

BREAD FOR THE BRIDE: Celebrating the Overcomer

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When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Phillipi, He asked His disciples, saying “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” So they said “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, ”But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Matt. 16:13-16) The greatest confession a human being can make had just come out of Peter's mouth, yet just a few moments later he unwittingly became Satan's tool to confound the redemption of mankind.

'From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (Matt. 16:21-22)

In Luke chapter 4 The Bible speaks about three great temptations of Christ, then in Luke 4:13 we read “and when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.” Right there on the road, in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Satan was presented with that opportune moment of time. I want your spiritual eyes and ears to be open to perceive and know the mass of weight that was brought to bear on Jesus through those words spoken through His closest human friend: “Far be it from You Lord! This shall not happen to You!” I want to impress you with the sheer horror of that moment. I want the Spirit to reveal to you the utter disaster that was waiting in the wings of eternity.

Look at the preceding events. Jesus had been teaching them the difference between reason and faith, between flesh and spirit. They'd been arguing because He told them to beware of the bread of the Pharisees. They'd reasoned together that He must be upset because no-one had remembered to bring bread, but they were wrong. “Why do you reason among yourselves?” He said (v. 8) They'd witnessed Him multiply loaves and fish. They'd seen Him feed over 4000 people supernaturally. He had taught them “the words I speak they are Spirit....” (John 6 :63). His words are Spirit - they are of Heaven, not earth. He said, “Stop reasoning spiritual things into natural things!”

Peter had just been used of the Holy Spirit to articulate, to confess, to proclaim the Messiahship, the Sonship, the Heavenly nature of Jesus. He'd spoken words of the Spirit, revelation straight from Heaven that flesh and blood could not know. Jesus had said: “Blessed are you Peter for it is My Father alone who has allowed

you to perceive this revelation of Who I am, and you Have spoken it forth and now it is proclaimed on the earth and I will build My church on this very revelation that you have spoken, and because you have spoken it, you shall receive keys that will unlock the Kingdom on this earth!” (Matt. 16:17-19, my paraphrase)

And then, in verse 21, it says “from THAT time” What time? The time of revelation of the Christ! Because they knew who He was and had heard it proclaimed, Jesus began to “show them that He must go to Jerusalem, He must suffer many things, He must be killed, He must be raised on the third day.” And here is Peter - so very soon after speaking revealed truth direct from the Spirit of God. From the same heart, from the same mouth, the words spill out: “Far be it from You Lord! This shall not happen to You! “

Peter heard Jesus words: “ I MUST go up to Jerusalem”. And reason said: “Ah but Lord they don't like you In Jerusalem, it's dangerous. Those scribes and priests, I think they want to kill you!”

“I MUST suffer at their hands.”

“Ah but Lord, you are the Son of God!”

“I MUST die”.

“Ah but Lord, you are the Messiah, come to reign over Israel”

“I MUST be raised up.”

But Peter was already too far down the path of reason to stop himself from blurting out: “Far be it from You, Lord! This shall not happen to You!”

The voice of human reason - “Lord, what you are saying is so far from my understanding, so remote from my way of thinking and interpreting the scriptures. We have just agreed that You are Messiah, You are the very Son of God and for that very reason this shall not happen to YOU!” He made it personal. “Lord this can happen to other men, but this shall NOT happen to the Son of God. This cannot happen to Israel's Messiah! What are you thinking Lord? Have you momentarily lost your powers of reason?” And at that moment Peter handed Satan the opportunity he'd been craving.

Now I don't know about you, but I know a little about me and I have no doubt right at that moment I would have wanted more than anything else to receive Peter's words. Jesus knew exactly what awaited Him in Jerusalem - humiliation, mocking, torture, abandonment and agonizing death. Here He was at Caesarea Philippi - a Gentile town near the sea. Escape routes abounded. Why not get on a boat and sail far away, perhaps spending the rest of His life preaching in synagogues and baptizing? Or He could turn back, settle in some little Galilee town and set up a rabbinical school. There in the road, came the moment Satan dealt his best hand. Peter had made it personal, and Satan made it personal too.

