

My name is Peter, and I was one of Jesus' first disciples. Many say I was the leader of the disciples. I suppose that's true. I was definitely out front, saying things that got me in trouble. I was a **leader** in doing things that needed to be corrected. Oh, I know more is written about me than the other disciples, but I often didn't get things right. There were times I didn't have a clue about what Jesus was doing.

I remember one time right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. My brother Andrew and I, along with a couple other fishermen, James and John, had just started to follow Jesus. It was the Sabbath Day, and Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. You almost had to be there to understand what was going on. You see, Jesus taught with authority. We had never heard anyone teach like that before. And then He did something incredible. A man was demon-possessed. That demon started to challenge Jesus, and the next thing we knew, the demon was silenced and thrown out of the man, out of the synagogue. Our eyes were wide open; our jaws dropped in amazement.

We left the synagogue and went to my house. I'm not sure all of you know this, but I was married, and my wife's mother lived with us. She was sick. She had a fever. Now that may not sound like much to you, but we didn't have much for doctors and medicines back then. When you got a fever, it was serious. You could die from whatever was causing that fever. We were worried.

Jesus walked into our house, and we told Him about her. He went into the room where she was lying down. He took her hand and lifted her up. She was

healed! In fact, she was healed so completely that she got busy serving us right away. What a delicious meal we ate that evening! Sure, I was thankful, but, even more, we were beginning to see just what kind of power Jesus had.

And sure enough, the crowds came. People heard about Jesus—that He could heal the sick and was stronger than the demonic powers that haunted them. They lined up at the door and **kept** bringing people to Him. Finally, we had to stop them so we could shut the door and get some sleep.

When we got up the next morning, the people started coming back, but Jesus wasn't in the house. We had to go look for Him. We found Him in the strangest place. He was in a desolate place, a kind of secluded, wild area most people avoided. He was praying. That didn't make sense to me.

You can imagine what I was thinking. Jesus has just started His ministry. He's got the crowds coming to see Him. People are excited about Him. A few more miracles like this, and we'll have a small army to work with. No one will be able to resist Jesus. He'll keep us healthy. He'll keep away the evil powers that make us afraid. He'll take charge and get rid of anyone who opposes us. He'll make life wonderful.

So why was He in a **desolate** place instead of doing more miracles, instead of building His popularity and fame when He had this chance? We told Him that people were looking for Him. The whole world was coming to Him. And what does He do? He wants to go to other places and preach. He wants to go and tell people to repent of whatever sin is leading them away from God and to believe in Him. I

remember His words, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”

I didn't understand. **We** didn't understand, at least not back then. Now I do. He was in a desolate place because **that's** where Jesus confronted His temptations. He was tempted to give up His mission of bringing salvation to a world of sin and demonic evils. He had been sent not to build an army and overthrow governments, but to overcome Satan. He had been sent not to carve out a few square miles of ancient Israel and set up a little paradise on earth, but to open heaven's gates to us. His mission was not to become a miracle worker who would satisfy the desires of those who stood in line to see Him, but to do His Father's will and bring eternal life to all people (Jn 3:16).

That was the temptation facing Jesus. He could stick around this small town called Capernaum and build His own little empire for a select few. But that would have meant abandoning what He came to do. He had been in a desolate place before. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Him with this very temptation—if Jesus would just worship him. Jesus would have none of that! Three years later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night He was betrayed, the night He would be beaten and sentenced to die, He was tempted to walk away from His mission of bringing forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation to the whole world.

But Jesus would not give in to the temptation. No, He goes to the **most** desolate place of all. It's a cross. It's a place teeming with all our sins. It's a place where all our burdens and hurts are gathered together. It's place of

punishment, our punishment. It's a place of agony and suffering. It's a place of death. It's a place where even God the Father in heaven abandons Him to the evils of hell.

Yet out of these places of desolation comes our eternal destiny. His mission was to bring forgiveness, to bear our griefs and sins. His mission was to open up heaven's gate to us. His mission was to bring eternal life. And on Easter morning, He did just that. Out of a desolate tomb, a grave, a place of death, Jesus rises from the dead. Satan was defeated. Evil was cast aside. Death had been undone. Sin no longer was holding Him down. Mission accomplished. Salvation is won.

Now I understand and believe all this. Back at the beginning I didn't. Back then I was impressed with the crowds and what I wanted Jesus to do. Back then I was thinking too small, too selfishly. But not Jesus. He would not give in to the temptation of pleasing the crowds. No, He would pray in that desolate place, and then He was on His way to other places to call people to repent and believe in Him. He was on His way to the cross. He was on His way to the grave. But Easter morning proclaims loud and clear that out of the desolate places Jesus brings our eternal destiny.

*(Take off the headdress but leave on the rest of the garb. Pause and then address the people directly, as their pastor.)*

I can understand how Peter could get it wrong at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He hadn't yet seen Jesus die. He hadn't yet walked with Jesus risen from the dead. But what about us?

I'm afraid **we** don't always get it. Sometimes we're more like Peter at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. How is that? Consider our prayer life. Without a doubt, we are to pray to our Lord about anything. He wants us to bring our requests to Him. But sometimes I'm uncomfortable about the bulk of the prayer requests having to do with healing or health, about safety and protection, about jobs and money, and how few prayer requests have to do with the growth of the Church and people believing in Jesus, about people doing what is right in life, about repentance, about stronger devotional lives, about resisting temptation, about our salvation. Certainly we can pray for health and protection and even money, but the bulk of our prayers need to focus on why Jesus came, about our eternal destiny that comes out of the desolate places in Jesus' life. Contrast that with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray. There are seven petitions in the Lord's prayer. How many of them have to do with spiritual and eternal matters? Six. How many of them have to do with physical life? Just one: "Give us this day our daily bread."

Now don't get me wrong. Back at Peter's house, Jesus did heal the sick and cast out demons. And today our Lord does bless us with good health. He gives us medical facilities to alleviate our pain and suffering. We live in a country with a lot of wealth and comfort. Jesus is our shield and protection as we live day-by-day. He has answered our prayers, and we need to thank Him for these blessings.

But don't stop there. Jesus' mission was bigger, much bigger. When you get right down to it, we need to become more like Peter after He understood. And we

have so many ways to do that. We have two thousand years of Church history and teachings to help us see what Jesus came to do. We have the Bible to read and study as over and over again it points us to the cross and Jesus' resurrection. We have Sunday School and Bible classes to teach us why Jesus gave His life for us. We have artwork and jewelry that take us to the cross. Look around. See how the stained glass windows and altar cross or designs on the paraments focus on Jesus. Our worship services lead us to repent of our sins and confess our faith in Him.

Jesus does bless us in our lives now, but He does so much more. Jesus went to the desolate places, and out of those desolate places He brings forgiveness, heaven's gates open wide, and salvation. Yes, out of the desolate places Jesus brings our eternal destiny.