

The Twelve: Solidifying the Rock, Part 5

Luke 6:14

We were looking at the greatest lesson that Peter would ever learn from Jesus. We were really in the middle of a point, illustrating an important point, namely, that Peter had been attempting to serve Christ, but he was attempting to do so according to his own understanding of love. He was doing so according to his own naturally defined concept of what love and loyalty to Christ should look like. Watching how that played out in Peter's life, seeing how that led to his greatest failure, it's not only instructive for us, but it's essential for understanding what actually happened to Simon. This is how Jesus changed Simon from being such an unstable, vacillating, unreliable man and how he turned that man into Peter, the steadfast, rock-like foundation stone of the Christian church. And for Peter, as we're going to find out, it was all about learning the power of divine love.

We've been watching this transformation take place. One of those documentary videos where you see this time-lapse video with an under-the-soil view of a seed germinating roots growing downward and shoots growing upward. That is what we've been watching with Peter. It's underneath the soil at this point. We're going to see some real growth this morning. That is going to give life and fruit to his later ministry.

We've constructed our outline of Peter's life around that triad of Christian virtues: faith, hope and love. Because like every true believer, Peter followed Jesus in faith, he learned from Jesus in hope, and Jesus had been teaching Peter all along for more than two years of daily intimate fellowship and instruction he had been teaching him. And the most important lesson of all, what Peter and the Apostles needed to learn most, it had to do with the motivation for all service to God and for all ministry toward God, for all ministry to the good of other people. It had to be done in love. Not just your own self-definition of love, not just your own understanding about love, but the love of God. In Paul's words, 1 Corinthians 16:14, "Let all that you do be done in love," in love. Peter thought he had that down.

He's like us, right? He thinks he's serving Christ appropriately, sufficiently, but he'd been getting it wrong. He was serving Christ in his own strength, in his own understanding, he was depending on his own understanding of loyalty and love; the power of his own affection, that, that had the power to keep him near and close, standing firm, but he had a lot to learn.

Just as a reminder, to set up the context here, Jesus was here with his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. He was waiting here for his betrayer to lead the band of soldiers to arrest Jesus and take him to his appointment, his eventual appointment with the cross. Judas Iscariot was there along with the Jewish leaders, accompanied by Roman troops. All of them came that night into the garden to arrest Jesus.

We know that they were doing the bidding of Satan himself, who had personally inhabited Judas Iscariot. And yet, at the same time, we need to understand that all of them were actually carrying out the eternal decree of the father, the decision that

he had made in eternity past to redeem his people from their sins through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. God was accomplishing His eternal will on this very night. This didn't happen to Jesus; God did this.

As Peter later understood clearly, as he proclaimed to his own people, the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, those Jewish people who committed the most tragic act in human history by crucifying their own Messiah. Peter told them in Acts 2:23, "This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Yeah, there's the free actions of human beings.

There's the sin of human beings as they murdered an innocent man. But there's also the eternal decree of the father, his plan that was coming to fruition on this very night. Peter didn't understand that, though, on this very night. He didn't understand the, the gospel truth when he was with Jesus in the garden on the night of his betrayal and arrest. Peter was in fact completely out of step with God the father; he was out of step with the stated will and intention of Jesus Christ, who told the disciples repeatedly, I will be put to death, but I

will rise from the dead. Peter didn't get that here. He had no sense about the activity of the Holy Spirit; the triune God intended to see Jesus crucified that night. And Peter, for his part, was dead set against that, which put him in direct contradiction to God himself. Here's our Apostle folks.

How many of us through misunderstanding can be put in the very same position? Here he is intent on preventing the arrest the death of Jesus Christ, John 18:10, as you can see there. Peter whips out his sword, and he takes a swipe at Malchus's head. He missed, took off his ear instead. That had to hurt. John doesn't bother telling us that Jesus healed Malchus. Matthew and Mark, they don't mention either.

But it's Luke here, the beloved physician, who gives us the little detail that Jesus did a little repairing surgery there. It's an important detail, especially if your name is Malchus. But again, Jesus, he had to rebuke Peter here for his rashness, not simply because it was impetuous and reckless, but more to the point, look at Jesus' question in John 18:11, "Peter, shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

As I said, he'd been telling Peter and his Apostles about the necessity of suffering. He'd been abundantly clear ever since Peter had made the good confession there at Caesarea Philippi, identifying Jesus as God's chosen Messiah and Matthew 16:21 it says, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed. And on the third day, be raised." It's pretty clear, right? But Peter kept standing in his way. Peter kept saying, No. Peter wanted to stop this suffering. He just wasn't getting the point. He wanted to prevent what God had planned. He wanted to prevent what Jesus intended to do. And he thought here that he was showing such great loyalty, expressing affection and love for Christ, but it's merely human love.