“You know he does have a point, Jesus. It doesn't have to be the way you think it has to be. You can serve Your Father much more effectively by continuing Your teaching ministry a while longer. These guys aren't ready for Jerusalem - hey, give them a break. They need You to stick around! They're going to fall apart without You, and then where will Your plans for a church end up? Maybe You HAVE gone a little bit too far. Maybe You ARE a little too intense about all this Cross business. There are other ways, you know. How about You chill out, rest a while and take stock. You're frightening them - be reasonable!”

One day sitting at my computer, meditating on this crucial passage, I was given a glimpse of this scene in the Spirit. I heard the pleading voice of Peter, I heard the smooth, seducing tones of the deceiver as he whispered his lies into Jesus mind. And I experienced a new depth of insight into the extraordinary agony of weight that Jesus was placed under at that moment. I don't mind sharing it broke my heart and left me deeply affected for several hours afterward.

Do we have any understanding at all of what happened there on the road that day? The Bible says Jesus was in all ways tempted as we are (Heb. 4:15). Can we begin to comprehend what He went through here, and do we perceive the magnitude of what He did for us in that moment? He loved Peter, but Peter had allowed himself to become the enemy's tool. His closest friend was standing in front of him saying “No Lord these things cannot happen to you because of WHO You are”. But the truth was these things MUST Happen to Him PRECISELY BECAUSE OF WHO HE WAS.

The place Jesus walked through in that moment on that road was a place of profound and horrible testing the depth of which we cannot appreciate. We think of the temptations in the wilderness and we think “wow, that was really something”, and it was. The whole thrust of each of Satan's temptations to Jesus in the wilderness was to divert Him from His course. That was what he was about. He didn't care what else Jesus did. He wouldn't have cared if He'd lived the holiest life on earth - as long as He lived and didn't die on the Cross. But Satan took what he learned from that defeat and waited his moment for one final, all out assault. He doesn't play fair. He doesn't engage in rules of war. He brought everything he had left against Jesus through the very one who had just spoken forth truth direct from Heaven's Throne Room. Satan speaking through reason offered Him a way out, a different path, another plan.

The weight placed on Jesus at that moment was exceedingly heavy, more than we can know. At that moment Jesus faced Satan once again, isolated and forsaken by those closest to Him. He stood as a man misunderstood and friendless. He stood separated even from those who knew who He was and thought they understood His

mission. the same old words echoed through his soul.... "If You are the Son of God....."

"If You are the Son of God surely You, who can call legions of angels to Your defense, You who created the Heavens and the Earth, You who are the dearest apple of Your Father's Eye....IF You are the Son of God, surely this shall not happen to YOU of all men, surely there is NO CROSS FOR YOU, oh Mighty One!"

But it was not the Father's plan, and it was not the Spirit's path. You talk about spiritual warfare - well don't. Don't boast to me about the demons you've cast out or wrestlings with principalities and powers. Don't go boasting to me about this confrontation and that confrontation, because if and when you ever know this dimension of warfare all boasting will cease. This was spiritual warfare at its foundations. This is the heart and soul of spiritual warfare. And if we can't come into a place of overcoming in this place where Jesus stood that day, then we are fooling ourselves about being warriors for His Kingdom.

Reason versus revelation. Fear versus faith. Flesh versus Spirit. It's the greatest battle you'll ever face. Jesus said "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on His throne." (Rev. 3:21) Look at Christ's letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. There are seven letters and seven commands to overcome as He overcame. It's the Revelation of Jesus Christ - the revelation of the One who has overcome. It's a book of warfare. And one of its keys is overcoming.

Satan made it personal, and then Jesus made it personal. He turned from Peter and addressed Satan: "Get behind Me Satan, You are an offence to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt. 16:23). Let me put it another way: "Get out of My Face, you are in my way!"

