

The Twelve: Solidifying the Rock, Part 1

Luke 6:14

I'd like to introduce our study by starting with a monumental moment in Peter's life and to look at that. Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the 16th chapter of Matthew. Matthew chapter 16. We'll be starting there in verse 13. There have been many portraits painted of the Apostle Peter throughout church history. For those in the Roman Catholic Church, maybe some of you come from that background is, he's not Simon Peter, he's Saint Peter. He is the first bishop of the Roman Church, and he has become, through stained glass and enshrined in stain glass and entombed in tradition, he's become somewhat remote in that communion because he is that monumental figure, foundational figure of the Roman Catholic, not just church, but the Papacy.

If we look at popular evangelicalism, we have another picture of Peter, don't we? He's been pulled down from lofty heights, and it's his humanness that is emphasized among evangelicals and even his commonness, sometimes even his foolishness at times. We

like to comfort ourselves that, Well, at least I wasn't as foolish as Peter. Many see Peter as the Apostle with the foot-shaped mouth. Some people have seen him as so familiar that he is like that buddy we can imagine hanging out with, eating chips and dip and watching sports. Most may refrain from painting too profane of a picture of Peter though I've heard some that I wouldn't want to repeat and talk about, that I wouldn't want to dignify it by mentioning it in too much detail. But there are many who've come to see Peter, as one guy described him, as kind of like an energetic puppy. He's really well-meaning, tail-wagging, knocking stuff over, but kind of dumb, unwittingly getting himself in all kinds of unintended trouble. We can allow the biblical record to defend the true view of Peter. He wouldn't want us running around defending his image, and this, this sermon today is not so much about Peter, but about Christ. It's about what Christ did in and through Peter. And that's where Peter would want us to put all the emphasis anyway, is on his Lord and Savior.

But we do want to make an initial observation about the various portraits of Peter. And there are many. Everyone tends to see Peter as someone who is rather like themselves. We tend

to look at Peter on the pages of Scripture, and it feels somewhat like we're looking in a mirror. More than any other Apostle, Peter is the one who seems most relatable to us. He's the one who, with whom each of us seems to have the most in common. And there's a reason for that.

As an illustration, many today look back in church history to the Protestant Reformation, and they look back to Martin Luther as the Protestant Reformer that they most relate to. He's their favorite. You talk about Ulrich Zwingli, even John Calvin, Martin Bucer, Philip Melancthon, not so much. Those are a bit more foreign to us. Why is that? It's because Martin Luther, he says so much that's memorable, for better and for worse. He says a lot that's quotable. He reveals a lot about himself because, he's frankly, he's less restrained in his speech. He jumps right out there, even talking quite a bit about himself, not maybe in a prideful way, but maybe just in a revealing way, more than the other Reformers.

So that means we know far more about Martin Luther than the other Reformers, so it makes sense we identify a lot with him, and a lot of people like him as a favorite Reformer. And it's

similar with Peter. In the wisdom of God, we have more of Peter's words and actions recorded in Scripture than the other Apostles, and it's probably because he was maybe more impulsive than the other Apostles. Maybe less restrained. And I want to add a caution that I don't see him as self-centered or profane, as we're going to see. It's just that he's more of an out with it, kind of a guy than other men which means there is more of his humanity on display, more of his heart is out there for us to look at. At the end of the day, it's his humanity we can all identify with, because it's a humanity that's common to all of us.

No matter what kind of personality we have, we can see our humanity reflected in the humanity of Peter on the pages of Scripture. There are times when Peter's words rise to sublime heights. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Or when he says in the face of the, the apostasy of many of Jesus' disciples, Jesus turns to the Twelve, he says, You don't want to go anywhere too, do you? Peter says, heroically, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." There are times when his actions are nothing short of heroic,

demonstrations of great faith. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

We marvel at what seems to be remarkable faith, or at times maybe even reckless faith. But Peter made the good confession. He was spot-on in his theology at that point. Peter took a supernatural walk with the Lord Jesus on the water. What other Apostle could say that? At other times, though, Peter could be shockingly impetuous in his speech. He made promises he couldn't keep.

He audaciously rebuked the Lord himself. After calling him Lord, he rebuked the Lord. He's, in his actions sometimes, Peter could swing wildly from the impulsively courageous, he's ready to take on the entire Roman cohort with his single sword, but we also see on the other side of that the cowardly, the vacillating, as he's shamed by a slave girl. Or as he plays the hypocrite with Judaizers, or worse, as he crows about his courage before Christ and the Apostles, only to be revealed by the crow of a rooster; to deny Christ just hours later when it counted most.

