

Luke 22:54-62
John 21:2-18

THE BREAK POINT

What is wrong with a woman making love with a man to whom she is not married? What is wrong with a man making love to a woman if they are not married? What is wrong with giving money to a person who has decided to survive by living off of other people's charity? What is wrong with telling lies if it gets you what you want, or keeps you from having unpleasantness with somebody? What is wrong with killing somebody who annoys you? Most of all, what do these things all have in common? If you have never been to Phase Three Christianity, punishment is the only reason to avoid such behavior. Most of the world has not been to Phase Three Christianity, so it goes on doing some or all of these and many other matching things, generation after weary generation. It does not work. It does not come out the way they think. But many never learn because it is not a matter of rules, primarily – it is a matter of values. It is a matter of knowing a different dimension and seeing life from a different dimension.

I will tell you the answer, but if you have not moved into Phase Three Christianity, it will make no sense to you and you will not be able to remember it. Even those of us who have been into Phase Three are known to occasionally forget, at moments – to descend to former levels – until, with a shock of dismay, we reawaken. What all of the above behaviors hold in common is this: They do not see people as valuable, as eternal souls, as precious children of God. That is the anatomy of all self-centered actions. They do not see life as something holy which we share and participate in as God's children – and in God's presence. Life is only about me, what I want, what I desire. Even if I like you, it is about me and what I like (at the moment). It is not about you. More importantly, it is not about God.

You remember Jesus' famous statement to Jimmy Carter? *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28) To look with lust means you see only your own desire and not the other person's value or purpose or true identity. By the way, no rule or punishment will ever stand for very long against lust. Lust is one of

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the Seven Deadly Sins, and none of the seven are easy to deal with. Only LOVE is strong enough to withstand and overcome lust.

These are just words – strange and meaningless words – until we enter Phase Three. And none of this is the central focus of Phase Three. Such perspectives are merely side effects.

How did Peter get into Phase Three? The same way anybody does: it is THE BREAK POINT – the breaking of the heart, the will, the soul.

A young boy was studying for his bar mitzvah. The text that day was Deuteronomy 6. The young lad asked, “Rabbi, why does it say we should keep all these words and statutes ‘on’ our hearts? Why are we not instructed to keep them ‘in’ our hearts?” The rabbi smiled with appreciation, and replied, “It is not in our power to put God’s words and will within our hearts. We put them *on* our hearts, so that when the heart breaks, God’s Word will drop in.”

This is the story of when Peter’s heart broke and The Word dropped in. Peter’s Second Conversion – Phase Three. It has gone FROM FISHERMAN TO DISCIPLE – FROM DISCIPLE TO APOSTLE – FROM APOSTLE TO SHEPHERD OF SOULS. Note that we do not lose what we gained from earlier phases. Peter never ceases to be *disciple* – learner and follower. Jesus is his Teacher, his Master. Peter never stops being *apostle* – Message-bearer and spokesman. Jesus is his Lord. But at the Break Point, Master and Lord are not enough. Jesus is Savior, or you do not make it.

The Second Conversion changes Peter even more than the first one. The content and meaning of Jesus’ mission move beyond the appeal of an earthly kingdom ... to the grace and forgiveness of God, and to awareness of a Kingdom beyond this world. Peter’s pride is shattered. Not nicked – shattered. His dreams and ambitions are scrapped, to return later on levels most earthlings either do not see or would not want. As he enters Phase Three, instead of an overt joy and delighted enthusiasm, Peter is on the brink of despair and near suicide. The joy that finally comes is out of range to Phase One and Phase Two perceptions, and so deep that no earthly sorrow can destroy it. In all ways, the Second Conversion is devastation and awakening ... dying and resurrection ... being born anew ... transformation. It is Moses so long on the mountain that they think

he has perished. It is Elijah asking permission to die in the desert cave on Mount Sinai. It is Paul blinded on the road to Damascus. It is Peter in a night so bitter that if he emerges at all, it will no longer be as a child of this earth. He will never again be mere headhunter – interested in the statistics, how many came to the meeting, how many joined the Movement. He will truly care about people and their inner spiritual journey. He will be a nurturer, a spiritual mentor, an under-shepherd of the Great Shepherd. Words are slow and poor. Let us come back to it in context.

Follow it with me as Peter comes to “point zero,” and the end of his own strength. It begins with the incident we spoke of last week. Jesus says to him, *“Get thee behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not on the side of God, but of men.”* Peter had thought himself to be Jesus’ right arm and strongest supporter. Now Jesus, with some fierceness, declares that he is still the enemy. And it happens right while Peter is trying his hardest, and even declaring Jesus’ true identity.

