

A Real ROCK
A Study of the Life of Peter

Characteristic of Completeness: Christian Life (Specifically authenticity)

Big Idea: Be a ROCK

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As I sometimes visit with former colleagues, they often joke about how simpler life must be working for a church, rather than a retail print shop. I laugh!! Church is much harder to navigate because at church everyone thinks that God is on their side.

You don't have to look far to find examples of Christian hypocrisy. Whether it is someone who's using the Bible as a weapon or pointing out everyone else's sin, Christians tend to carry the hypocrisy banner almost as well as politicians and sometimes better.

Christians aren't perfect, and one of the most amazing things about the Bible to me is that no one is presented as perfect except Jesus. God, in his instruction book to us, shows the successes and failures of almost every person in Scripture. This morning I would like to look at my favorite person in the Bible- Peter. Peter is my favorite because he was impulsive and bold, and wrong a whole lot of the time. But was Peter a hypocrite? How many time did Peter say one thing and do another? But hypocrisy isn't saying one thing and doing another. Hypocrisy is saying one thing and acting like you don't do another. This morning, I'd like to do a little biography of Peter. And when we are done, I hope we see the difference between hypocrisy and authenticity. ► In fact, that's our characteristic of completeness for this week: authenticity.

Peter grew up on the Sea of Galilee and worked the family fishing business with his father and brother. Once a disciple, he often spoke for the disciples and was part of Jesus' inner circle along with James and John. After Jesus death and resurrection, Peter assumed leadership of the newly formed church. Peter died in approx AD 64. Church tradition says he was crucified upside down by Nero, the Emproer of Rome. Peter's original name was Simon, but Jesus called him Peter.

► “And I tell you that you are Peter, . . .” Matthew 16:18

► Petros, the Greek word for Peter means rock or stone. It was probably meant as a title or nickname, because before this time it hadn't been used as a name. To help us remember some things about Peter, I have arranged our outline around the word ►ROCK.

► Let's start in Matthew 14. Jesus teaches a huge crowd and then miraculously feeds more than 5000 people. Let's pick up the narrative in Matthew 14 and verse 22

► 22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ► 25 During the fourth watch of the night (between 3 and 6 AM) Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified.

"It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

So, you get the picture. It's windy, wavy and Jesus is strolling by. But then Peter speaks up.

▶28"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

Have you ever really consider what happened here? Peter walked on the water. Peter was experiencing a miracle at that very moment. Now, I don't know about you, but if God allowed me to walk on water, I am pretty sure a miracle like that would fill my faith tank for quite a long time. But Peter wasn't quite as spiritual as all of us.

▶30But when he (Peter) saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Peter, how could you doubt God after something miraculous like this? Peter doubted in the very midst of a miracle. Even while Peter was experiencing the personal power of God, he doubted.

Do you think that when Peter and the other apostles got together for their 20th apostle reunion, the other apostles riddled Peter for his lack of faith? "Hey Peter, remember the time Jesus let you walk on the water and you got scared and sank and screamed like a girl and Jesus pulled you out?"

In any case, Peter did do something right here; ▶he responded with faith. Sure, Peter's faith was limited, but Peter trusted Jesus enough to get out of the boat. But then something made him afraid; it was the wind and waves. Peter was a fisherman. Why is he all of a sudden afraid of wind and waves? I think it's because he didn't have his boat. Peter's step of faith forced him out of the security of his boat and now he had to trust something besides his boat. Peter responded with the faith that he had, albeit limited. But don't we all have limited faith someplace in our life. Peter's lack of faith didn't make him a hypocrite; it made him authentic. The hypocrite stays in the boat and says, "Sure, I trust Jesus." The authentic person responds with the faith they have.

So, what does this look like for us? What's your boat? In what areas is God asking you to trust him? Is it a relationship? A career? Your kids? Joining a life group? Talking about Jesus? Money? Changing a sinful habit? Responding with our limited faith is what Jesus uses to make it not so limited. When Peter responded, he experienced the power of God and then the grace of God. All because he was willing to get out of the boat. He wasn't perfect, but he was authentic.

