

April 2010
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SIMON PETER – THE ROLLER COASTER CHRISTIAN

“You are Simon, but from now on you will be called, “Peter” (Rock)
John 1:42

As a boy, Sir Walter Scott was left weak and lame by a severe attack of fever. Some misjudged him and thought he would never amount to much. When he became a teenager, he visited in a home where some famous literary guests were being entertained, including the poet Robert Burns. In one room was a picture under which was written a beautiful bit of verse. Burns asked who wrote it, but no one seemed to know. Timidly, Scott gave the author's name and quoted the rest of the poem. Burns was delighted. Laying his hand on the young fellow's head, he exclaimed, “Ah, my boy, I'M SURE YOU'LL BE A GREAT MAN IN SCOTLAND SOMEDAY!” From that hour, Walter Scott was a changed person. That brief conversation set him on the road to greatness. Someone believed in him and he believed in himself.

Simon Peter was like this. On every New Testament list of the Twelve Apostles his name comes first. He became one of the great champions of the early church. In the early chapters of Acts he is the chosen leader of the church. He stands like a giant oak against all opposition, preaches the gospel with Pentecostal power, and when told to stop preaching or die- tells them they can kill him if they want to but he will not stop.(Acts 1-5). Today he is the best known and best loved of our Lord's Twelve Disciples. The Roman Catholic Church, without a shred of evidence, claims him as the first Pope and to Protestants he is first in our hearts. The secret of his success is found in his first meeting with Jesus. Jesus looked at him and nicknamed him, “The Rock” or “Rocky”. He was a big mouthed braggart with more bark than bite, but Jesus believed in him. We come to the Lord believing in him; and putting ourselves in His hands, He believes in us.

HE BELIEVES WE CAN BE SAVED

Jesus came to save people like you and me. This was His mission- to get us to turn to God for forgiveness; to give us the desire and power to live a life pleasing to Him; and to take us to heaven when we die. The angel said to His mother, “You will call His name Jesus (the Lord saves), for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1)

Peter did not reach such heights because of natural ability, wealth or brilliance. He left much to be desired. He was **ARROGANTLY SELF CONFIDENT**. He was the one who foolishly boasted that he would die before he would deny Jesus and then denied Him more than any of the Apostles. He always had to be first to

speak or act. When Jesus tried to warn him about over confidence, Clovis Chappell says it was like shooting a BB gun at a battleship.

He was UNPREDICTABLE and UNRELIABLE. He, like us, was a mixture. He was both wise and foolish with his words. One minute he named Jesus as the “Son of the living God” and the next he telling Jesus what He should and should not do. One minute he is walking on water and the next he is sinking and yelling for help. One minute he was facing an army with a sword in Gethsemane and the next he was backing down from a servant girl.

Peter never got entirely away from this. His big sin was that in fear he denied knowing Jesus with cursing to prove it. Jesus forgave him and made him the leader of the Apostles but years later he gave in to peer pressure and returned to Jewish acts of prejudice against Gentiles (Galatians 2). We never get to where we do not fail because there is no perfection this side of the grave. But neither do we get to where we quit trying not to fail the Lord. But I submit that the best of him was dominant in his later years. He was far more wise man than fool; far more hero than coward; far more faithful than unfaithful and far more success than failure. This was because he put his faith in Jesus and Jesus put His faith in him. Jesus took the weak clay of his human nature and as the master Potter, fashioned him into what he became.

One mighty force in the ministry and method of Jesus is that He believes we can be saved. No one else may believe it! We may not even believe it! But praise God, He believes it. Jesus is no blind optimist seeing only the goodness in men and women. He knew human nature was corrupt to the core. He knows the heart of our problems is our self centered heart.

Others look at us and we look at ourselves and despair. He looks at us and HOPES. He raked the gutter, said J. D. Jones, for His saints. He knows nothing of hopeless cases or those too far gone to help. A soiled woman, with five ex-husbands and a live-in boyfriend comes to the well. She comes along because the “good people” of the town have nothing to do with her. They are just waiting for her to die and go to hell and get what she deserves. Jesus looks at her and what does He see? He sees a woman who can be helped, who can be reclaimed for God and goodness, who can become a home missionary, who can be saved! (John 4)

The great words of Christ’s gospel are, “You are ... You shall be.” He has the “shall be” of hope for everyone. He took Mary Magdalene from the “you are” of demon bondage to the “shall be” of peace. He took Zacchaeus from the “you are” of dishonesty and greed to the “shall be” of fairness and generosity. He took Saul from the “you are” of pride and hatred to the “shall be” of humble missionary service. Friend, I don’t care what “you are,” Jesus offers you a “shall be.” Put your faith in Him Who believes in you and you can be saved. You can one day say with Paul, “By God’s grace I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Recently I heard Teddy Welborn, the country singer, say, “I was a slave to alcohol. In eight years I had not had thirty sober days. But Jesus loved me and set me free. I don’t know why He loved me and I can’t explain what happened to me, but I love Him for it.”