And then I want you to see the victory of that place. I want you to understand to some deeper degree what occurred here, because it affects you and me deeply. Our eternal fate is directly linked into this event on that road near Caesarea-Phillipi. If Jesus had agreed and surrendered to the voice of reason, you and I would not be here now gathered together in His Name. If He'd not chosen the Voice of the Spirit over the voice of flesh there'd be no New Testament. If He'd not denied Himself and taken up His Cross, even at that moment it would have been all over for you and me. I can't think of it without trembling. I can't speak of it without wonder. How can we just pass over it and not worship Him? He is worthy to be Savior, worthy to be Lord and worthy to be followed.

Listen, I don't care what the voice of reason tells you - there IS a cross. It's not reasonable; it looks like foolishness to the world. "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up HIS cross and follow me." And it's personal. "Let him

take up HIS cross. “ You don't take up His Cross, you take up your own cross. There's one for you, and there's one for me, and there's one for every true believer. Yours is going to look different to mine, but they all have one purpose - the crucifixion of the flesh. And when God brings the Cross to bear in your life, the enemy is going to offer you all kinds of alternatives and escape routes, and your flesh is going to reason with you because those two are in agreement.

The Cross is not optional, it's stock standard if you're following Jesus. Am I being morbid? No, I'm glorifying the Life of Christ in us. Am I making you uncomfortable? I hope so. I know it makes me uncomfortable, but it's only my flesh. “Ah, but it's Christmas...not Easter. Time to celebrate His birth, not mourn His death.” No, my friends, time to celebrate His birth, life, death, and resurrection. The shadow of the Cross was there when His newborn Body was swathed in cloth and laid in a crude wooden manger, a prophetic sign proclaimed by the Angel of the Lord: “This shall be a sign to you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:12) The shadow of the Cross was there in the frankincense and myrrh brought by the men from the east. Many years later He would lay Himself down against the splintery wood of a Roman cross. Later His body would be anointed with frankincense and myrrh, and wrapped tightly in fine linen for burial. The promise of His resurrection was there in the star that shone through the darkness, for He has become the Bright Morning Star (Rev. 22:16). If we choose only to celebrate His Birth and deny the power of His death and resurrection we cannot call Him Savior.

Where is the Cross being applied in your life right now? Are you recognizing it for what it is or are you calling it some other name? “ Oh, that devil, you know he just will not leave me alone. He just sends me tribulation after tribulation.” Well, guess what? God gave Him permission! “In this world you will Have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). I'm not saying we don't resist evil, or take a stand against spiritual attack, but the church desperately needs to grow up in discerning what comes from where, and we can only do that by walking in the Spirit because your flesh will tell you everything difficult is the devil.

Peter didn't discern what He was listening to. Satan took hold of the very deepest fear in Peter, the same fear that is in every human being, the last fear to be overcome - the fear of death. “Lord though I should die with you, yet I will not deny You, and likewise said all the disciples.” (Matt. 26:35). We know the result. They denied Jesus because they couldn't deny themselves. Would we have been any different?

But Satan didn't have the last word on Peter - not by a long shot. Turn to John 21. It is after the crucifixion, it is after the Resurrection and prior to Jesus departure

from the earth. Seven of the disciples, Peter one of them, have gone fishing and while they are out there on the lake Jesus prepares a breakfast and then invites them to eat with Him. We read from verse 14: “This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah do you love Me more than these?’”

Now this is the crucial question in the whole chapter. The Holy Spirit wants to show us something here. You see Peter loved Jesus before that question came. Peter loved Jesus on that road near Caesarea Philippi when he said, “You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Peter loved Jesus the first time he set eyes on him, because he left straightaway and followed him. Peter loved Jesus at Gethsemane when he ran away; Peter loved Jesus when he stood in the High Priest's courtyard and denied him three times. Peter loved Jesus when Jesus hung on the cross at Calvary, but he couldn't bring himself to stand there with him. Jesus was not calling into question Peter's love for Him. He was questioning it's depth.