▶Be authentic and respond!

Let's move on. ▶Another great example of Peter's life comes from an exchange in Matthew 16. Jesus asks his disciples who people are saying He is, and they give him some answers. But then Jesus gets personal. Look at verse 15.

▶ 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

Good answer Peter! And where did this revelation come from? Jesus says it came from God. In essence, at this moment, ▶ Peter is one with God. God has revealed something that Peter would not have known otherwise. But as is Peter's custom, he can't keep being right for very long. Look at verse 21.

▶ 21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ▶ 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

▶ Rebuke here means to admonish or charge sharply. He is rebuking Jesus. Peter is admonishing God.
▶ Matthew continues,

"Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

So, Peter gets another nickname: ▶ Satan. Jesus doesn't mean that Peter is Satan no more than he means that Peter is really a rock. So, once again we see Peter as quite a paradox. At one level, he is "One with God" and yet, a short time later Jesus calls him Satan. The word for stumbling block actually means the trigger of a trap. Peter's insistence on a plan other than God's was seen as Satan's trap. But Peter wasn't really looking for God's plan. He kind of had his own plan.

So the question is, which nickname do you want, rock or Satan? Or, how do I set my mind on God's things instead of mans' things? There are 2 important things to remember here. First, God gave us his Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul writes,

▶ 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

In essence, Paul is saying, "Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God and we have been given that Spirit so we can know what God has for us." That's good to remember is you want to think like God.

Secondly, we need to listen for God's spirit. ▶ Last week, Pastor Bob compared the Christian life to a sailboat. Powered by the wind of God's Spirit, we are the tools God uses. So how do we do that? How do we see where God's Spirit is blowing? How do we listen for God's Spirit?

Well, Paul tells us in Romans 8:5

►5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Where I focus is what I see. Where I focus my energy is where I get my results. When Peter was focused on Jesus, he got to walk on water and he confessed him as the Messiah. But the moment he focused on something else- the wind and waves or the death of Jesus- he stopped knowing what God wanted. And that's when we get hypocritical. Being one with God and living by His Spirit helps us know what to say, when to say it and who to say it to. Otherwise, it's just the things of man.

So, how do I focus on God's Spirit? I have no idea. Really, how we focus on God can vary from person to person. Maybe you have or need a certain time each day or week to be alone with God. Maybe Christian radio helps you stay focused. Maybe you need to ask someone to help you be accountable. But let me give you an example of something that helped me for awhile. I used to use a daily calendar that opened up and laid on my desk. In my job, I referred to it several times an hour for what to do next. I started writing a Bible verse or a principle on the daily page. When I would come back to my planner throughout the day, there it was. The first little while, it seemed awkward or legalistic or churchy. I know people had to see it because it was out in the open. But it helped me pray things like, "Lord, help me deal with this next customer" when oftentimes I might not have thought to consult God at work. Or sometimes it was, "Lord forgive me for thinking that." It wasn't perfect, but I found myself asking God to show me what to do or how to act throughout the day. Focus is a learned behavior. The more you do it, the easier it comes. But it helped. ►Be authentic by being one with God.

Let's move on to Matthew 26.

►There is something else that Peter was; ► Peter was committed. Let me stop for a moment to clarify a common misconception. Must a person be committed to Christ to be a Christian? The answer is no. Jesus is very clear. In John 6, Jesus says,

►47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

Or John 3:16, probably the most famous verse from the Bible

►16"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Because of his death and resurrection as payment for our sin, Jesus promises eternal life to anyone who simply believes him for it. Belief in Jesus for eternal life equals eternal life. Commitment is something we choose to do as an act of worship for the God who saved us. So, are there people walking around who have believed in Jesus for eternal life, but haven't made a commitment to follow Christ or serve Christ or find the wind of God's Spirit? The answer is yes. But what did Peter's commitment look like?

►Jesus and his disciples are eating what's known as the Last Supper. Let's pick up Matthew's narrative in verse 31.