In the outer story, the resistance to Jesus has been increasing. Threats and opposition have risen to serious proportions. Many former supporters have become so alarmed or frightened that, as Scripture says, they no longer “go about with him.” Peter just gets more loyal, and more determined. He assumes that Jesus trusts him totally. If Jesus can trust anybody, He can trust Peter. And that, of course, is precisely true – at this point, Jesus is unable to count on anybody.

Then, at the Last Supper, Jesus states outright that He expects Peter to deny Him. The second blow! First he is called “Satan.” Now he is accused of desertion. What has Peter done or failed to do to provoke such hurtful statements from Jesus? Lots of us would have packed it up right there. “We don’t need this,” we would have said. “After all our hard work and sincere efforts and personal friendship? The hell with you!” We hear it all the time. “I didn’t get my toy train ... my mommy died ... I lost my job ... my friend got cancer ... your church hurt my feelings – the hell with you.”

Peter is not easily dissuaded. He protests Jesus’ judgments emphatically. He swears they are not true. He will gladly lay down his life for Jesus.

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Then Jesus is arrested. Will you please notice that Peter had not been kidding? If you jump to shallow conclusions about the level of Peter's denial, you will never understand his story. Peter *is* ready to fight and die, just like he promised. Peter grabs his sword and wades into the temple police despite the impossible odds. (John 18:10) There is no trace of cowardice; it is Jesus' rebuke that stops him. (Matthew 26:52-53) Then Jesus says to him, "*Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*" One legion of angels could have taken on the entire Roman Empire, no problem. Jesus just means that if He had wanted to play it this way, the entire host of Heaven was at His disposal. The great rift between Jesus and Peter is front and center once again: you cannot serve or defend God's Kingdom with this kind of earthly method. For the third time, Peter is rebuked. Even the wound he has inflicted is healed. (That is probably the only thing that saves Peter's life right then.) At this point, all the disciples flee, and Jesus is carried away by the temple police.

Peter's bubble has burst. Jesus is a prisoner, and no heavenly powers have intervened. This is NOT the script for any Messiah that Peter has ever heard about. So what is Peter *supposed* to do??? Everything he has tried, every way he has turned, it has always been wrong. Have you ever felt that way? Jesus is gone, and Peter himself has run away. But what is he *supposed* to do?! Jesus is on some entirely different wavelength, and nothing Peter can do or say or think of will allow him to be faithful or helpful. Peter has hit the end of his tether, and it is not long enough. His human strength and wisdom cannot follow Jesus any further – not into this crucible. Peter cannot take another step in the power of flesh and blood alone. To get beyond this "wall," he must die and be born anew. Transcend. Lay it down, and turn it over to God – all of it. Then wait some more, until God shows him how to pick it up again in an entirely different WAY.

Peter is not there yet, but he is close. He cannot leave it alone. He slinks back to what is happening – to where they are interrogating Jesus. Only now he *is* confused – and frightened – and all the weakness we all hate has descended upon him. He is not ready for the questions, and the denials pour out, and the rooster crows ... and Jesus looks up at him. Peter goes into the deep six and runs into

the night – blinded by his tears, deafened by the sound of a heart that is breaking. Remember, Peter’s whole life was wrapped up in Jesus and His Movement. He had given the full capacity of his loyalty and love to Jesus.

It is unbearable. Peter cannot hold it together any longer. He has not been faithful, and he no longer even knows what it means to be faithful. With little choice, at this point, Peter lays it down – his life, his pride, his willfulness, his human aspirations. It all disappears into the night ... chasing the cry of a rooster. (Bitter was the night ...) You never want your children, your loved ones, to have to go through such a time – such a dark night of the soul – do you? Isn’t there some other way into the Kingdom? Some easier, softer way?

It is the Break Point. Peter is undone! All that matters most to him, he has forsaken. Unfortunately for Jesus, Peter will not process all of this and rally fast enough to gather all the followers and appear before Pilate at Jesus’ trial. We never seem to get there in time, do we? To be with Him ... to really follow His lead ... to do it His way. “Hey Pilate, no insurrection – it’s your call. But we’re with HIM. Kill Him, kill us. He is the only hope – yours, ours, anybody’s.”

In many ways, Peter will die with Jesus far more than if the soldiers had killed him. He will die in such a way that the fear of death will never again control him. Therefore, the fear of life – success, fame, riches, honor – will no longer control him either. Very shortly, Peter’s life will bear this out.

We must move now – through how many days or weeks we cannot tell for sure – to the other end of Peter’s Second Conversion. There is always a second part to the Second Conversion. We would not last long in part one, if that were all there was to it.

We go to THE LAST BREAKFAST, where Jesus helps Peter pick it up again, on the other side. For some reason unfathomable to me, the general population and even many Christians are not as familiar with the Last Breakfast as they are with other parts of the story. Let us review it quickly.

