

When Two Friends Become a Team

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The Lord's first two disciples were Andrew and John. It may be surmised that these two were good friends. They were disciples of John the Baptist, but then switched to Jesus when they heard what the Baptist had to say about the Lamb of God. When Andrew had the opportunity, he went and told his brother Simon about it: "We have found the Messiah", and he brought him to Jesus (John 1).

That is when the Lord gave Simon his new name of Cephas, or "stone" (Peter). From now on the three of them would almost constantly rub shoulders as part of the complete group of Twelve Disciples - for the next three years.

If we have an inkling that there was, or developed, a special relationship between **Simon and John**, as they shared in the many experiences of the whole group, we may be disappointed looking for it. Not even in Mark 6, when the Lord sent out the Twelve, two by two, is there any indication as to who went with who...

But then we read Luke 22:8. At that point, Jesus "sent **Peter and John**, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.'" It must have meant that the two disciples spent quite a few hours together, as they arranged and organized the special evening meal, celebrated annually. Would they have had any notion that Jesus himself might be **the** Passover Lamb? Did any thought come that what had been foretold, like in Isaiah 53, might be about to happen? Or the prophecy of the '30-silver-coins', paid for the Messiah (Zech. 11:12-13)?

Early that evening then, all of them took their places around the Passover table, not sitting on chairs, but reclining on low benches or couches, which means that all feet, not being under the table, were easily accessible. At some point, before or during the meal, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Later on, He announced that one of them was to betray Him. Understandably, this caused confusion, and **Peter** motions to **John**, who is reclining next to Jesus, to find out who would do such a thing (Jn. 13:23-24). So now, shortly before the crucifixion, a special relationship is seen to be developing between the two disciples, the older one, very brash, the younger one, rather cautious.

Later on, during Jesus' trial, again the two of them are together, the only ones of the twelve to be there (John 18:15-16). It would seem that their relationship, instead of suffering through Peter's denial, is strengthened. The night passes, and the next day the trials continue, leading to Jesus' crucifixion. There, **John** is standing close to Mary, and he is told by Jesus to look after her. No sign of **Peter**.

The Saturday also passes. Then, very early, that next morning, the faithful women are the first to realize that the tomb stone has been removed and the tomb is empty... Mary of Magdalene runs and raises the alarm with **Peter and John**, which starts the intriguing story of them doing a good bit of running as well, but in the opposite direction. **John** outruns **Peter**. Then, as soon as Peter gets there, he doesn't stop, he immediately enters the tomb (John 20:1-10).

We may take it that **Peter**, from inside, describes to **John** outside the details of what he is observing. It must have left them totally non-plussed, as they could only think of body-snatchers, who must have moved the stone and then took away the body... Neither **Peter** nor **John** connected the scenario with the Old Testament prophecies, or with Jesus' own prophecies.

After hearing **Peter**, **John** himself steps inside, and suddenly everything starts to make sense.., for *him*, that is! **John believes**, not only in the Savior's birth, in his life and in his death, he now is a believer in the Savior's **resurrection**. Everything falls into place for him. And, as the two men walk home, we can picture them, standing still here, then there, reasoning together as they go. But **John** doesn't manage to persuade **Peter** to believe. Peter may well have had the same arguments that Thomas was going to use...

Yet, on that Resurrection Day, after **John** had believed (without seeing), **Peter** becomes the second disciple to believe. However, just as in

Thomas' case, the Lord grants Peter to see first and *then* believe.

Peter meets the risen Lord in a special appearance, he is the first one of the Twelve (Luke 24:12, 34). Later that evening – it is still Resurrection Day - the others, i.e., all except Thomas, also meet the living Lord.

In John 21, the chapter of the third appearance to the group of disciples, possibly some ten days after the resurrection, we find another clear indication of a deepening and strengthening relationship between **Peter and John**. Their hearts were “**being knit together in love**”.

Their night of wasted toils on the lake is about to end when there is this totally unexpected call from the shore. There's a 'stranger' who gives them advice. When the advice is heeded, it suddenly leads to a huge catch of fish. At that, **John** puts two and two together, and tells **Peter**, “It is the Lord...!” Which is enough for Peter to jump overboard.

After breakfast, the Lord and his seven disciples, evidently go for a walk, possibly on the beach. It may have been the only walk *after* the resurrection, reminiscent of so many they had had *before* the Lord's death.

Gone are their feelings of frustration and exhaustion; and all of them listen in to the Lord's very special conversation with Simon Peter, whose heart is laid bare. Jesus speaks to him of his later years and of his death. And when He tells him to simply follow HIM, **Peter** stops in his tracks, turns around and looks for **John** among the rest of the group that is coming along. **Peter** had this special concern for **John** and their partnership, not for James or Nathanael or Thomas.

However, the Lord tells **Peter** that **John's** future was of no concern to him. Whatever should happen to the one, should *not* influence the discipleship and the persevering service of the other. **Peter's** dependence must be on his Lord exclusively, just as **John's** should be. In other words, whatever a disciple cherishes most (could be a property, an occupation or a relationship - compare Deut. 20:1-9), **MUST** be relegated to second place, or third, or last. The Lord Himself, and the Lord alone, must have the first place. That is the normal Christian life.

It makes us think of Abraham, with his son laid on the altar in Genesis 22. God wanted to make it public knowledge that here was a man for whom HE was first, for whom even his beloved son-of-the-promise had to take second place. Once that had become crystal clear, Isaac was returned to his father...

With Peter's declarations of love, earlier on, Jesus now emphasizes the implications. Only if there is the real love-relationship with the one

Good Shepherd, can the under-shepherd feed the lambs and the sheep. It is a **complete commitment** to the One Lord. No one else must ever be allowed to wriggle into that unique relationship. It will make the 'salt' to lose its savor and become useless.

After **Peter and John's** experiences at the Lord's 'death and resurrection', they are ready for Pentecost. **John** is not personally mentioned in Acts 1 & 2, but **Peter** so much more, and it becomes wonderfully clear that the Lord can make use of him, i.e., after his full restoration, and that John doesn't have to come into that. Nevertheless, right after Pentecost, in chapters 3 & 4, God is pleased to make use of them together, when a marvelous miracle occurs, when the testimony of the Risen Christ is given to a multitude (right in the temple courts), when very many come to faith in Christ, and... when persecution breaks out.

In chapter 4 both **Peter & John** display the Spirit's boldness, and in the face of a total gag order, i.e., re the Savior's name and his resurrection, both respond politely, yet in outright defiance. Being let go, they both report to the congregation, and a very special prayer-meeting ensues.

There is one more period (probably of some weeks, at least), in which these two brethren enjoy each other's company and ministry. Peter, with the 'keys of the kingdom' entrusted to him, has already opened the door of faith to the Jews in Acts 2. Now the time has come to do the same for the Samaritans, who (in chapter 8) have believed through ex-deacon Philip. They had been baptized, but had not received the Holy Spirit. It is arranged that **Peter & John** together go down to Samaria for that.

*“So (after the Holy Spirit had been given) when **Peter & John** had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans” (8:25).*

In case, you're curious, there was a third and last 'door' to be unlocked (see Acts 1:8). Peter alone is called to Caesarea for that, where at his ministry, 'the door of faith' must be opened to the Gentiles (Ch. 10).

“That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3).