

SIMON PETER AND HIS GREAT FISHING STORIES

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Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing (John 21:3).

The well-known pianist, Arthur Rubinstein, who spoke fluently in eight languages, told how he was afflicted with a severe cold and hoarseness. When none of the usual remedies gave relief, he made an appointment to see a throat specialist. He said, "I searched his face for a clue during the thirty-minute examination, but it was without expression. He told me to come back the next day. so I went home filled with fears and did not sleep that night. The following day there was another prolonged test and once again it was accompanied by an ominous silence. At last I could stand it no longer and said to the doctor: 'Tell me. what is the matter? I can stand the truth; I have lived a full, rich life. What is wrong with me?' The specialist replied, 'You talk too much!'"

One wonders what that doctor might have said to Simon Peter who was a prolific talker! When God controlled the man's speech, blessings followed; when He did not, trouble could be expected. The Big Fisherman, as he has often been called, usually acted in haste and repented at leisure. At the fire on the night of Christ's arrest a maid terrorized him. Yet when he preached on the Day of Pentecost, Simon was God's man for the moment. Me was the most interesting of all the disciples, and if it were possible to engage him in conversation, his fishing stories would be enthralling. Christians are attracted to him, for they see what they would like to become and in his mistakes, the reflection of what they are. The Lord was also interested in the exploits of Peter and decreed that some of his remarkable fishing stories should be included in the archives of eternity.

The Fisherman Who Listened... Realizing the Truth
And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the ships, so

165

that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees. saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:6-8).

Huge rivers begin with small streams, and some of the greatest church leaders came from unpretentious beginnings. The apostle Peter was a native of Bethsaida, a city close to the Sea of Galilee. He and his brother, Andrew, were fishermen. Their partners, James and John, also owned a boat, and the four men were well-known in the area. Simon became a leader of the Christian church and was God's spokesman on the Day of Pentecost. Later in his life he wrote two epistles that were included in the canon of Holy Scripture.

This interesting character first met Jesus of Nazareth when his brother Andrew said, "We have found the Messiah." That startling announcement encouraged Simon to seek the cause of the excitement. Later the Lord attended a service in the synagogue at Capernaum and went into Peter's home to heal his sick mother-in-law. The fisherman was greatly impressed by the Savior's work and was prepared for the morning when

SIMON PETER AND HIS GREAT FISHING STORIES

he allowed the Lord to borrow his boat. If Simon Peter were on earth today he might say:

"I shall never forget the morning when my brother and I were attending to our nets. We had been fishing all night, had caught nothing, and were damp, frustrated, and tired. We had cast our nets and pulled them in again and again until our arms ached. It seemed as if all the fish were hiding. Neither my brother nor I could understand what had happened. Then we saw a crowd coming along the beach and recognized they were following Jesus. We had not forgotten His visit to our home, and when He asked for the use of the boat, it was a pleasure to grant His request. Hastily, we launched the ship to take it out a short distance and, releasing the anchor, sat back expectantly.

"When Jesus began to speak, I was enthralled. Yet, as He continued, I began to feel uncomfortable. He seemed to be speaking to me. I felt as if I were in a trance, but when I came to my senses, He was smiling. He wanted to go for a ride.

166

Then He asked me to let down the nets, but that seemed foolish. As I had told Him, we had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. I thought the suggestion to be ridiculous. but if it would provide pleasure, He could see how we operated.

"He watched as we threw out a net. I had the shock of my life, for when we commenced to trawl, fish were jumping everywhere. They were swimming into our net as if they were all committing suicide. The fish were heavy, and our vessel began to sink. I yelled to our partners in the other boat, and they came to help, but it became obvious that unless we got back to shore quickly, the catch and our equipment would be lost.

"It was too much for me; I could only stare at the Savior as shame overwhelmed my soul. I knelt and said. 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' I shall never forget the gleam in His eyes when He said, 'Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men!' I was ecstatic. The other men attended to the fish, but I only had one desire-to follow Jesus. My brother, Andrew, was correct when he said, 'We have found the Messiah, the Savior of the world.'"

Perhaps Simon Peter would understand the sentiments expressed by an unknown author.

My Pastor shapes his sermons

From A to final Z.
In clear and forthright language,
And aims them straight at me.

And when he gets to preaching.
I look around to see
If there might be another
Deserving more than me.

But every soul looks saintly,
Their hearts to heaven turn,
While I in my conviction
Can only turn and squirm.

167

SIMON PETER AND HIS GREAT FISHING STORIES

You know, I often wonder
If I should miss a day,
Would he without his target,
Have anything to say?