Peter no longer thinks of himself as chief apostle. He thinks of himself as utter failure. The Break Point does not leave anybody

feeling good about themselves. Yet Peter has been a witness to the Resurrection. How glad that must make him! Jesus is alive, and the Kingdom will move forward, and the power of God has come through at last! But like some of you, Peter is delighted about the Resurrection without feeling himself to be any part of it. Hooray for Jesus – but Peter has failed Jesus. He is no longer worthy to participate in the Movement. It has passed him by and he has missed his chance. At least that is the way he sees it. Gone are all his noble aspirations. He no longer seeks fame or success. The earthly kind no longer matter, and the New Kingdom coming is not for deserters. He has failed. He sees himself as unworthy, useless, and unwanted. He is right about the first two. But the third one is not his call to make. One last time, he has misjudged Jesus, and misunderstood God. He *is* wanted! The whole thing has been about the grace and love of God. He is about to find out about that. And you cannot find out about that until Phase Three. Before Phase Three, they are only pretty words, and even if we say them, they do not register.

Anyway, Peter is finished, washed out, through. He heads back to his former life. He is not going on vacation or indulging in sport – fishing is his trade, his old life. He does not know what else to do. So he goes back to fishing, back up in Galilee.

Then it happens again, just like before. Only, it couldn't be – not after all that has happened. But the nets are bursting again and there are fish everywhere. As the shock goes through him, Peter knows it can only be Jesus, there on the shore. Peter is so consternated with guilt and joy and surprise and eagerness – all at the same time – that he doesn't know what to do. It is really quite humorous. Peter is stripped for work, and he suddenly realizes that he is not supposed to be here, working. These were not his instructions. Quickly he puts on his clothes, like, “Oh, I'm not *really* working.” Then he realizes he cannot fool Jesus. Oh well ... So he jumps overboard. Not to walk on water this time – this time the boat is too slow and he cannot wait to greet Jesus.

Once on shore, everybody is shy and sheepish – you know how it is when there is a lot of unfinished agenda in the air. Jesus suggests some fish for breakfast. You can tell how much tension there is by the way Peter calmly dashes to the boat and hauls the whole net ashore – all 153 fish. Jesus wasn't quite *that* hungry.

A little later, after breakfast, when things have quieted down, Jesus deals with Peter's soul-sickness. Three times he had denied. Now, three times he must reaffirm. How characteristic of Jesus – simple, direct, profound. “Do you love me?” Each affirmation erases the guilt and shame, and replaces the negation and betrayal with affirmation and reinstatement.

Unmistakably, Peter is “back in.” The content of The Word is grace and mercy and love. The unwanted, unworthy, useless servant is wanted and worthy and useful again. The proof is that the commission is reissued. But there is a difference: It is much deeper now – and so is Peter. Before, it was an invitation. Now it is a command. Do not be offended by that word. Jesus is resurrected now. He has conquered sin and death. He cannot pretend to be a simple rabbi anymore. It is a COMMAND: “*Feed my sheep ... tend my sheep ... feed my lambs.*” The image of netting, hooking, or catching people like fish is no longer adequate. Has the church missed this turn, somewhere down the backroad?

Without pride or perfectionism, Peter is about to begin a new ministry in response to a second calling and a second conversion. It is no longer for his own glory or success. It is for Christ and the New Kingdom. Win, lose, or draw is no longer of much importance to Peter. Only one thing matters now: God's will, made known in Jesus Christ.

Peter still has much to learn, as we will see. But he has died to this world, and he belongs to Jesus Christ. He is now an authentic servant/apostle, shepherd-class. Try “Mentor,” if you do not like sheep or shepherds. Peter will go when the Lord says “Go.” He will stay when the Lord says “Stay.” He will endure if the Lord says “Endure.” He will not try to make any more grandstand plays. He will not seek success, or fear defeat. He will not seek defeat, or fear success. Those are irrelevant categories to Phase Three. His life no longer depends upon anything in or of this world. It is “*hid with Christ in God.*” (Colossians 3:3)

Peter may still goof up. But he will not again deny his Lord. He may misunderstand or mistake the Spirit's instructions from time to time – for a while. But he will not again betray his Lord. The world no longer holds anything Peter wants badly enough to make him do that again. And the world is about to have all the same problems with

Peter that it formerly had with the man called Jesus, who has become Peter's Lord and Savior. As you might suspect, that is Phase Four.

PRAYER

With laughter and tears, sweat and blood, patience and determination – You have loved us, and put up with us, and carried us to this present day, O God. We have followed and rebelled; we have believed and doubted; we have seen signs and great wonders; we have felt and known Your truth even though, for us, it is always partly garbled. So we have hated and blamed You, and praised and loved You. And probably it will go on this way for as long as we live in this broken realm. But let us find Your Ways and Paths more than any other, we pray – for apart from You, life is as nothing. And thanks be to You, in Christ Jesus our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.