

The Twelve: Solidifying the Rock, Part 6

Luke 6:15-17

Look at John 21 verse 1, "After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the sea of Tiberius, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called the twin Nathanael of Canaan and Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. And Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We'll go with you.' And they went out, got into the boat. But that night, they caught nothing." That sounds familiar, doesn't it, from Luke 5.

There they are fishing again, another frustrating night of fishing. And another fishing miracle is on the way. Look at the next verses. "Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore. Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. And Jesus said to them, 'Children, do you have any fish?'" He knows the answer. Do you have any fish? "And they answered him, 'No.'" It's got to be dawning on them. "But he said to them, 'Cast the

net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it. And now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish, and that disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'"

"When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and he threw himself into the sea." That's Peter again, throwing himself around. I love it. "The other disciples they came in the boat." So Peter left them behind, right? You guys get the fish. I'll be over there on the shore. "He threw himself into the sea." Other disciples came in the boat, dragging a net full of fish, but they were not far from the land, "about a hundred yards off.

"When they got out on land, they saw the charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' And so Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them and although there were," look how eager he is to obey Jesus, go get some fish. Peter says, Okay, I'll get you some fish. How about 153? I'll get all of them. He's jumping

over there to get into the work because he doesn't want to let Jesus down. He wants to obey Him.

“Although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’” And, “none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord.” And, “Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with a fish.” Now, “this is the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.”

Let's look at the next verse in John 21, John 21:15. There's a section here in John 21:15 through 17, which is all about Jesus' restoration of Peter, and I want to walk through those verses just one by one, noting a few things along the way. “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ And he said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’” Don't stop there.

Notice the use of “Simon, son of John?” What is Jesus reminding Peter of? He's reminded him of his earliest identity.

"Simon, son of John, you're still the Peter that I called you to be. Simon, son of John, this is not what I intended you to be. Simon, son of John, you're something more." He comes back. He says, "Do you love me more than these?" More than what? More than, more than the other disciples? No, I think that what he's talking about is more than these, like the, the fish, the boats, the fishing. He's trying to break him from his Simon-thinking that wants to go back to fishing and give up on all of this. He says, "Do you love me more than these?" Or is your affection for me more than going back to this? Are you going to stay near me?

And Jesus asked him the question. He said, "Do you love me more than these?" He says, he uses the word, *agapao*. There are four words in the Greek for love. There's *storge*, which is kind of like a familiar kind of love. Like a mother has an affection for her children, the *storge* familial affection. There's the word *eros*, which is really dominant in our culture today. That's what people mean, mostly, when they talk about, I love this person or that person. They're really talking about what even the Greeks were talking about. They're talking about a lust. They're talking about a personal desire. They're talking about a

romantic feeling and sentiments that drive them, and sometimes they feel can't be bridled. That's *eros*.

There's also the word *phileo* or *philea* because that's the common Greek word for love. In the Greek language, it's the one that really was considered to be a highest form of love. It's the love that a friend had for a friend. But there's always in *phileo*, that kind of love, there's always a sense of, I'm gaining some benefit out of this. Listen, that makes sense to us, doesn't it? We love people because we're drawn to them. There's something about that person that attracts us. It's a natural, human kind of love and affection that one has for another, and it's a very common. It was very common in the Greek days as well.

There was also one more word. It was the word *agapao*, and *agapao* was a word that was more philosophical in nature in the Greek language. It was kind of a word that was pushed to the philosophical margins. It was kind of like this ultimate kind of a love that really is just a, just a love in theory. It's an idealistic love that one that would sacrifice all simply for the

good of someone else with no self-interest involved at all. That was *agapao*.

It's interesting that when Jesus told his disciples in John 13 that "by this all men will know you are my disciples, if you have," what? "love for one another. What kind of love? *Agapao*, ultimate sacrifice for the good of somebody else, according to the will of God, with no self-interest in mind. That was out of favor in the Greek world, just as it's out of favor in our world. But it's exactly the kind of love that we're to be identified by. It's exactly the kind of love that we didn't know until Jesus died for us on the cross.

Jesus questions Peter's *agapao*: "Do you *agapao* me?" And Peter responds honestly. Here he says, "Yes, Lord. You know," and he uses a synonym he thinks a synonym, "you know that I *phileo* you." You know that I have an affection for you, a strong affection. Notice the call to service here. Jesus doesn't stop and correct anything. He just calls him to service. He says, Okay, then, "Feed my lambs." "Feed my lambs." What's he calling him to, shepherding?

