

The Call of Simon

TEXT: Jn 1:35-43; Lk 5:1-11

Words for kids: Simon, stone, grace

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Scr. Reading: John 1:35-43

The Life of Simon Peter

So much of the Bible is written in story form: Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah, the gospels, Acts. It's a deeply theological book, but it's not written at all like your typical theology. There's no topical index, no summary explanation of each key person or concept like an encyclopedia would offer. It's not highlighted with bulleted lists of key principles, identifying symptoms, or sample test questions. It seems a very inefficient way to convey the most important truths in the universe.

Why did God give us his word this way? Because these stories fill out our understanding of what these theological terms and principles mean. If we want to understand faith, we need to examine the life of Abraham. Deliverance & salvation – the story of Moses and the Israelites. Passion for God – the life of David. Likewise, if we want to understand what it means to follow Jesus, we will find significant help from studying the life of Simon Peter.

Peter's story shows us in living color what discipleship is, what faith is, what forgiveness is. How high you can rise and how far you can fall and still be loved by Jesus.

My prayer is that together we will make this journey toward a better understanding of one of the most important figures of the New Testament—but not for the sake of understanding him alone. This would have been onerous to someone like Peter. No, the ultimate reason for getting to know Peter is so together we might better know Jesus. For the story of Peter is the story of Jesus. Perhaps, if you and I do our best, the same will be said of us someday. ~ Michael Card, *A Fragile Stone*, p 23

That would be the goal of the series – to know Jesus better and become more like Him through a short study of the high points of Peter's life.

The facts of Simon Peter's life:

- Given name – Simon bar Jonah, i.e., “Simon Johnson”

- Born in the city of Bethsaida, on the western coast of Sea of Galilee (“Fisherman’s City” – cf John 1:44). At some point for reasons unknown, he moved to Capernaum.
- Most Jewish boys attended synagogue school, so Peter was probably trained in the Scriptures, had a basic understanding of mathematics, and some literacy skills.
- Bilingual (Greek, Aramaic) and spoke with a distinct Galilean accent
- Likely apprenticed under his father as a fisherman and married during his teenage years. His wife later accompanied him on some of his missionary travels (1 Cor 9:5).
- Was in the core group of the 12, along with James and John
- Clearly the leader among the 12 – Jesus often addresses the group through Peter and they likewise address Jesus that way
- Name always appears first in the list of the 12
- First person Jesus calls by name, first person to confess his sinfulness to Jesus, first person (and only?) who says no to Jesus and even rebukes the Lord.
- He in turn receives some of the Lord's most severe rebukes
- Jesus performed at least 7 of His miracles for Peter or those close to him: 2 catches of fish, curing of mother-in-law, walking on water, coin in fish's mouth, healing Malchus' ear, and 2 deliverances from prison
- First gospel written – Mark's – was written because of him and it became the pattern for Matthew and Luke
- Later became a powerful preacher, international church planter, published author, and world-famous historical figure
- Steps onto the biblical scene as a relatively young, married man, working as a smalltime business owner in the fishing business

POTENTIAL (John 1:40-43)

Simon's first meeting with Jesus is recorded in John 1, set in the context of John the Baptist's ministry. When John saw Jesus and realized who He was, he began to direct people to the Savior. One of those was Andrew. It's curious that he's called “Simon Peter's brother” (v 40) even though the Apostle John hasn't introduced us to Simon Peter himself

yet.

The Bible never tells us what Simon looked like, nor what Jesus looked like, but it does tell us what Jesus saw when He looked inside: “You are Simon, the son of John? You will be called Cephas (which means Peter).” Notice the tense of the verbs: “You ARE Simon. You WILL BE Cephas.”

