

Today we are beginning our new series in the epistles of Peter. He was called a rock by Jesus for his confession and commitment to God, and sometimes a he was also called Satan by Jesus for his obstinance and his willingness to be an obstacle to the plans of God in salvation. His contemporary apostle, Paul, who was fitted for the proclamation of the gospel to non-Jewish ethnicities, is different than Peter in many respects. We can deduce a lot about the apostle Paul from his writings, but with Peter we can actually go back to the gospels and see where he learned many of the lessons that he teaches us in his epistles. It's like scrolling through old pictures with someone who I has experienced a lot of life, and having them recount what was taking place during that time. Or, if I may lean in on a universally masculine activity, its like Peter is showing us his scars and telling us how they got there and why. One thing is certain about Peter, he knew what failure was. He knew what it was to be embarrassed. He knew what it was to succeed. Peter's life is like a map for how to make massive mistakes in life and be an amazing instrument of grace and mercy, and sometimes all at the same time.

.I. Let's start by considering some "fun facts" about peter, FFAP. Peter, and Andrew his brother, was a fisherman by trade, and he fished the Sea of Galilee. The sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake. It would be comparable to fishing on one of the Great Lakes on our continent. Peter was probably trilingual . We know he spoke Aramaic, which was the common Semitic language of that time and area. He would have spoken Hebrew, at least enough to understand the reading of the scriptures in Hebrew. An overly simplistic comparison between Hebrew and Aramaic would be to compare French and Spanish. The differences are probably more pronounced, but it helps our western minds. And, since Greek was the language of the Romans and therefore the trade language, and since we do have Peter's letters in Greek, we can say that Peter spoke Greek. That being said, there are differing degrees of fluency in any language, but from what we can gather from reading the texts and knowing something about the area of that time, Peter could at least get by in his communication. This should encourage us to leverage everything we have to be a vehicle of sharing Christ. If Peter had waited until his Greek reflected the precision and flow of Luke's Greek, we may never have his two epistles. Concerning Peter's connection with Jesus, we can see from the gospels that Peter was first moved by the message of John the Baptist, and it was after hearing from John that Jesus was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world that Peter began to seek audience with Jesus. That tells us that Peter was actively concerned about his relationship with God, and was seeking the coming of the Messiah. We learn also from Paul in **1 Corinthians 9:5** that Peter was married, as were many, if not all, the apostles except Paul. As an aside, the fact that Peter, who is deemed the first Pope, was married, should have informed the Roman Church's teaching on the marriage of clergy. It underscores not only that godly personal relationships, like Biblical marriage, are not hinderances to serving Christ, rather, but also that they may very well help us define better the kind of ministry we should do.

But for the rest of our time this morning, let's consider some of the experiences that Peter had, as revealed in the gospels, that can help us understand this man further, and grow in our own walk with God. **.II. Lessons from Peter.** I will start with **Matthew 4:18-20**. The text tells us that Peter's vocation was fishing. It tells us that when Jesus called them, he assigned a different vocation to them, they would fish for men, which of course is a play on words from Jesus Christ. He was calling these men to serve people with the gospel which saves from sin and eternal separation from God. To be clear, the gospel is this, that Jesus Christ died for our sins. Jesus Christ was buried and was raised three days later, just like the scriptures teach us. And Jesus Christ appeared bodily to hundreds of Christians at one time, as well as to smaller groups and individuals, before He ascended into heaven. If we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our singular means of deliverance from sin, God gives us eternal life. Jesus is calling Peter to this task, although Peter doesn't yet know the full implication of this calling. None-the-less, the text tells us that Peter, Andrew, James, and John, all immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. Now this was not haphazard. We are told in Marks gospel that James and John left their nets with their father and the hired servants. Peter and Andrew most certainly had others that he left his things with, perhaps adult children, or other family. But as for themselves, their "fishing for a living" days were over. Their entire focus was to bring the gospel to all who would listen. This complete act of worship is underscored when later we read that Peter says on the heals of the rich young ruler walking away from Jesus so as to not have to give up his wealth and status, "we have left all and followed you." And Jesus commends them, with a promise of provision, for their sacrifice. And here in lies the exhortation for the believer, that we should at any moment be inclined to drop the course of our focus and life if Jesus should desire our more focused attention upon the gospel. It doesn't mean we can't use our gifts and capacities to aid us in providing for this focus. Paul teaches us this as he made tents to support himself in ministry. It does mean that everything else in life is a secondary pursuit to the primary pursuit of gospel proclamation. We are all called to seek after Jesus. We are all sent to proclaim the gospel. But there are differing levels of commitment that Jesus Christ demands. Most will be called to be a faithful Christian in other vocations. Some are called to be faithful Christians as missionaries and pastors. All must be ready and willing to surrender either calling if it would be the command of Christ.

