

A FEW WORDS FROM THE ROCK-MAN

Matthew 16:13-18 | St. Peter & St. Paul, Apostles | June 26/29, 2014

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Jesus

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Peter. Actually, that wasn't always my name. My given name is Simon, but now I am called Peter (Cephas in my native Aramaic – although I don't use that one very much). Loosely translated, Peter means “rock-man.” It's sort of a nickname.

Let me tell you the story of how I got this name. I grew up a fisherman. My earliest memories are all about mending nets and catching fish in the big lake called Galilee. My brother Andrew fished with me. My father taught us how. But he didn't just teach us how to make a living as fisherman. He taught us the truth about the living God. He taught us about the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

One day, my brother found the Messiah (really, Jesus is the one who did the finding). Andrew came to me all excited and said, “We have found the Christ!” He then took me to see Jesus. Jesus looked at [me] and said, **“You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas.”**

Translate that into Greek and you get Peter, the rock-man.

I am so glad to have this opportunity to share a few words with you today. My only goal is to help you see Jesus. I want you to know him, love him and serve him as I do. First, let me be honest. Though Jesus called me rock-man, I wasn't very rock-like.

I. I wasn't always so rock-like

I spent three years with Jesus – walking, talking, listening. I was privileged to see and do some amazing things. I tasted the water he changed into wine, and later I drank the wine in which he gives his blood. I saw him still the storm and walk on water. I even walked on the water myself, until I took my eyes off of Jesus. I witnessed him heal countless of the sick, the lame, the blind, the demon-possessed. Later, by his power alone, I did the same. I saw him raise Jairus' little girl back to life. Years later he did the same for dear Tabitha through me. I heard him preach and teach with divine authority. By his grace I spent many years preaching and teaching his powerful Word which brought the kingdom to countless hearts.

Who'd have thought an “unschooled, ordinary” Galilean fisherman could do such things? Certainly not I! I have lived

an amazing life. I even have the privilege of bearing the name apostle, one trained personally by Jesus and sent out to share his Word with the world.

But let's back up a minute. I've only told the good stuff, the success stories. There has been plenty of bad too, all of it my fault. As I said before, I haven't always lived up to my nickname. Rocks are solid and strong. By nature I was more like a sponge – soft and weak.

First of all, I had a big mouth. I had a tendency to open my big mouth before engaging my brain. Like what happened right after the events of our text. Jesus talked about going to the cross, to suffer and die. I told him that would never happen to him. Jesus looked right at me and said, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** I can't tell you how much that hurt. I think it hurt him more to say it. But he was right. I wasn't thinking. I was looking for glory without sacrifice.

I also had a problem with arrogance. I was sometimes a little over-confident. I sure showed it on the night before our Savior was crucified. Knowing our weaknesses, Jesus predicted that I and my fellow disciples would desert him in his hour of need and that I, the leader of the disciples, would deny him. Once again I opened my big mouth: **“Even if all fall away ... I never will!”** (Matthew 26:33) Jesus replied: **“I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”** (Matthew 26:24) I told him I'd sooner die. Not long after, to save my own skin, I swore up and

down that I didn't even know him. For a long time I hated the sound of a rooster crowing. I've never felt so low. I've never cried so hard.

I talked when I should have been thinking, slept when I should have been watching and praying. I even denied my Lord and Savior. Rock-man? Hardly!

Does any of this sound familiar? What sins do you struggle with? Is it pride that looks down on others while puffing yourself up? Is it gossip that's always looking for some juicy bit of news, some dirty little secret to share? Is it drinking too much alcohol, eating too much food, or numbing yourself with drugs? Do you struggle with sexual sin – pornography, homosexual desires, a roving, lustful eye? Is it a lack of trust in God's care that keeps you from returning to him a generous portion of your treasure?

Whatever you're particular brand of sinning, do you find yourself falling into it over and over again? Does it happen even when you promise yourself that it'll never happen again?

I feel your pain. I know your struggle. I know my own weaknesses all too well. I've looked long into the mirror of God's law. In that mirror I saw a rebellious, death-deserving sinner. Left on my own hell would have been my permanent address. You deserve to live right next door. I've got some good news for you. Let me tell you about the real rock-man.

II. The real Rock is Jesus

Did you hear my answer to the question Jesus asked? **“Who do people say the Son of man is?”** Now I don’t take credit for the answer. I didn’t invent it. As Jesus said, the Father in heaven revealed it to me. What he revealed is wonderful. Speaking for all my brother disciples I said, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”** – true God and true man in one person, the promised Savior of the world.

Let me assure you, when Jesus talked about building his Church on a rock, he wasn’t talking about me. He was talking about this confession, this truth. Our faith, our life, our eternal future is founded on the truth that Jesus is the Christ.

In my first epistle, I wrote about what this confession means. The Spirit himself wrote through the pen I held. I want to share with you three passages that tell the story of our Savior’s work.

First, Jesus is **“a lamb without blemish or defect”** (1 Peter 1:19). John the Baptist called Jesus **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). But before he could take away the sin that God hates, Jesus needed to provide the righteousness that God loves. And he did! He obeyed God. He never sinned. God credits his perfect life to us.

Here’s another passage: **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed** (1 Peter 2:24). You should have seen Jesus in Gethsemane. He was a

mess. That’s because every sin of every sinner in history was weighing down on his soul. He took all that sin into himself. He carried the guilt. And God punished him. By his wounds we are healed. Because of the payment he made in his holy precious blood, you are forgiven. And with that forgiveness comes the desire and ability to fight sin, to resist temptation and live for righteousness.

One more. It’s one of my favorites. **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you** (1 Peter 1:3-5). You’ve probably heard those words at a funeral, and rightly so. Because of Jesus’ empty tomb we have hope. Because of Jesus’ empty tomb we believers don’t really die. Because of Jesus’ empty tomb you can look forward to a life that is really life.

I stood in that empty tomb. I saw the risen Christ. He appeared to me on the day he rose. He showed me such grace. It was just the two of us. I was still hurting so badly. I knew my sin. My cowardly denials haunted me. With one look my living Savior told me it was all gone.

Later, he restored me to my apostolic office and gave me the privilege of feeding his lambs and sheep. He gave me the privilege of doing what I am doing right now: Helping you to **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** (2 Peter 3:18). He is the only

foundation for your faith. He is the real rock-man.

As I said before, I have lived an amazing life. I've been privileged to do and see so many wonderful things. I've even had the privilege of suffering for my Lord and laying down my life for my confession of his name. Yes, that too was a privilege! My Lord considered me worthy to suffer for his sake (Acts 5:41). How did I do it all? My dear friend and fellow apostle Paul put it best, **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength"** (Philippians 4:13).

You can too. You can do amazing things. You can serve Jesus in thanks for his love, spending your time and money, your energy and effort on things that will last. You can hear and study his Word and so grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, and in the passion and purpose of a life lived for him. You can share his Word with great boldness. If a first-century fisherman from Galilee can do it, so can twenty-first century farmers from Columbus. You can share with others the only name that saves. You can bear the crosses that come because of him. You can suffer for his name with joy and die in the peace that only he provides. You can do it all trusting his promise that the gates of Hades will never overcome God's church, that the devil will never win. You can do it all because Christ is your rock. My friends, keep on clinging to him. Amen.

S.D.G.

Votum: Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Amen. (1 Peter 5:14).