HE BELIEVES WE CAN BE SERVANTS (Jn. 21:16)

Jesus called the Twelve and calls us not just to be “converts” but disciples. A disciple is a learner; a follower of the Lord (Luke 14:27); and one willing to “take up a cross” Too many so called Christians are satisfied with forgiveness, with their “eternal fire insurance policy.” Genuine salvation, which makes disciples, includes a life of service based on love for Jesus. As Teddy Welborn said, “I love Him for it.” Jesus said, “As the Father hath sent Me, so do send I you.” (Jn. 17:18). “As God trusted Me so do I trust you.”

There is a legend that when Jesus returned to heaven Gabriel met Him and asked Him how he was going to get the message of His death out to all the world. Jesus told him He had given that mission to eleven men. Gabriel asked, “Lord, what if they fail? What other way will you use?” Jesus said quietly, “I have no other way.”

Annie Johnston Flint wrote:

He has no hands but our hands to do His work today
He has no help but our help to lead men in His way
He has no tongues but our tongues
To tell men why He died
He has no strength but our strength
To bring men to His side

This does not mean we will never fail or fall into sin. Peter denied knowing Jesus, even with cursing. But Jesus after the resurrection appeared to Him privately and took him back into His service. He probably had given up on himself, but Jesus had not given up on him. Since church members are often slow to forgive and quick to criticize, Jesus restored him publicly in John 21. He sat down with him at breakfast on the shore, got him to reaffirm his love and then made him a shepherd in the church, saying, “Shepherd my sheep” (Jn. 21:16). No failure needs to be final.

No one is beaten till he lies
In the dust and refuses to rise

HE BELIEVES WE CAN BE SACRIFICERS (Jn. 21:18)

Our Lord has such faith in us that He believes not only that we can be saved, and be servants, but that we can make unbelievable sacrifices for Him. The clay of human nature can become a rock altar upon which we place all that is nearest and dearest to us. At his public restoration Jesus told him:

“When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

The Apostle John explained this in verse 19, “Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.” Peter was a giant of a man. In John 21 he drags a net full of fish to shore all by himself. He could have played linebacker in professional football. He willingly gave his life for the Lord who willingly gave His life for him.

We know from the Book of Acts that Peter was willing to die for Jesus. King Herod executed his friend James with whom he had fished as a boy (12:2). Then he threw Peter in jail and the night before his trial (and certain execution) God sent a bright, shining angel to rescue him and Peter had such peace about it that the angel had to shake him to wake him up.(12:3-19).

The historian Eusebius says that in the mid-60’s Peter’s wife was killed before his eyes. When they got ready to crucify him, Peter asked them to crucify him upside down, saying, “I am not worthy to be crucified like my Lord.” According to tradition, every one of the Twelve Disciples, except John, died a violent death for Jesus.

Church history (Protestant and Catholic) is filled with this. Father Damien ministered to lepers until he became a leper. Bill Wallace refused to leave China and was murdered and buried in China. Dr. Claude Barlow, fighting a plague in China that killed people at a terrifying rate, infected himself voluntarily with a disease and checked into John Hopkins Hospital so they could develop a cure.

There is an ancient legend about the sculptor Michelangelo. He had just fashioned the beautiful figure of an angel out of solid rock. When someone asked him how he did it, he answered, “It is easy. I see an angel hidden in every stone and I bring it out. I take out everything that does not look like an angel.” Isn’t this what Jesus does with each of us? He sees in us what no one else sees. He sees the bad, loves us anyway, and helps us slowly get it out. He believes things about us that no one else believes. He believes we can be saved. He believes we can serve. He believes we can make heroic sacrifices for Him. Our response should be first, “Have thine own way, Lord / Have thine own way” and second, “I can do all things through Christ, Who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

When a monster started shooting children in a one room Amish School, one little 13 year old girl stood up as he raised the gun. To give the others more time to be rescued, she said, “Please shoot me first.” Don’t feel sorry for her. One of the first people in heaven to shake her hand was the big fisherman, Simon Peter.

The story of sacrifice has been repeated over and over in the history of the church. Christ takes selfish, scared human beings and turns them into giants of heroism. A young boy who seems to be full of trivia goes to war and throws himself on a grenade to save his buddies. We can't believe it! But Jesus can! Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran Pastor who dies in a German concentration camp, did not see his sacrifice as special. Before His capture he had written, "When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die." Sacrifice, he says, is required for us all. Since we do not believe in people we hide this call in our shallow evangelism, but Wayne McDill is right, "God can only work His wonders in a life yielded to Him. When we invite people to a cheap and easy acknowledgment of Christ, we cheat them out of the riches of an abundant life." Jesus tells us, "Do not hide the demands of the gospel; people will give up everything, including life itself, for Me."