Jesus died for Peter and all of his people, as the Great Shepherd is calling Peter to shepherding, in the pattern of himself, as Peter is an under-shepherd of the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. That doesn't do it. That's not it. Look at verse 16. "Jesus said to him," to Peter, "a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'" Do you *agapao* me? "He said to him, 'Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.'" Again, he's, he's talking to Jesus. He, he knows Jesus can see right through him. He's not trying to shade anything. He's not trying to be duplicitous. He's not trying to be hypocritical in any way. He's trying to be guileless, straightforward, as straightforward and honest as he can be. And he says, "You know, Lord, that I *phileo* you." You know I have an affection for you. You know I love you.

Look at the call to service here and the nature of the service. Jesus not only says, "Feed my lambs," but he says to Peter, "Tend my sheep." The word, tend, is the word, shepherd. Shepherd my sheep. Shepherding a broader concept than feeding. Feeding is that they, they need to eat. Sheep need to eat to be healthy. But tending, shepherding, that's a broader concept. It involves a whole lot more: keeping them out of danger, steering

them away from wolves, guarding them against wolves, fighting wolves, fighting against bandits and everything else.

Look at verse 17 now, Jesus "said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him," a third time here, "Feed my sheep."

Peter's grieved, *lupeo* is the word, he's feeling deep, deep sadness. He's feeling deep, deep sorrow. You know there's a wound there ever since he defected from the point of the courtyard, where he denied Jesus three times, the rooster crows, he gets that look from Jesus, that dagger that pierced him right through, and he cries, he weeps, the tears are flowing and he has never forgotten that. Time has only put a scab on that wound. And Jesus, he's messing with that. "Do you love me?" and he's pushing on it and it hurts. This third time, though, he rips that thing wide open. He rips the wound wide open.

Why does Jesus do that? Is he torturing? Is he taking pleasure in Peter's grief? Is he making him really feel it, grovel before him? It's sadness? The third time Jesus comes to him, he questions his love a third time and this time when he questions him, he uses Peter's word for love. Jesus says, "Do you love me?" He said to him the third time, "Do you love me," and it's not the word, not *agapao*. It's the word *phileo*. Do you *phileo*? Is there even that? Peter affirms again his *phileo*, but he's torn from the heart. He affirms Jesus' omniscience, the fact that he knows every detail, the fact that he knows him through and through. "Lord you know everything, you know that I *phileo* you." It's there. And then the call to service: "Feed my sheep."

Why three times? Once for each denial, once for every crow of the rooster, once for every condemning crow of the rooster, there's a restoration. This is not, this is not torture on Jesus' part. This isn't sadism. This is loving, tender affirmation and restoration. This should tell us something about our coming to God and finding forgiveness. Folks, forgiveness isn't easy. Forgiveness costs a lot.

When you think about your forgiveness before God, think about the cross. Think about how much God hated sin that it would cause him to put his own son to death and pour out his wrath on him. It costs a lot. Forgiveness is not cheap. It's not easy. And we should never think that we can come to God in a flippant manner and say, I know I denied you, forgive me for that, pffffsh, it just slipped my mind.

We should never come to each other either in such a flippant attitude seeking forgiveness. We should expect that identifying sin in our lives hurts. It does not feel good. Humility is hard. Humility is painful. But listen, for those who truly know God, who are truly regenerate, who have a new nature. That's the only thing we can do. We are going to come to people and just open ourselves up. And that's what Jesus does to Peter here. He just cuts, opens up. Why? Because he's got to clear that wound out and heal from the bottom of that wound all the way to the surface. This is a deep restoration, not superficial.

This is restoration into a service after the sin of spiritual defection. And you would think from Peter's instability, his vacillation, his weakness, that he can never be

useful to Christ again. Not true. Peter could admit to Jesus here in all honesty, in all transparency, the true nature of his love. It wasn't the *agape* love that Jesus was asking about, but it was what he had, it was a start. But the *agape* love would develop and grow in Peter's life, and that's exactly what Jesus wanted Peter to know next.

Look at verse 18. This is what he's going to affirm to Peter here, he, he wants him to understand the next couple of verses here, that Peter, Look, I'm going to develop *agape* love in you, here is how you'll know, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me.'"

Tradition passed down to us from the early church tells us that Peter was put to death in Rome. He was crucified there by the Roman government. Some versions of the tradition say that he refused to be crucified like his Lord and so he requested, and

it was granted his request, to be crucified not like his Lord but upside down. There's actually another tradition that says his wife was crucified first right before his eyes. He had to watch her suffer and die in front of him before he died.

Before he died, Peter had lived up to his name, though. And he loved Jesus to the very end. Not because there was something in Peter, but because something that Jesus was doing in Peter to turn his own affection into the strength of divine love that would remain forever. Paid the ultimate sacrifice. From this point on, Peter, he has moments of vacillation, moments of weakness.