Three names: Simon, Cephas, and Peter. Simon was one of the most common names of that day in Palestine. “Peter,” on the other hand, wasn’t a name at all. It was the Greek word for “stone,” and Cephas was its Aramaic equivalent. Calling him “peter” would be like calling someone “brick” or “lemon” or “sugar.” It’s a substance, not a name. Why would we call someone by a nickname like that? Because it pegs just who they are. That’s what Jesus was doing here – He was giving Simon a new identity, not a different name.

Notice again the future tense of Jesus’ statement. He says, “You *will be* ‘stone.’” Jesus is envisioning Simon’s *future* life, the life that Jesus Himself will shape in him. In fact, through the rest of the story Jesus continues to call him by his name “Simon,” not by his new nickname “Peter” (cf. Mt 16:17, Mt 17:25, Mk 14:37, Lk 22:31, Jn 21).

Why? Because Simon is not yet a rock, but Jesus will make him one. His story in the gospels shows Jesus didn’t name him “stone” because of what Simon was in himself, unless Jesus was referring to how hard his head was! Preachers love to talk about Peter as this strong and sturdy rock, but that is not a description of Simon as he is. It’s what he will become. The new name Jesus gives him on the seashore is a prophetic promise.

It’s not the first time God has looked on a man and chosen to build him into someone useful for His divine purposes.

Isaiah 51:1-2 *“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ² Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.*”

Abraham, the one God called to Himself thousands of years before He

called Simon, was also called “the rock.” Isaiah writes: “Look to the rock from which you were hewn... Look to Abraham.” In the Jewish commentaries on this passage, we read: “When God looked on Abraham who was to appear, he said: ‘Behold, I have found a rock on which I can build and base the world.’ Therefore, he called Abraham a ‘rock.’” (quoted in Card, p 33).

This is the background for the new title Jesus’ gives Simon. The character of Abraham had nothing to do with God calling him a rock. He wasn’t strong or steadfast. His faith faltered. He disobeyed and doubted. What was significant about Abraham was God’s commitment to build him into something great—a new nation through whom God intended to bless the world.

It’s the same thing Jesus is doing with this unremarkable man called Simon. Not by virtue of any qualities or accomplishments of his own, Simon has been chosen as the foundational leader for the new community God is building.

It’s not until a few years later, deep into their relationship together, that Jesus will say to Simon, “You ARE Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” (Mt 16:18). Jesus predictive nickname had begun to come true in Simon’s life. Now that Simon has begun to become the rock Jesus intended him to be, He can begin using him to build his church. And only later, in the book of Acts, does the name “Simon” give way to the new identity “Peter, the stone.”

Here’s the lesson for us: Our potential comes from what Jesus can do with us, not from what we can be in ourselves. It just might be that God sees something in you—not some quality or characteristic you have developed yourself. It’s something only He could do, a person only He could fashion you into. He did it for Peter.

Revelation 2:17 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’*

GRACE (Lk 5:1-9)

It's been almost a year since Jesus and Simon met. The gospels record no fewer than 10 events between Jesus giving Simon his new name and this event on the shore.

Jesus comes along the shore of Galilee teaching, followed by crowd of people. But His thoughts don't seem to be so much on the crowd. He's thinking about Simon. Jesus is going to catch Himself a man.

He asks to use Simon's boat as a platform for His sermon. They push out from the shore, and Jesus continues His sermon. Simon leans back against the side of the ship, weary from the long night of fishing. Jesus finishes the sermon and turns to Simon: "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

"Go fishing now, in broad daylight? Doesn't Jesus already know we've fished this spot already? Besides, the nets are washed and folded..." You can hear the reluctance in Simon's voice: "we toiled... all night... and caught nothing." But he obeys anyway: "If you say so." Suddenly the net heaves with fish, and Simon has to brace himself against the side of the boat. He calls over his partners, and even with their help the boats almost sink with the weight of fish.

Notice how verse 8 begins : "But." It's a word of contrast, setting us up for the disconnect between the incredible miracle and Simon's unexpected reaction to it. He's scared and ashamed. Jesus has brought him into incredible success, and it scares him.