But Jesus said, “Do you love me MORE than these?” What's the “these” we ask? Well, does it matter? Peter, do you love me more than these men here with you, your closest friends? Peter do you love me more than this life as a fisherman on the shores of Galilee? Peter do you love me more than your tradition, culture, and life as you've known it? Peter do you love me MORE than life itself?

You see, it's not enough to love Jesus. Many people love Jesus. Many people in Israel loved Jesus. The rich young ruler loved Jesus, but he loved his wealth more (Mark 10:21-22). The scripture says he went away grieved because he was very wealthy. But he never went to Calvary with Him. Judas loved Jesus - but he loved money more. He never went to Calvary either. The crowds that Jesus multiplied the fish and the bread for loved Jesus. They loved His miracles and they loved his signs and wonders, but they loved their lives more. The scripture says many of them departed from Him because His words were too hard (John 6:66). Our churches today are full of people who love Jesus, but sadly lacking in people who love Him MORE. Do we wonder who the Bride is? Put simply, she is made up of the ones who love Him “more than all these”. What is the 'these' in your life? I tell you the same as Jesus told Peter that day on the seashore. There's no room left for “these”. Whatever we love more than Jesus is idolatry. Are you ready for that? Was Peter ready?

Peter had his day of reckoning with Jesus right there on the beach at Galilee. It went right back to that day on the road at Caesarea-Phillipi. I believe he was ready, because Jesus, having looked into his heart gave him a profound prophetic word, “Most assuredly I say to you when you were younger you girded yourself and

walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.' This He spoke signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me" (John 21:18).

His words must have echoed deeply in Peter's memory. Where was it He had heard Jesus speak in such a way? Ah, yes, of course - back there on that road to Caesarea Phillipi, when Jesus had set His Face irreversibly towards Jerusalem. He had been talking only to His disciples. There were no crowds, no multitudes, no Scribes or Pharisees - just Jesus and the closest ones to Him. And yet He said to them: IF any of you want to follow Me, LET HIM take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. 16:24). Now here on the beach Jesus simply looks at Peter and says "Follow Me!" Follow where? For a walk along the beach? No! In the clouds to Heaven? No! Where then?

The New Testament does not record how Peter died, but historical tradition tells us Peter was in Rome ministering to the church there when he was warned of his imminent arrest and execution. Not wanting to lose him, the believers urged him to leave the city immediately, and he hurriedly prepared to do so. Moving quickly out through the city gates Peter looked up and saw a vision of Jesus walking in the opposite direction into the city. He called out "Lord where are you going?" And He heard the Lord answer "I go to be crucified..." And Peter, understanding, turned around and walked back into the city, where he was duly arrested and crucified.

Reason would have said, "No, Peter surely it makes more sense that you remain alive to go on strengthening the believers and teaching them the words of Jesus. After all, you're one of the last ones alive who walked with Him, one of the last eyewitnesses". But Peter wasn't able to be swayed by the voice of reason this time. He had become an overcomer.

Overcomers are not born of flesh, they're handcrafted by God. He uses fiery trials, tribulations and testings to create them just the way He wants them. He uses different tools for each one and each one is an individual work of art. But there's something every overcomer knows without exception, and it's this: There IS a Cross and there's no way round it for those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. To those whose god is reason, its foolishness. To those who are overcoming it's the power Of God. (1 Cor. 1:18).

The world does not need any more heroes. It needs overcomers. As we celebrate the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Savior of the world this season, let's celebrate more than a Christmas card image of the helpless infant lying in a hay-filled manger. Let's celebrate Christ the Overcomer. Let's celebrate the fact that because He overcame, we too are being handcrafted as overcomers in His own

image. And let's understand that without the Cross, there is no overcoming.

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