In fact, you can see right after this, Jesus said to him, "Follow me." The very next verse, Peter turned. Jesus says "Follow me," and Peter is all eager, filled with gusto about following Christ, but then he turned. He turned around "and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?'" Again Peter is failing, again right off the bat. He's restored into service and what

does he do? First step, falls flat on his face. In Galatians chapter 2 we find Peter vacillates again as he feels the pressure from the Judaizing element in the church and, yeah, he plays the hypocrite, and Paul calls him out for it publicly. But what does he do? He repents, he turns again.

Peter is not a perfect man, and God has nothing to work with except imperfect men and women, right? That's why Peter is so relatable to us. But he became the rock; he lived up to his name just as Jesus said he would. He became a steadfast witness for Christ. He became one of the twelve foundation stones of the Christian church. In fact, he was the key Apostle who verified the progress of the Gospel, first among the Jews in Acts 2-4, then among the Samaritans in Acts 8-9 and then among the Gentiles in Acts 10-11.

As he preached the Gospel to Cornelius the Roman centurion, and he did that among the Samaritans, among the Gentiles, completely turning against the sentiments and the sympathies of his own Jewish people. He was a rock. We Gentiles, we owe God a great debt of gratitude for Peter. Because he stood, rock like, at the Jerusalem council defending the equal footing in Christ

of both Jew and Gentile. He was withstanding very powerful, pro-Jewish superiority voices in Jerusalem.

In fact, if you turn in your Bibles just quickly and see in Acts chapter 15, we see a shining example of a triumph in Peter's life, his rock-like character that stood fast even when pressure was coming against him. It says in Acts 15:6 that the Apostles and the elders, "they, "were gathered together to consider the matter." The matter is that there is a complaint against Gentiles joining in with the Jewish church and being counted as one with the church.

So they are gathered together to consider this matter. "And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

"Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'" Sounds pretty Pauline doesn't it? But that's Peter. He paved the way for Paul's ministry to us Gentiles as the Apostle to the Gentiles. And here is he is standing with men. He's standing in this council, and this time he does not fail, he does not vacillate, he does not exhibit any weakness at all. He's no longer Simon, he's Peter and he stands firm. Very rock-like.

What had happened to Peter? Well by following Christ in faith, by learning from him in hope, serving him in love, Peter's love is transformed. From that which is weak and vacillating, took on the strength and the steadfastness, characteristic of divine love, true love, which Jesus demonstrated perfectly on the cross. That is what conformed Peter to God's love, made him steadfast and rock-like.

We read about it particularly in the first chapter of Acts, as Peter led his Apostles in replacing Judas Iscariot with

Mathias. We can see there how much Peter returned to the Old Testament Scriptures. He found time and again Christ revealed there, he saw the nature of Christ's ministry which he had previously not understood, he saw it clarified. And understanding it finally, the Holy Spirit then used Peter to lay this doctrinal foundation of the church as he proclaimed the prophetic word. And Peter was submissive to that prophetic word, whether spoken or written, whether coming out of his own mouth and ministry, whether coming out of his own pen, or coming out of the mouth of another Apostle.

We read about his attitude toward Scripture, seeing the apostolic ministry as Scripture, 2 Peter 3:15-16. He commended to his readers not just his own writings but then also the inspired canonical scriptures penned by the Apostle Paul. He says, "Just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you concerning the wisdom given to him." As he does in all his letters when he speaks of them in these matters and he says that they are on equal authority with Scripture, the rest of the Scriptures.

And his love, Peter's love, grew throughout time in real knowledge, all discernment, just as ours does, as he found Christ revealed in Scripture. As you read his two epistles, that's what he commends all Christians. To pay very careful attention to God's Word in order that we practice true love. Not the kind of vacillating love that he had naturally, but serving God and one another in obedient, joyful love that's given from God. It comes from heaven, not from earth.

In fact, let's just, let's just close today, our time, by looking at 2 Peter Chapter 1. I want to show you something there, very important, connects to something we talked about last week when we looked at the Transfiguration. Peter is nearing the end of his life in 2 Peter. He's imprisoned in Rome; he's facing certain death. You hear the tone of the elderly Apostle in this letter, fatherly concern for fellow Christians. Christians are being marginalized, even persecuted by the pagan world. They're being infiltrated by false teachers.

Peter tells them several times in Chapter 1 verses 12, 13, 15 his purpose is to remind them of what they already knew. He wants to anchor their confidence and their hope in what's

written. He makes the point in such a powerful way, telling them in verse 16, "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"

Remember we read that last week? "We ourselves, Verse 18, "heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." That is, Peter said, he's, he's remembering the time when God said, "Pay attention to Christ." Verse 19, "We have something more sure." More sure than what? More sure than that experience. More certain, "the prophetic word to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

PILLAR OF —TRUTH—



God is the guarantee of the truth of his Word. And Peter wants to anchor people, Christians following him, anchor them not in their experiences, not on their own confidence, but in God's holy Word. This is what happened to Peter. He went back to the Word of God, and he continued to rehearse and learn, and come to understand who Christ is.