So we, we feel the shame with Peter. We identify with his sins and his weaknesses because we know that we ourselves, we would have probably spoken and acted in much the same way many of the times we see there. Or if we're not wired like Peter, we may tend to be more reserved, we know that we would have at least had the same impulses, the same temptations. We're never repelled by him. We're actually drawn to him the more we see and especially as we admire his humility, his, his proper sense of reverence in the holy presence of Jesus Christ. He says, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." We rejoice with him, too, whenever he got it right. Why is that?

Because of Peter is the Apostle with whom we all most identify. And I think that's one of the reasons the Lord chose him to be not only an Apostle, but also one of his close, intimate associates because there are qualities about Peter that we can all identify with. He's clearly a leader among the Twelve, but he's not a remote or aloof person. He's real. He's transparent, even demonstratively so, whether that's good or bad for his overall reputation. We always know what Peter is thinking, don't we? It makes him so easy to portray in the

biblical record, because he's given the authors of Scripture so much material to work with.

I believe that was God's design, as I said, not just in choosing him for apostleship, but in putting him a prominent place among the Apostles because God wanted all of us to see in Peter lessons about weakness and strength, lessons about courage and cowardice, lessons about relying on self and the end of that versus relying on Christ and the end of that. All these things teach us that at the center of all of it is the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Peter we're all able to see something of ourselves. We find encouragement and hope as we live our own Christian lives. We know that at the end of the day what's best about us is Christ.

As we've said, Peter is a leader among the Twelve, kind of a *primus inter pares*, that Latin phrase that means, first among equals. He's listed at the head of the innermost circle in all four of the lists of the Apostles, as we talked about. He's the one we find leading the other men, speaking out on their behalf, or even taking action before any of them know what's going on. He's always jumping into the fray before anyone else, taking the

initiative. He's clearly a leader. That's what we see portrayed in Matthew 16:13 and following. This is really a foundational moment in a foundational time in church history, and particularly so in light of the fact this is the first time in church history that the word, church, is used to refer to the church. Our Lord first used the word church here in Matthew 16, one of only three times in all of the Gospels. Once here, and then twice in Matthew 18:17, but beyond that, we wait for the Spirit to fall on the believers in the Book of Acts to see this word church used again. Ekklesia, to see it used routinely to refer to this new body of believers.

So this is a foundational text. It's a foundational moment. And Peter, once again, is right at the center. Look what it says in Matthew 16:13: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'" Stop there for a second. The scene takes place in Caesarea Philippi. It's a city that was perched atop a rock plateau, 1,500 feet above sea level. It's at the northern end of the Golan Heights situated at the foothills of Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon is this massive rock giant, towering more than 9,000 feet above sea level. The whole region is in the

shadow beneath it. The city of Caesarea Philippi, it's the ancient city of Paneas, which is dedicated to the Greek god Pan, devoted to Pan worship.

In Roman times, Philip the Tetrarch built up and beautified this city, renaming it Caesarea Philippi in honor of the emperor Caesar Augustus, who was also, by the Romans, viewed as a god. So the city and the entire region that they just entered are symbols of pagan worship. And it's interesting that the Lord chose this place and not another, but this place to draw the good confession out of his disciples. Why? Because in contrast to the many erroneous opinions of the Jews, and in contrast to the false worship of the Greeks and the Romans, Jesus wants the Apostles to think about him in antithetical black and white terms. He is exclusive and unique. That's what he wants them to see.

Notice verse 14, Jesus asked the question, "'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" You see the confusion there. "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the

Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!’” Son of John, that is. “‘For flesh and blood has not revealed this you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,’” or more accurately have been bound in heaven, “‘whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.”

So in contrast to the other prophets and great men in Israel’s history, Jesus is set apart. He’s unique. He is the Christ, the Messiah of God. And there’s only one of those. In contrast to the pagan deities, Jesus is not some other dead idol. He’s not some other god with a small “g.” He’s the Son of the living God. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone upon whom the church would be built. Peter’s confession identifies that cornerstone truth of the church’s foundation that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter himself is one of the twelve foundation stones.

Now, that is an amazing confession and a quite a special commendation of Peter by our Lord, isn't it? But there is a sense in which Peter, though he is a specially chosen instrument of Christ for a unique task, for an uncommon calling of apostleship, Peter here represents a true typical believer.

