

In the House Of... Part 1 (Peter)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Maybe some of you have participated in a “progressive dinner,” an occasion when you go to several different homes and are served various courses of a meal. Those are enjoyable! Beginning this week we’ll go on something like a “progressive sermon;” we’re going to go on a short tour of some of the homes of those who lived long ago when Jesus was here. It would be nice if we could actually go to those places, or even take a “virtual tour” of those sites like you can via computer today. But we have a fairly good idea of how people lived back then.

Unless you were fabulously wealthy, your home in Galilee or Jerusalem 2,000 years ago would have been quite modest. It wouldn’t have been very large, and it certainly would have lacked the modern conveniences we take for granted today. But it would have been “home” to you.

The purpose of our visit to these homes is to see what happened at these places, particularly when Jesus paid a visit to them. We’re going to look at a few incidences when Jesus visited the homes of His disciples and followers, gaining insights that come from the events that took place on those occasions.

Two things are noteworthy as we begin our study. First, we see that Jesus had no home of His own. Though Ruler of the universe, though Creator of all, He came here and had no place to lay His head. It was a borrowed crib that cradled Him at His birth and a borrowed grave in which He slept at His death. These were statements of His life of self-denial. One time someone approached Him and expressed a desire to become His disciple. Jesus bade him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” Luke 9:58. When He left the Nazareth home in which He was raised and began His public ministry, He became dependent on the hospitality of others for the next 3 and a half years. So if you and I have a place to call “home,” no matter how humble that may be, we are already richer in this world’s goods than the Redeemer.

Second, it is noteworthy that Jesus enjoyed the fellowship of people and willingly graced the habitations of those to whom He ministered. Try to imagine the feeling of those whose doorways He entered as the years passed by. “He came into my house,” “He knows where I live,” would have been thoughts that would have brought blessing ever afterward.

In our travels to these various homes, we will keep in mind the promise that He wants to come into our “house” as well. The same Jesus who stepped into the doorways and lives of those who lived centuries ago, wants now to be a part of our experience. We know that’s true because He says to us today, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20. The word “anyone” includes you and me!

We’ll begin our journey with a stop Jesus made early in His ministry, at the home of Simon Peter. He lived in the town of Capernaum on the northwestern shore of the Lake of Galilee. Fed by the streams descending from the highlands of Mt. Hermon, the northern shore of Galilee boasted excellent fishing. Villages and communities spotted the shoreline and bustled with activity. Among those whose occupation was fishing were the first four who responded to the call of Jesus to become disciples, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John. When the invitation to follow Him was given, they left their boats and nets and accepted the call.

On the Sabbath day, Jesus worshiped in the synagogue at Capernaum. His teaching, which was simple, direct and with authority, was in sharp contrast to the suppositions and hypotheses, the spiritual “jell-o” offered by the scribes. While in church that day, the service was interrupted by the shrieks of a man devil-possessed. Jesus calmly rebuked the demon and the man was healed, causing, as you might expect, great amazement among the people.

After the service, Christ retired to the home of Peter. “Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.” Mark 1:29-31. We’ve chosen Mark’s Gospel to use as the source of this story because historians feel that much of his information came from his good friend Peter. There is no authentic “Gospel According to Peter,” and maybe that’s because the Gospel of Mark is essentially that of Peter.

It is interesting to see that Peter was married. The text specifically speaks of “Simon’s wife’s mother.” Of all the disciples, Peter is apparently the only one that is mentioned as being married. Peter, the one to whom a large population through the centuries and even today, look upon as being the first “pope,” was not celibate.

All of Christ’s healing miracles conveyed spiritual lessons. It was His purpose that people back then, and that we today go from the “physical” to the “spiritual” realm and discern the truth that Christ can bring healing of body and, more importantly, of soul. “He restores my soul,” wrote King David in the 23rd Psalm.

The illness that had befallen his mother-in-law was a fever. She was laid low and incapable of bringing service to those close to her, but Christ brought healing to her diseased body. Notice the comment that immediately upon being restored, she “served,” or ministered to them. What spiritual truth would Jesus have us learn from this story? What might “fever” illustrate in the

Christian life? It can well stand for a heated passion for these things of this world. The Lord's complaint regarding Israel in the past, given through the prophet Hosea, was that "Ephraim is a cake unturned." Hosea 7:8. Do you see the picture? A pancake that has remained too long on the griddle on one side and become burned? A "cake unturned" is a visual of a Christian who is too hot for the things "below," and too cold to the things "above." The "feverish" pursuit of the things of this life have paralyzed the follower and their ministry is crippled.