It really had more in common with Satan than with Christ as Jesus rebuked him and said, "Get behind me Satan." We all know people like that, right? People who listen to some of the stuff on television, some of the stuff on the radio that tells us that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. And it's all about sweet roses and great financial prosperity,

and everything is going to be good in the future. We're going to avoid suffering. We're going to avoid persecution, we're going to avoid difficulty, marginalization, ostracization in this world. No, we're not.

Jesus said, "If they hated me, they'll hate you." And the way to glory is the way of suffering. It's the way of the cross. We can't prevent that, nor should we. And as the scene unfolds here, we're going to find that Peter is going to learn the most important lesson in his life. It's one that he'd never forget. And it would come for him at great cost. It would come with extreme sorrow and anguish, something he'd never forget. But it was vital to Peter's usefulness in the apostolic service of Jesus Christ.

John 18 verse 12, it says there that "the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father in law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. And it was Caiaphas, who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple," we know that

disciple's John, "and since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door.

"So the other disciple who was known to the high priest went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, 'You also are one of this man's disciples, aren't you?' He said, 'I am not.' Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself." And we'll stop there for a second.

Throughout this section it's interesting how John constructs the narrative. We're going to see John shift the scene back and forth. The camera is first on the steadfastness of Jesus before his accusers. We see how he interacts with them how he most of the time just keeps silent. Then we also see the camera flip over and look at Peter. We see the behavior of this so-called rock.



This charcoal fire is burning in the quadrangle at the center of the high priest's home. The rooms of the home in those days, especially the larger homes, they're built around an open square. The high priest's servants, they were milling around in this open square, and they built a fire there. It was cold at night, and Peter's standing around the campfire with the soldiers, the guards, the officers. This is a man's campfire, manly men, manly conversation around this campfire. And I love the fact that God sent Peter, he sent him a female to test his strength, standing among all these manly men, having manly conversation, exhibiting and exuding just manliness. You know they've got swords on them. They're tough.

Here's Peter. He's also a manly guy, fisherman, Galilean, tough. His hands are leathery and strong. He's tested by the gentle inquiry of a woman and not even a fully mature woman, just a little servant girl. She's of no consequence, especially to this group of soldiers who are standing around the campfire. I mean, she's hardly even an issue, dismissive of her. She's exactly the kind of test that exposed Peter's character. He crumbled, absolutely came apart.

Mark tells us, painting the picture vividly, and Mark 14:66 and following, "As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you mean.'" That's an interesting way of phrasing that, isn't it? "And he went out into the gateway," he's trying to get away from her, "and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began to say to the bystanders, 'This man' was, was, 'one of them.' But again he denied it. And after a little while, with the bystanders again said to Peter, 'Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.'" "

This little servant girl, she's pretty persistent, isn't she? I have a daughter like that, two have them in fact. You know how young girls can be right? She's completely unaware of the implications of outing Peter here. She's not thinking about that. She's just very innocently identifying him and saying, No, no, no, no, don't, don't trouble me with all this other stuff. I know who you are. I have eyes. I can see; seen you before. She's simply trying to verify his identity. And she's incredulous here that Peter doesn't just admit his identity and confess his close

association with Jesus. Certainly, she would, if she knew him. God even gave Peter a preemptory warning, as the rooster crowed once just to get his attention. It was to no avail.

We're in John 18; look at verse 25. "Simon Peter was standing warming himself." You see, John brings us back to the same scene there. "So they said to him, 'You are also not one of his disciples are you?'" And "he denied it and said, 'I am not.'" And "one of the servants of the high priest, a relative of a man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked," him. Didn't "I see you in the garden with him?" "I'm pretty sure you're the guy. And "Peter again denied it. And at once the rooster crowed."

Matthew's account tells us that Peter invoked a curse on himself. That is, he swore by oath, before God in heaven, "I do not know the man." Back in Luke's Gospel, we read a little detail that really pierces the heart here. Luke tells us in Luke 22:60, "Immediately, while he was still speaking," that is, while he was swearing an oath before God, while he's pronouncing a curse on himself, should he be lying, "the rooster crowed." And then this detail, get this. "The Lord turned and looked at Peter." Can you imagine that? That look was a dagger through his

heart. "And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today you will deny me three times.' And he went out and he wept bitterly."

Look, Peter trusted Jesus, and he followed him. This is not his best moment. Obviously this is a failure. This is a sin. But he did trust Jesus. He's there in the courtyard; his faith is weak; it's failing, it's faltering, and it completely let him down. But he did try to come, he probably justified to himself, You know, I don't want to, you know, reveal my identity because I'm here with the soldiers, I'm kind of listening in to what they're saying, because this is strategic for our eventual rescue of Jesus, as I break into where he's held, and I break him out of prison. And we run off and we rid the land of the Romans, and we move on to messianic glory, the glory of the millennial kingdom, when Jesus is on the throne, and I'm going to be there. He's got all this stuff in his head all figured out. He's standing there with the soldiers because he's gathering intel. I know what Peter's doing. I know how he's rationalizing this. Why? Because there's a little bit of Peter in all of us, isn't there? And God sent a little servant girl, a little servant girl to call him to account. He failed here.

