference between the Old Man and the New Man is all about the Centre in each of us. In the former state, the centre is inwardly inclined i.e. LUST in all its proclivities, sexual lust being an obvious one as the word 'lust' to most people connotes things sexual. But this is but one expression of lust. In the New Man the centre is outward going which is love. *"Love seeketh not her own"* (1 Corinthians 13.5).

'The Old Man' is a term that describes a heart condition. It is a condition where the heart is inwardly inclined, self-seeking, self-centred. In regeneration, Christ is born in the Centre; the whole proclivity, direction of the heart reverses about face. We see here that truly the Old Man IS DEAD. This is the centre and God works from the centre outward. The work of God by the Holy Spirit progresses from the centre to the periphery, the most outer being the physical body. Therefore, the body may be called 'the body of sin' because it is not (yet) touched by regeneration, but still has the sin principle residing in its members. (Romans 7.23). All sin is LUST in various forms, spiritual and natural. (2 Peter 1.4). Herein is our daily struggle: not with the Old Man (who is dead: Romans 6.6) but with sin in the outer part of our being. Hence, *"We that are in this tabernacle do groan."* (2 Corinthians 5.4).

There are but two philosophies in the universe: Self for Others i.e. LOVE; and Self for Self i.e. LUST. These are the diametrically opposed arch opposites. What a momentous change comes into Man upon Regeneration! How awesome really is Salvation! And how impossible is it to effect any fundamental and permanent and remedial change in Man other than by Jesus Christ altering the bent of the Centre.

Obvious it is too that mankind if unchanged is ruined utterly and goes on into perdition (destruction). Praise God for His unspeakable gift!

The following is an extract from: The Sealing of the 144,000 by JP Eby
As the river of God flowed out of the Paradise of God, it divided and went in four directions. This is a type or symbol of the life of God, flowing out of the kingdom of God to the whole earth! Individually, it means the life of God within our spirit flowing out into soul and body. Our soul and body can never live in incorruption apart from the life-giving spirit! The nature of God's wonderful river of life is that it flows outward. "OUT FROM your innermost being will flow rivers of living water" is the great truth of it! Ezekiel once had a vision of a river that flowed out of the temple and got deeper and deeper as it flowed out to the sea (body realm, raging, surging masses of humanity), and it healed the sea, or gave life to all who dwell in the lowest realm of existence. The minute the river starts flowing inward, there is death. The life always flows *out* from the source of life, from the higher dimension to the lower. And in its outward, universal application, God Himself is the source, the wellspring; Jesus Christ our Lord is the fountain, the reservoir of this wonderful life; and the sons of God are the channel or river by which God's life shall be communicated to the arid barrenness of the earth realm. Thank God that this river now flows! The life of Jesus Christ is flowing as a mighty river out from the throne of God! First it is flowing out of our own spirit into the soul and onward into the body of each member of God's elect, bringing redemption, life, transformation, and immortality to our whole man! Then it flows out from us unto creation to quicken, and restore all things and all men everywhere! (end of extract)

The Lord Jesus promised that: *"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."* (John 7.38).

A river is virtually unstoppable. It overcomes all barriers. If an obstacle gets in its way, it pushes it out of the way or makes a new way round. The river of the Spirit of God overcomes all obstacles.

There are rivers of healing in our souls, and these have been effecting a transforming work turning us from mere humans, mere sons of Adam into Sons of God. As we go on looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, we find that God has placed within us mighty rivers of healing, blessing and joy for others also. And this river, like God, is infinite. It is a weight of glory that is too much to contain. We cannot keep it to ourselves.

John Joseph