Notice what Jesus says: "Do not be afraid" (v 10). It's the line Jesus says on just about every occasion when He opens the disciples' eyes to see who He really is. He says it when he calms the storm (Mk 4:40), when He walks on water (Mt 6:50), when He shows His glory at the transfiguration (Mt 17:7), and at the resurrection (Mt 28:10). Each time the disciples glimpse more of His divine glory, Jesus reassures them with "Do not be afraid."

Why would Peter be scared here? He's seen lots of fish before. Even if we grant that it's a miracle to pull two boatfuls of fish from the sea in

one haul in broad daylight, that's a reason for awe and wonderment, but why fear?

Listen again to Simon's words: "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." Simon fears because he is so deeply aware of his sinfulness, but Jesus has treated him with such graciousness. Nothing in his experience could have prepared him for this kind of generosity. Simon knew that he deserved punishment and destruction from God, but instead he received lavish fountains of grace.

Friends, it's impossible to feel the wonder of grace until you have felt the horror of sin. Until you recognize what you deserve, you will never be awed by what you actually receive. You and I are sinful, through and through. If we for one moment could step back and glimpse the utter burning fury of God's wrath against sin, we would fall on our knees with the same reaction as Simon.

The gospel is not the good news that God accepts you just as you are. It's the good news that He accepts you just as Jesus is. You deserve God's curse, but Christ bore it. Christ is fully pleasing to the Father, and He imparts all of His goodness to you. That is grace, and when you see it clearly, it drives you to your knees.

ABANDON (Luke 5:10-11; Mk 1:16-20)

Empty nets lying there by the water's edge tell this part of the story. What does it mean to follow Jesus? It means reckless abandon, relinquishing everything you own called yours for Him. Jesus' promise to make Peter a "fisher of men" encodes the basic purpose of Christianity – to help people.

It all began with a simple invitation: "Follow me." For every Christian, it is the same decision. Every one of us has bet our life that Jesus is right. And then we have to follow Him with reckless abandon.

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into

the world. But it is the same death every time – death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at this call.

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

This should not surprise us. Jesus death cost Him everything; likewise, following Him costs us everything, too. A half-hearted discipleship is worthless.

Adoniram Judson, in a letter to his first wife Ann's father, requesting her hand in marriage (July 1810):

"I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left is heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteous, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?"

We might think, "I've grown and changed and repented all I can. I'll settle down a bit, hit a nice spiritual routine, find a level of spirituality that keeps us comfortable, call it 'faithfulness.'" But that isn't what it means to follow Jesus. Not as Simon's example defines it. Not by a mile.

What is keeping you back from full throttle pursuit of God? Time wasters? Fear? Distractions? Lack of discipline? Friends, if we are feeling lethargic in our following of Jesus, the problem isn't in Jesus. The problem isn't even the circumstances he has put us in. The problem is something else, perhaps even something non-sinful and allowable, but it is preventing us from going after Jesus with all our heart. Simon would never have become the rock if he kept holding on to his nets.

Following Jesus cost Peter everything. Yet Peter's life story shows that it's only the person who loses his life for the sake of the gospel that truly finds it. When I imagine where Peter ended up, it's utterly

astonishing in light of where he began. From blue collar worker and smalltime business owner in Palestine to apostolic leader, powerful preacher, international church planter, published author, world-famous historical figure... all because of this key encounter one morning on the shore of a lake.

Transition to the Lord's Supper:

At the end of John's gospel, we read of another time Jesus fills Simon's boat with a miraculous catch of fish. After the resurrection, after his great fall... But this time, when Simon sees his boat fill and recognizes the grace that made it happen, he drops the net and runs. Toward Jesus, not away. Simon learns by the end of his life to run toward this kind of grace, not flee it.

Participation in the Lord's Supper is one way of acknowledge our sin and fleeing to Jesus in faith...

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