►31 Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, . . . 32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." ►33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away

on account of you, I never will." 34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." ► 35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

So, Peter articulates his commitment to Christ. Now, one would have thought Peter had learned not to contradict Jesus, but apparently he didn't. In fact, Jesus' pronouncement of Peter's denial only fueled Peter's resolve.

In verses 36-46, Jesus goes to pray and he asks the disciples to pray with him. When he returns the disciples are asleep.

►40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.

Two more times that evening, Jesus went to pray while his "committed" disciples slept. While Peter claimed to be committed, he couldn't even stay awake with his friend during the most difficult night of his life. But after his nap, Peter is fired up.

►50 Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51 With that, one of Jesus' companions (John 18:10 tells us it was Peter) reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

So, Peter commits, then sleeps, then fights.

As Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled. But Peter tagged along at a distance. As people gathered in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter joined the crowd to see what would transpire. Let's pick up Matthew's narrative in verse 69.

►69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

Between verses 69 and 74, Peter denies knowing Jesus to three different people. To the last person Peter replies,

►74 Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!"

So, how committed was Peter really? Was Peter full of hot air? What about all the "I will die with you" stuff? Did Peter's denial make him less committed? I don't think so. Many people view struggles or sin or failures as a lack of commitment. And that simply isn't true. Let me steal from Pastor Bob's message last week. In our study through Philippians, we learned to be responsive to the spirit of God. The 3 step process to being ► responsive was listen, will and work. ► The "will" part is where we decide what to do based on what we heard. That's making a commitment. Sure, we may struggle with the work part. But that shouldn't keep us from committing.

What commitments do you need to make? What is God asking you to do? Maybe it's to give? Or serve? Or join a life group? maybe it's to spend more time with Him? Maybe it's to love someone unconditionally? Maybe it's to forgive someone? Maybe it's to help someone. If you listen, God will tell you.

Be authentic by taking what you here and committing to do something with it. Hypocrites learn and stop; authentic people learn and try to apply. ►Be authentic and commit!

So, with heartache and guilt, Peter ►disappears and Jesus is killed. That is on Thursday. On Sunday, Jesus appears to Peter. And it seems as though he appears to Peter alone.

In Luke's account of that day, 2 disciples that interacted with the resurrected Jesus, come to Jerusalem and report

►"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul also writes,

►5... he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

Since no one recorded their meeting, we can only speculate how it went. But we do have some clues. The first clue comes from Peter's reaction to his denial. Matthew writes,

►Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

►Peter's grief seems genuine. This isn't some contrived apology to avoid punishment. Peter was distraught over his own failure. The second clue comes from what we know about God and forgiveness.

►In Luke 15, Jesus tells the story we call the Prodigal Son. A son comes to his dad, asks for his inheritance and leaves home. He blows his money, lives a riotous life style and ends up feeding pigs as some farmer's servant. But he realizes his father's servants eat better than he does and decides to return home, even if all he can be is a servant. And while the son is still a ways off, the father sees him because the father is looking for him. When his father sees him coming home, he runs to him, welcomes him and has a party for him. The imagery is clear. God, as represented by the father, is watching and waiting for his wayward child to repent. This isn't a picture of how someone becomes a Christian. It is a picture of how dad is waiting for his kids to come home. I suspect that Peter's first encounter with Jesus went something like that. Peter groveling knowing he was completely unworthy or undeserving. ►And Jesus forgiving him. In 1 John 1:9, John writes,

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The third clue comes from their interaction together. ►John writes in his gospel

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

When was the last time you were that excited to see someone you had disowned? Clearly, Peter's reaction demonstrates he had been forgiven. Peter was whole in his relationship with God. Not because he was perfect, not because he always made good choices, not because he was an apostle. Peter was whole in his relationship with God because there was nothing between him and God. He had repented; Jesus had forgiven. He was free from any guilt or shame. He didn't have to or want to hide in the boat. ► Be authentic and know God's forgiveness.

► And this brings me to our big idea this morning. It's very simple. Be a ROCK! Respond, one, commit and know. Peter was a person of God because he was a ROCK. He tried to do these things. It didn't make him perfect, but it made him authentic.

Will you pray with me?