But he did love Christ; he'd learned from Christ. He had been in the context of a daily, intimate communion, a relationship with him for three years, the better part of three years. And when it came to loving and serving Christ, it's true: The nature of His love, it needed to grow. In fact, the nature of His love had to change. And it had to change fundamentally. It had to move from a love that's defined by human sentiment, to a divine love, one that does not come from himself, but one that comes directly from God and is planted in the heart and then works its way out. It's a love that's defined by fidelity to the truth. It's a love that perseveres through suffering. It's a love that's demonstrated in self-sacrifice, and loyalty, even ultimate loyalty, loyalty unto death.

Peter, he'd been trying to serve Christ. But he'd been doing so in his own power, with his own energy, and it let him down. So once again, Christ designed a trial for Peter, which would expose his self-reliance and reveal the weakness of reliance on self, reveal the fickleness, the weakness, the smallness, the frailty of human love. Sovereignly, God designed this trial because he knew Peter would fail, that he would

really blow it. But sovereignly also, God had a good and wise purpose in mind, that he might build Peter up again. And then through Peter, teach all of us here two thousand years later, what is truly essential.

Here's where we're gonna get into our final point in this survey of Peter. He's a lot like us; we need to understand that. In faith he followed Christ, in hope he learned, but the most foundational lesson that he needed to learn was the one that would make Peter useful to Christ. And that brings us to a third point: In love he served Jesus Christ. In love Peter served Jesus Christ.

We've left poor Peter there weeping bitterly over his spiritual defection. By the way, how would you like your worst spiritual failure recorded on the pages of sacred Scripture, guaranteed by the eternal God to stay in writing, never to go out of print? And all your closest family members can read it. But look, since it serves to correct and instruct the church, I can tell you that Peter, he wouldn't have it any other way. "I must decrease," in the words of John the Baptist, "but he must

increase." We're not going to leave poor Peter in this condition of failure and defection, and the Lord didn't leave him there.

So let's read about his restoration. Just turn over a couple pages to John 21, John 21. And we're going to see how Jesus rounded out Peter's training, how Jesus restored Peter to useful service, and then how he deployed Peter into apostolic ministry. At the time, we get to John 21. Jesus has been arrested. He's been tried and sentenced by the Jewish leadership. And then he's been crucified by the Roman soldiers with the permission of Pontius Pilate.

Jesus died on the cross; he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. He was aided by Nicodemus, a former Pharisee both of those men had been members of the Sanhedrin. But they didn't assent to Jesus' crucifixion. They had become disciples of Jesus, but secretly, John tells us, for fear of the Jews. Jesus did not stay in the tomb that they buried him in. He was raised from the dead three days later. He didn't stay wrapped in the cloths that they provided. He didn't stay covered in the burial spices. He'd risen from the dead. He left the tomb.

He appeared to some of his disciples, first to the women at the tomb, Mary Magdalene, then the other women, Mary the mother of James the Lesser and Salome. I find it interesting that the first appearances of Jesus to any of his disciples is to females, not to males. Isn't that interesting? Then Jesus appeared to two disciples on the Emmaus Road. And then, only then, did Jesus appear to Peter, according to Luke 24:34.

And it's interesting that before Jesus appeared to the other disciples, the other eleven gathered as a group, he appeared to Peter, he appeared to him alone. It's a moment the Bible simply acknowledges in Luke 24:34, doesn't tell us much about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They tell the other eleven, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon." Just a simple statement.

No doubt, this appearance of Jesus that we don't know really anything about, it had to be, though, a total shock to Peter. His mind had to be in a whirl as he processed the fact of the resurrection, as he saw the risen Christ before him. But in



thinking about Jesus, and why did he want this private moment with Peter, before seeing any of the other Apostles, he wanted to see Peter first, to visit with him alone. It's such a tender moment of affirmation in our Lord, how he had a love and a tenderness and affection and a compassion for Peter, knowing he was stung by this defection, spiritually. I love it, too, that in all that the Lord had to accomplish, there's never a sense of hurry. He can take time; he can stop and pay attention. And he does. Peter saw Christ after getting over the fact of the resurrection, processing all of that, no doubt the feelings of guilt and shame had to hit Peter full force.

No doubt, he's replaying the memories in his mind over and over again, how he denied the Lord, how he wishes he could go back and do it again. The one he followed in faith, the one he had learned from in hope. The one to whom he professed such love and loyalty, even to the point of death, "even if everybody else denies you, I will not," that's what he said. That's the one he had so utterly and completely let down. That was not his intention. But with every post-resurrection encounter, Peter had to feel the weight of that shame. And as he remembered his sinful abdication and defection, it had to bring the tears over

and over, again. So in love, Jesus intended to stop that and restore him.