What can be done? In the story Mark is relating, it was when Jesus was invited into the house and when His touch was given that the fever left. Is it possible that in your life there is a debilitating "fever" that is holding you back in your service to the Lord? Are the things of this earth captivating and alluring you? Do you not know that they will soon pass away? The things of this life will take on an entirely different look in the glory of God's Son at His coming! Don't become "feverish" toward these things! They don't last anyway. Invite Jesus into your "house;" feel His "touch" and the fever will go away. Your "service" will improve.

This was Sabbath afternoon when Peter's mother-in-law was healed, and it didn't take long for the news to get out, accompanied by the report of what had happened at church earlier that day. Many in Capernaum wanted the same blessing of being healed. But there was a problem. They had been taught by the scribes and rabbis that such conduct was not appropriate for the Sabbath. And so, even though Christ was in their midst, though He had demonstrated His ability to bring healing, they waited. They waited for the sun to go down and close the Sabbath so they could come to Jesus for help! How sad! "Now at evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door." Mark 1:32, 33.

How Satan had worked to bring false information to the people so that Christ's ministry would be misunderstood and condemned! Here were people, a whole city of sick people, who struggled with their ailments for hours unnecessarily because of false teaching regarding the Sabbath! How Jesus wanted to open their minds to the truth and remove from the Sabbath the useless traditions and requirements that had been heaped upon it by misguided religious teachers through the centuries. He wanted to clear away the rubbish of pharisaical nonsense that had obscured the beautiful institution of the Sabbath. It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

We slip over to the second chapter of Mark, in which we find the story of the paralytic being lowered through the roof in order to find Christ. Do we know whose house this was, that underwent a remodeling for the sake of healing? Yes! It was Peter's house. "And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house." Mark 2:1. It is a well-recognized rule of grammar that the definite article as used in this sentence refers back to the previously identified noun. Since Mark has told us about the incident of healing at the Capernaum home of Peter, and now brings us back to the same city and speaks of "the house," there can be no doubt but that he is speaking of the same house as before.

“Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.” Mark 2:2. Try to visualize the scene. Jesus had left Capernaum saying, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth. And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout Galilee, and casting out demons.” Mark 1:38, 39.

But now, “after some days,” He had returned to Capernaum and the word was spread that He could be found at Peter’s house. Among those who sought His healing touch was a man who suffered paralysis. He wanted to be restored, but when his buddies brought him on a cot, they found they couldn’t get anywhere near the door of the house. Every window was jammed with people. What were they to do?

“Necessity is the mother of invention.” I don’t know if I would have suggested this approach as a solution, but they were desperate. They had to see Jesus and get help! Somehow they got this poor man, on his stretcher onto the roof (how did they do that?) and began dismantling the tiles to create an opening. I try to picture the scene. There’s Jesus in the crowded living room, teaching and healing. Preaching “the word.” Now there’s a disturbance above. There’s strange and unexpected noise. The sound of footsteps on the roof. Scratching and scraping as the tiles are being moved. Everyone in Peter’s house is looking up now, and shafts of daylight are beaming into the room!

Now the sunlight is blocked by the spectacle of a cot being lowered into their presence, with a man that many recognize as being a cripple resting on the gurney. In my mind’s eye I see a smile come across the Savior’s face as He acknowledges the perseverance of this man and his friends. What you really want you usually get. You find a way, no matter what the sacrifice.

Do you really want to find Jesus, to be in His presence? If so, you’ll find a way. Recently we’ve been holding evangelistic meetings at our church. Our program began at 7 p.m. and went till 8:30, with two presentations being made; an hour and a half total. When speaking with people in the foyer after the meeting, I chanced to ask one gentleman what he thought of the meeting. He said, “It was good, but looooooong.” You have no idea how hard it was for me to hold back from asking, “Tell me, friend, have you ever watched a football game?” It’s all in what you’re interested in, what’s important to you!

The day after Thanksgiving has become known to many as “Black Friday,” a day on which “door-buster” deals are offered to shoppers willing to get up early and stand in long lines for bargains. I see that Target is going to open their doors at 4 a.m., and Kohl’s is going to open at 3 a.m.! Because that is what they want, many will set their alarms and make the sacrifice to buy that computer at a special price, or whatever it may be. Would they get up early enough to go to church the next day? I wonder. It’s all in what you find important; what interests you.