So the penetrating heart questions can begin. Are you disposed to rest your nets and fishing gear if Jesus so calls you? If the answer is no, oh brother or sister, I implore you to discern why your heart is not gladly given, though fearful, of leaving your nets and following Christ to serve the gospel. This is more than an issue of obedience, this is an issue of the affections. Let me tap on one of the greatest pulls on the heart, the grandchild/grandparent relationship. My brother who lives in Northern

California was telling me of a phone call he received from his grandson in Southern California. His grandson is around 3 years old and he asked his parents if he could call his grandpa. Assuming his desire to talk to grandpa just to say hello, the call went out. The intent of the “hello” became clear. He asked my brother if the next day grandpa would take him to Disney Land. Apparently he told my nephew that he wanted to talk to his grandpa, and when the call was made, the request was snuck in. Guess who took a vacation day and was on the 6:00 am flight to L.A. for a day at Disney with all the grandkids in L.A.? The only thing that can stir that kind of immediacy is love. We say we love Jesus enough to repent of our sins. Do we love Jesus enough to walk away from the life He’s blessed us with, all that we may glorify Him through more focused service, if that should be His desire? Peter, Andrew, James, and John are excellent examples of service.

But this should derive a deeper question, **how do we encourage that kind of love for Christ?** The answer can be found in another example from Peter’s life. This particular example is more in the line of a *recurring life lesson*. Have you ever noticed how God does this? He cycled the same life lessons throughout our lives at different times and each time takes us deeper and changes us more than before. It’s like an ever expanding drill bit that turns and turns throughout our life. Though it is not the focus of this point, **one of those life lessons Peter deals with in his epistle is joy and strength in the midst of suffering**. There are several events in the life of Peter that underscore this. One story finds Jesus and Peter with the other disciples caught in the middle of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. These were experienced sailors if their lives were supported by fishing. Here in that storm when they fear for their lives because of the immanent threat of death, they wake Jesus up who simply rebukes the wind and the waves. Jesus calmed the seas, and then the emotion that would lead to a proper affection for Jesus is seen in this question, “**what manner of man is this?**” And, “**amazement seized them all, and they glorified God.**” Within the gospel narratives we have these kinds of statements from the disciples as they observe and follow Jesus. All of these because there was some crisis, some difficulty or fear that Jesus drove away like we flick flies away from us. Finally, towards the end of the ministry of Jesus, Peter gives the synopsis of this amazement when asked by Jesus who they thought He was. Peter’s response is clear and unwavering, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Christian, are you in awe that you traffic in the courts of the divine? We need to ask God to help us continue to be in awe of this awesome truth, that God is, and that God is with us.

A proper view of Christ is a view that stands in awe of His mercy towards us personally, individually. We don’t just stand in the presence of greatness when we encounter Jesus. We stand in the presence of God, and it is a view of God informed by His mercy towards mankind. Jesus Christ died on a cross for our sins because God the Father loved the world. **It is a view that recognizes that His sacrifice is so great there is nothing that we could ever dream of withholding from his service.**

But consider what the life lesson was for Peter. He loved Jesus. He recognized who Jesus was. He was willing to fight for Jesus physically. But the path that led to one of the greatest failures in Peter’s life, the failure to stand with Jesus and ultimately deny Him before men, was a path that underscored where Peter’s affections needed to grow. **The hard lesson for Peter was in letting Jesus go to His calling. Peter’s affection for Jesus needed to grow enough to let Jesus go, and with that so went all of Peter’s errant views of power and authority he would gain.** It’s so bad that Jesus tells Peter that he’s being like Satan in trying to keep Jesus from doing what He was there to do. Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has a plan for the individuals in our lives that will confront our willingness to follow in obedience. It’s easy to say that we are willing to leave to be missionaries and pastors. It is easy to say we will die for Jesus. **But can we say that we will release those we love to the plan of God when it is hardship and toil for them?** Do we love Jesus enough to say, yes Lord, we will follow you even down the path of cancer, the loss of a child, the calling of grandchildren to the mission field, the loss of material wealth or fraternal wealth? These are the sacrifices that leave scars. But they are not without God’s promise of blessing. For the Christian this is not a desperate sacrifice with little to no probability of joy on the other side. The Christian is promised blessing. The Christian is promised to be transformed by the renewing of heart and mind. And finally, the Christian is promised joy that is so inexpressible that Paul tells us he can’t even tell us what God has revealed to Him about heaven. There are rewards awaiting those in Christ that I must give up to Christ. There are rewards awaiting us individually when we lean into the “all in” duties to which we are called. And so Peter concludes his epistle with these words, “**after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who had called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and even. Amen.**” 1 Peter 5:10-11