Peter, he wasn't the only one of the Apostles to come to the right conclusion, he was just the first to speak up, as per usual. And in fact, I think Peter's good friend, the Apostle John, who was there, he would have come to that very conclusion. Turn just briefly to John 11:25. John 11:25, there, John tells us that the same confession that Peter made at Caesarea Philippi was actually the common Christian confession. And not just of all the Apostles, but of all true believers. And he makes the point here by letting us hear the same confession, almost word for word, but not from an Apostle, but hearing it from the hurried, worried, distracted Martha.

You may remember this is, this scene here in John 11 is on the sorrowful occasion of the death of her brother Lazarus. And

Jesus is speaking words of comfort to her. And he, he said to Martha, verse 25, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.’”

Now notice there that Jesus did not stop at that point and say, “Blessed are you, Martha, and I tell you, you are *petra* and on this rock, I will build my church and I’ll give you the keys,” of the kingdom, “of heaven,” and so on and so forth. He doesn’t stop and say that, does he? She said exactly what Peter said because that is the common confession of every true disciple.

So again, just to emphasize, Peter’s life represents the common life of every true disciple. It’s grounded in faith and it’s explainable only by God. As Jesus said to Peter, “Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you.” That is, you didn’t come up with this on your own, Peter, “but my Father who is in heaven.” God is the reason for

every true believer, and faith in Christ is what causes us to follow the path of Peter. For weakness is strength.

We all share a common life, which comes from God. We all make a common confession, which was revealed to us by God. We all grow in the same direction toward Christlikeness, because that is the purpose and intention of God. And Peter would have us understand that very same thing. He would have us understand that his life, not his special calling to Apostleship mind you, but his life, it's the typical experience for every true believer. As he wrote in his first epistle, "you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious'" Who's that? Jesus Christ. "and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

So Peter, he is neither the remote, transcendent saint of the Roman Catholic Church, enshrined in stained glass to be admired as the Holy Father, the Bishop of Rome, the first Pope,

nor is he merely the Apostle who represents all those who speak and act impetuously, who lack wisdom, who are guilty of inserting foot in mouth all the time. Peter represents every true believer, grounded in faith, instructed in hope, and serving the Savior for his entire lifetime with a heart of an increasing passionate love for Christ. Faith, hope, and love. Faith, hope, and love.

Let's take a look at the first point. In faith, Peter followed Jesus Christ. In faith, Peter followed Jesus Christ. In the text that we just read, Matthew 16:18, Jesus told Peter, "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." The mention of that nickname Peter, that harkened time to the first, harkened back to the time when Peter first met Jesus. We looked at this passage last week, but you might want to turn there in John.

You're in John right now, so just turn back to John 1 and verse 40. John the Baptist had just pointed two of his disciples to Jesus, and they left John to follow Jesus, which was appropriate, which was right, and one of them was Andrew. Look at John 1:40. "One of the two who heard John speak and followed

Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah,' which means Christ, "and he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said," so, 'You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas.'" Which means Peter.

So he translates it over from the Aramaic to the Greek for the Greek readers of his Gospel. Jesus gave Simon the name Peter at that very first meeting. It's the word *cephas*, as I said, in Aramaic, the word *petros* in Greek, and it refers to a detached, but a very large fragment of rock. And the rock upon which Jesus would build his church, is a, is a *petra*. That's the next word he uses in Matthew 16:18. It's a *petra*, a massive, a living rock. Peter is a fragment from that larger rock. Jesus didn't name Peter "rock" because he was so rock-like dependable, not at this point, anyway.

He named him Peter because he knew what he planned to do with Simon. He looked ahead. And Jesus intended to make Simon firm like a rock, like a *petros*. He intended to turn his life into the bedrock foundation for the entire church, the entire church age. Jesus could say that even from these early days because he

identified in Peter the evidence of the Father's work. He saw in Peter the indispensable quality and virtue of every true disciple. What is it? It's the necessary and foundational virtue of faith.

So when Peter, when Andrew told Peter, "We have found the Messiah," Peter came. He started following Jesus from that point on. And by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we see that Peter was with Jesus in Cana of Galilee, where, where the water was turned into wine at the wedding. He watched Jesus there in Jerusalem clear the temple of the buyers and the sellers and the moneychangers. Remember later that it was said, "Zeal for your house has consumed me." He saw that in Jesus.

He was around for the meeting of Nicodemus, maybe in not in the room, but close enough to get the report, find out what happened. Jesus taught on the foundational need for regeneration, for rebirth, for new birth from the Holy Spirit from God. Peter then traveled back to Galilee with Jesus. He witnessed the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman when he came back and found him talking to a Samaritan woman. Then he saw the harvest of the Samaritans who came to

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Christ. Peter believed and he followed, and he saw all this marvelous, miraculous stuff.