When we were at Andrew’s University I met an evangelist who was addressing this point. He related that while inviting someone to come to church, the person expressed general lack of

interest. The evangelist said to him kindly, “If they were handing out thousand-dollar bills, you’d be there in your pajamas!” What’s important to you? Is being with Jesus and receiving His help a high priority in your life?

It certainly was for these men! It was important enough that they took the risk of tearing apart Peter’s roof so they could lower the paralytic into the room! “Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. And when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their *faith*, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you.’” Mark 1:3-5. What is “faith” in this context? It is persistent belief translated into action.

Why did Jesus say, “Your sins are forgiven you”? It’s because this man struggled with his physical ailment as well as a stricken conscience. The current teaching by the scribes presented God as a harsh taskmaster, unwilling to forgive. His continued disability was proof-positive that he had passed from the favor of God and there was no hope for him. The physical aspects of his ailment were made more difficult by his mental anguish. He longed for peace in his heart; some evidence that there was hope for him, that God loved him. He found none in the messages of the religious teachers of his day.

When he was lowered into the presence of Jesus there were many questions on his mind. What would Peter say about his roof being torn apart? Would Jesus be able to heal him? But the one overriding question in his heart was, Did God love him? Was it true what the rabbis had said that he was beyond hope? Jesus looked at him kindly and said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” How could He have known that that was the best thing in all the whole world that he wanted to hear? Even if his legs never worked again, his life took on new meaning when those words were spoken. Somehow the paralytic knew that what Jesus said was true. Somehow he knew that his sins were forgiven and he was right with God. A peace flooded his soul that he had not known for a long time.

But the sunshine of joy and peace that now blessed this man’s soul was contrasted by the clouds of doubt that darkened the faces of others in the room. There was no joy expressed by their countenances; there was skepticism and condemnation.

“But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, ‘Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?’” Mark 2:6-8. I’m glad it says “some” of the scribes had trouble with this. That leads me to believe that there were some others who did not!

They were correct in their definition of “blasphemy” being the unwarranted attempt to take the place of God; specifically, to make the claim to be able to forgive sins. Only God can do that. No mortal has the authority to say, “I forgive you your sins.” When a mere human being says that, it

is blasphemy. The problem for “some” of the scribes is that they did not recognize that Jesus was not a “mere” human being! He was fully and completely God in the flesh! He was the Creator in human flesh, “God with us,” the Immanuel of prophecy. In order for salvation to be achieved, it required that One above the law broken, One above the human family that transgressed pay the price for salvation. It meant that God had to come and become part of the human race and walk in our sandals and live as we live. This is exactly what Jesus did. But because He stooped to enter our world, did not detract from His godhead in one iota! He still was God, though in human flesh!

This, “some” of the scribes stumbled over. They could not grasp how the Nazarene, the supposed son of Joseph, could be the Messiah of Scripture. Their faith was not strong enough to grasp the central theme of the Bible, how God’s love was translated into the Bethlehem story. How Jesus Who swept up the carpenter shop was the Yahweh of the Old Testament. How Christ Who now walked among them was God Who had authority to forgive sin.

There are still “some” who struggle with that today. Though we many not be fully able to comprehend the “mystery” of “God manifest in the flesh” (I Timothy 3:16), that should in no way hinder our faith from laying hold of this beautiful truth. We must “believe” that He is God and Savior. To each one of us has been given “the measure of faith.” Romans 12:3. In the same room, within Peter’s house, were those who were able to believe, and those who did not. And so it is in our world today.

Jesus continued speaking to those who didn’t believe. “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk.’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’ -- He said to the paralytic, ‘ I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go your way to your house.’ And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” Mark 2:9-12.

Quite obviously, it would be “easier” to say, “your sins are forgiven.” Who could disprove that? How would you know if that were true or not? But, to say to a man crippled, in front of a huge crowd, “Get up and walk,” is something that will be tested immediately. Before everyone’s eyes, it will be known instantly. So, Jesus said to the man, “Get up and walk,” and “immediately he arose.” This was to be taken as proof that Jesus indeed has the authority to forgive sins. The man left with a double blessing! He was now able to walk, which was great, but he had the peace in his heart for which he had longed. God loved him!

Today I hope we can “visit” Peter’s house. Today the same Jesus is willing to “forgive our feverish ways” as He did Peter’s mother-in-law. He can take from us the passion for the things below, the things that will soon pass away and give us a heart and mind to serve others. He will say to us, “Your sins are forgiven you,” and we can walk from this place knowing that God loves us and has forgiven us our sins.