The Fisherman Who Learned... Raising the Taxes
And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received
tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master
pay tribute? He saith, Yes (Matt. 17:24).

"If I were asked to describe the strangest event in my fishing
career, I would have to tell of the fish who helped pay my tax.
It happened in Capernaum where an official asked if Jesus
ever paid taxes. Maybe he wondered if the Master paid in
Jerusalem or Capernaum; or perhaps he inquired if the Lord
had some special exemption. Without thinking I replied, 'Yes,'
but afterward I wondered if I had been truthful. I had no
recollection of Jesus going to a tax collector, and the thought
worried me. Of course, I could not hide my feelings from the
Lord, and it was difficult to be silent when He asked what
was troubling me. It was strange when He said princes were
not required to pay taxes. He said:

'Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the
sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh
up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a
piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and
thee' (Matt. 17:27).

"I went down to the edge of the sea, baited and cast in the
hook, and almost immediately caught a fish. When I opened
its mouth, I saw a Greek coin which was worth a shekel or
two drachmas. It was sufficient to pay the tax for two people.
For a moment I was amazed and could not believe my eyes.
Of course I paid the taxes, but now I wish I had kept that
coin. I should have paid in some other way. I told the Master
what had happened but could not forget His words: 'For me
and thee.' That was my greatest fishing experience."

168

The world now knows it was not unusual to find a coin in
such a place. A fish might seize anything bright which is
dropped into the sea. Dr. H. D. M. Spence tells of a cod
which was caught with a watch in its stomach-"still going."
The true miracle of this fish was twofold: (1) The Lord knew
the coin would be found in the first fish to take Peter's hook
and (2) He knew the value of the coin; it would be sufficient
to pay tax for two people. "For me and thee."

"Yes," said Simon Peter, "That was a strange moment.
How could the Master know so much? There were millions of
fish in the lake, but He knew a coin had been dropped and
recovered by one special fish which He commanded to seize
the tempting bait. This was arranged to fit into His timetable.
Every time afterward when I caught a fish, instinctively, I
looked into its mouth wondering if I would find another coin!
I never did and should have known the Lord supplies our
needs, not our wants. I needed to learn that lesson."

The Fisherman Who Loved ... Repeating the Testimony
There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus,
and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee,
and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I

SIMON PETER AND HIS GREAT FISHING STORIES

go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing (John 21:2-3).

Simon Peter paused. A faraway look came into his eyes. It seemed he was reliving the past. After the resurrection of the Lord, he said to his colleagues, "I go a fishing." The other men replied, "We also go with thee." "Well," said Simon, "What else was there to do? Life had ended for us when the Master died and commenced again when He arose. But He was different, and we were fearful of the future. If He went away again, we had to earn a living and support our families. I knew how to fish; in fact that was about all I did know. We would always have cherished memories of the Lord, but we could not sit still hoping for something to happen.

"My brothers agreed with my suggestion. Judas was gone.

169

Some of the others were absent, but the rest of us went down to the shoreline, took two boats, and proceeded to the fishing grounds. It was hard work, but although we pulled our nets in again and again, we caught nothing. It was frustrating. It had happened before, but then Jesus was with us, and He had the ability to turn failure into success. Finally, reason prevailed, and we returned to shore. As we approached the beach we saw a man whom we supposed to be a merchant. He asked about the catch, and we told Him we had nothing to see. He advised us to cast the net on the right side of the ship, and for some inexplicable reason we did as He suggested. Soon, we had one hundred and fifty and three large fish. I know, because I counted them. John was the first to recognize the Master, but when I reached the shore, I saw He had lit a fire and cooked our breakfast. The stillness of the morning was unbroken except for the noise of waves on the beach. Suddenly I heard the Master saying, 'Simon Son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?' For a few moments I wondered what He meant. He seemed to be looking at my companions and the fish. I remembered that awful night when I disowned Him and felt too ashamed to reply. But His compelling eyes were focused on me, and I whispered, 'Yes, Lord. I certainly do.'

"It was very embarrassing when He asked the same question three times. Maybe He likes us to tell Him that we love Him. Occasionally we get so involved in current events we forget to say what He deserves to hear. When He gave me a new commission, it was difficult to believe. He was willing to trust me again. I never forgot that morning, for it was the last time I went fishing. He asked me to look after His flock, and that has been a full-time job. Actually, He gave to me two tasks. He made me a fisher of men, but each catch makes my work a little more difficult. My fish become sheep. I sometimes wonder what happened to our boats. Do the new owners ever go fishing in vain? Jesus asked if I loved Him, but ever since I have striven to make the question unnecessary."

170□

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