

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

BEING LIKE PETER

by the Rev. Morley D. Rich

When the Lord walked upon water, Peter tried to come to Him by walking over the water, too. He would have failed and drowned if the Lord had not lifted him up.

We are not surprised that the Lord walked over water, because we know that all things are possible to Him, and that He can do anything He wishes. But it does surprise us that Peter was able to walk on the water. How could Peter do this? Perhaps we can find out by thinking about Peter's life and what kind of a man he was.

The name "Peter" means a "stone" or "rock", and that is why the Lord said to him, "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Again, when the Lord asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?", it was Peter who answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15-18).

On another occasion, just before evil men were about to cast the Lord into prison, Peter told the Lord that he would be true to Him, even if he died because of it. But the Lord answered that He had prayed that Peter's faith would not be taken from him. The Lord also told Peter that he would deny that he knew the Lord three times before the cock crowed. And this came true. For, when the Lord was cast into prison, Peter was afraid that he would be put in prison also. And so, when those who hated the Lord asked Peter if he knew Him, Peter said three times that he didn't. Then the cock crowed, and Peter remembered what the Lord had said and was very sorry.

Later on, when the Lord had risen, and was about to leave this world forever, He came to the disciples, who were fishing. Standing on the shore, the Lord called to them. Peter was so sure that it was indeed the Lord that he jumped into the water and swam to the shore in order to meet Him more quickly.

After the Lord had left this earth, Peter went out with the other disciples to tell the world that the Lord had been born and lived on earth in order to save all people. Peter did this so well that evil men, who did not want the news to be told, punished him severely. But Peter believed what he was telling so surely that he did not stop telling it. And finally, he was put to death because he would not give up his belief. The same thing happened to many others.

Now that we know all these things about Peter, what is the one thing that stands out most clearly? Let us consider when the Lord called Peter a rock and said that He would build His church upon this rock. Of course, this does not mean that the Lord would actually build a church of stone and mortar upon Peter. Did it mean that Peter would be the main person by whom the Lord would tell all people of His Coming, and thus make a new church? Surely he could not have meant that, for the other disciples also worked at this just as much as Peter did. What *did* the Lord mean, then?

All the things which you have now heard about Peter tell us something about his belief in the Lord. And this is the one thing that stands out most clearly in Peter's life. Now, to believe is to know

something so surely and so lovingly that nothing can take away that knowledge. Peter knew that the Lord was indeed the Lord of the whole universe so surely, and he loved Him so much, that nothing could make him give up his belief. And even when he was put to death, he still would not give up his belief. It is the same with us. For example, we may know so surely that our parents love us and will take care of us that no one can make us believe that they do not love us and will not care for us. In the same way, when we have particular friends, we may know them so well and like and believe in them so much that we are willing to take their part against anyone who says that they are not good. It was the same way with Peter, who believed in and loved the Lord so much. Again, the same thing was true of all those disciples who believed in the Lord long ago, and who would die rather than give up their belief. And to these the Lord once said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

And so we see that it was not upon Peter himself that the Lord was going to build His church, but upon everyone (that is, with the help of everyone) who is like Peter. For Peter is like everyone who believes in the Lord so that he is willing to suffer many things without giving up his belief. We all can become like Peter if we will only say to ourselves, "I believe in the Lord, and no one can take that belief away from me." Then we will have a most precious possession; one which will be the only real help to us when we are grown up. Then, too, we will become people upon whom the Lord can build His New Church.

When Peter first knew the Lord, he had not yet become sure of who the Lord really was. And that is why he started to sink while he was walking over the water toward the Lord. He had started to do what the other disciples had not dared, it is true, and had even walked part of the way. But then, he must have begun to wonder whether it really was the Lord who was out there, and whether the Lord was actually able to help him. As soon as he started to think that way, Peter began to be afraid of the waves and started to sink. So he called, "Lord, save me." This shows us that he knew again that the Lord was the only one who could help him. Then the Lord caught him by the hand and drew him out of the water, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31).

In the same way, you are not afraid if someone whom you can trust is near. For example, young children may be afraid of a thunderstorm, but when they remember that their parents are near, then they become brave once more. Perhaps someone feels nervous about going to a party alone, but more confident when a good friend goes along. A wrestler may be afraid of facing a strong opponent, but the encouragement and advice of his coach gives him strength. If there is someone near whom you trust, then you can do things which you could not do if you were trembling with fear.

If, then, like Peter, you really believe in the Lord's power, you will learn not to be afraid even when you have no person to comfort you. For then you will know even more surely than now that ONE far stronger than anyone else is with you, who will guard you from all danger. This One is the Lord, who is our Shepherd and who wants to hold us all in His arms, out of harm's way. And He does this if we believe in Him and follow His Commandments. And if you do this, then indeed you will be able to say of the Lord what King David said in his Psalm:

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You are with me (Psalm 23:4).*

Texts: Matthew 14:22-33, 16:15-18