

PETER'S BRAVERY

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[One of a series of talks addressing standing up for the Lord's church.]

Lesson: Luke 22:31-34; 54-62

In this talk on bravery, I want to tell you about a man who was afraid just for a short while, and then became one of the bravest men of all. His name was Peter, and he was a disciple of the Lord.

You know that Peter had followed the Lord faithfully, and was the leader among the disciples. So, when the Lord was about to be crucified, He said to Peter, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." (Luke 22:31, 32) Peter didn't understand this, because he thought he was strong enough already, but the Lord told him that that very night he would deny Him three times.

That was the night that Judas betrayed the Lord, and you may remember that Peter was brave, for he drew his sword, and cut off the ear of one of the men. But the Lord would not let his disciples fight, and most of them ran away; but Peter followed, into the hall where the Lord was taken for judgment, and he sat down among the crowds there.

Then a woman saw him, and said that he was a follower of Jesus; and Peter was suddenly afraid too. Probably he thought that if he said so, he would be killed; and so he denied the Lord, saying that he didn't even know Him! Again, a man thought that Peter was surely one of them, and again, Peter said he was not. A third time, someone said, "Surely you are one of them, for the way you speak shows you come from Galilee;" and again Peter denied the Lord. Then the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter realized what a terrible thing he had done. Three times he had said that he did not even know the Lord. He was so terribly ashamed that, although he was a grown man, he went outside, and he cried, he wept bitterly.

The story does not end there. After this Peter was brave, and never again did he turn from the Lord. He worked hard for the building of the Christian Church, even though he knew that there was great danger for Christians, since the Jews and Romans wanted them killed. Many believe that Peter himself was put to death by being crucified upside down, and this is quite possible. It is a most painful death, and yet Peter faced it bravely. For a short while he had been afraid, but after that he had been afraid no more.

Children, each one of us is tempted to be afraid, perhaps many times in our lives. Sometimes we will give in. It can happen in lots of ways. A boy may be bullying your younger brother, and you know you ought to fight him, but you're scared, so you back off. A group of children are going to do something you know is wrong, and you feel you ought to refuse to go, but you're frightened of what they will say, so you go along with them. Others are taking the Lord's name in vain, and you feel afraid of their opinion, so for the first time in your life you may do so too. You may even be tempted to deny the Lord by pretending that what He says is quite unimportant. These things can happen, and then afterwards we can feel really ashamed of ourselves for letting others down, and letting our beliefs down, the way we have. We think we're pretty useless people to do things like that, and are tempted perhaps to become even worse, because we don't respect ourselves much any more.

At times like this, it is useful to remember a man who also once was weak, and then became among the bravest of men. We can think of Peter denying the Lord whom he had followed so faithfully. We can think of how ashamed he was when he realized what he had done. We can remember his strength and his courage afterwards when all the world hated the Christians, and he was one of their most important leaders. And we know also that today he is an angel in heaven.

This can help us to see that because we are weak once we do not have to stay weak. We can feel ashamed, and try again to be stronger, and teach ourselves to face up to what is wrong and refuse to give in to it. No one is brave every moment of his life. The best of men have felt afraid of doing what is right, and a little ashamed of themselves for it. What they have learned, though, is that if they keep trying, they become more and more brave, and less and less are they afraid of what others will do and think. At last the time comes when the Lord gives them enough strength that they know that they will never again be frightened to stand up for what is right.

When therefore we feel ashamed of ourselves for being weak, we can remember Peter the disciple, and we can tell ourselves that, just like he did, we are going to learn how not to be weak ever again. *Amen.*