

I Met Jesus: Peter

John 18:15-27

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We continue our series *I Met Jesus* from the Gospel of John. Essentially we are meeting people who met Jesus and asking the question, *what difference did that encounter make in their lives?* We've looked at Nicodemus and the woman at the well and the crowd of 15,000 Jesus fed and the blind man and others. You know what we've discovered? These people are essentially just like us. We can relate to their lives before meeting Jesus and hopefully relate to their lives after meeting Jesus too.

All of us to one degree or another can identify with our person this week. Have you ever failed God? I mean majorly failed God? How about a colossal failure? On the other side of that failure have you ever wondered, *Will things ever feel right with God again? Can my conscience ever be restored? Can I ever have peace with God again?* If you have ever failed God, this guy is your guy. Ironically, he is also the most famous person to meet Jesus. In the list of disciples, he is always first on the list. Who am I talking about? Peter.

Who Was Peter?

His name: Simon Peter

His given name was Simon, so why do we call him Peter? When Jesus met him he changed his name or gave him a nickname.

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter)." (John 1:42)

Peter is a form "Petra" which means, Rock. With what we are seeing about his flimsy character today, his name would seem to be a cruel joke. But Jesus gave him the nickname "Rock" to inspire him to live up to his name. Eventually and most dramatically, he would.

His vocation: fisherman

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His home: Bethsaida

If you are a fisherman, you better live by fish. He did. He lived on the Sea of Galilee.



His family: Brother to Andrew; married

His brother Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus. We also know Peter was married from a few passages that refer to him having a wife and a mother-in-law (1 Cor. 9:5; Luke 4:38). It's ironic that in some circles church leaders are not allowed to be married, even though the leader of the Apostles was married. Further, in one case Jesus took care of Peter's mother-in-law and healed her. Many men here wish Jesus would do something with their mother-in-law too, but what that is exactly we won't get into.

His hubris and his mouth

Peter had many strengths. He was a leader. He was the only disciple who got out of the boat and dared walk on water with Jesus. He was the first to confess Jesus' true identity (Matthew 16:16). He was close to Jesus because Jesus wanted him close. So there are a lot of positives here.

But Peter was a man of great inconsistencies. He had tremendous strengths and devastating weaknesses. He was arrogant, brash, impetuous, and domineering. There was no bridle on his tongue and he was eager to announce his own greatness and superiority. This meant that Peter was the guy in the room who always had the ability to say the wrong thing. Ever been in a room with someone like this? Are you that person in the room? The kind of person that when they open their mouth everyone cringes for fear of what is coming out? Over and over again in the story, Peter had a knack for saying the wrong thing; the awkward thing. One writer calls him "The Apostle with the Foot-sized Mouth."

Let me show you some examples of this. Which disciple refused to let Jesus wash his feet? Peter. Which disciple rebuked Jesus? Peter. Which disciple decided to say something stupid during Jesus' transfiguration? Peter. Which disciple threw himself overboard and swam to shore leaving the other disciples to fend for the nets? Peter. Which disciple boldly declared to Jesus and to the disciples that HE would be the one out of all of them who would never deny Jesus? Peter.

That is the moment in this I'd like us to look at today. It represents his greatest failure and I think provides one of our greatest encouragements. In John 18:15ff we are stepping into the story in the moments after the treachery of Judas and the arrest of Jesus. Just hours before in the Upper Room...

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times." (John 13:36-38)

The rooster crow was a time designation between midnight and 3:00 AM. Can you see Peter when Jesus says this? *Deny you? Really? Jesus, we're not talking about John or Phillip. They're weak. It's me. Peter. I'm the special one. My name is first in line. Remember, you named me Peter. The Rock!* If you think I'm making it up, here's Matthew's account:

Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." (Matthew 26:33)

What do you hear? Bravado. Hubris. Pride. Everyone else may fall but I WILL NEVER FALL AWAY. We will see about that. Just hours later in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas would lead a band of soldiers and arrest Jesus. There was a bit of a scrum and guess which disciple decided it was a good time to pull a sword and take a swing at highly trained Roman soldiers? Peter. What was his career? He was a better fisherman than a soldier. Not only does he NOT hit a Roman soldier, he hits a servant and only manages to cut off his ear. I think the Roman soldiers may have snickered at him. It was NOT Peter's greatest moment. Jesus was arrested and taken to the home of the religious leader Annas.

"Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. (John 18:15-16)

Can you see this in your mind? It's night. Jesus is taken by force to the home of a religious leader for interrogation. Two disciples follow secretly. One of them, likely John, knows someone and gets both he and Peter into the courtyard. The soldiers and servants are also in the courtyard and one of them looks at Peter....

Denial #1 – A servant girl

The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." (John 18:17)

Peter is a man afraid. Minutes before he had swung a sword at a cohort of Rome's finest and now before a little girl he won't even admit he knows Jesus. He was operating according to fear and when we are living by fear, little people and little things terrify us. Can you relate today?

Denial #2 – Servants and Officers

Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming

himself....Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." (John 18:18, 25)

Matthew's account (26:69ff) says that it was Peter's Galilean accent that made them suspect he was a disciple of Jesus. Peter repeats his first denial, *I am not*. Fear led to deception. He lied to the servant girl and now he has to keep the deception going. Pressure is building. People are whispering and looking his way. There are multiple people identifying him. They have connections to the authorities. He might be found out. He's paranoid. You know what he's **not** thinking right now? *Jesus, I will die for you*. Who is he thinking about? Himself.

Denial #3 – A relative of Peter's victim

One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" (John 18:26)

Apparently this guy had been part of the mob that arrested Jesus. In the melee, his relative was hurt and while it was dark, he thought Peter looked like the guy who did it. This is a strong accusation because if Peter is identified as taking up arms against the authorities, he may end up arrested like Jesus. What would Peter do? *Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.*" (John 18:27) John ends the story there; Luke adds this:

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:60-62)

This is masterful storytelling. Can you see the split screen here? Inside the house, Jesus is being assaulted by the most powerful men of the day. How's he doing? Complete obedience to his Father's will. While out in the courtyard, his right hand man is wilting in front of a servant girl. The contrast couldn't be any more tragic.

Which begs the question, why include this in the story? Peter's actions have nothing to do with the macro themes of Christ and his cross or his death for us. It could be removed and we would still have the gospel and a clear Christology. Why include what's going on in the courtyard with Peter when the real story is in the house with Jesus?

Why Include This in the Gospel?

Peter pictures our weaknesses and highlights the strength and courage of Christ

The courtyard and the house are a kind of parable of human weakness and divine strength.

The Courtyard

Peter
I will die for you
Fear
Deception
Betrayal
Failure

The House

Jesus
I will die for you
Courage
Truth
Faithfulness
Success

The point is not that we should be like Jesus in the house and not like Peter in the courtyard, but that we are by nature like Peter. This realization ought to cause us to look at the One in the house and realize that he is utterly worthy of adoration. We see Jesus' story continue from the house to Pilate's judgment to the flogging and ultimately to the cross. The courage Jesus displayed and his willing obedience to the Father's will – even to death – shows in stark contrast who we are and who he is.

I read this week that the actor Mark Wahlberg said that if on 9/11 he had been in one of the planes, the outcome would have been much different. He later apologized, but don't we do that? Don't we imagine ourselves the hero in the story? Don't we picture ourselves as Jesus instead of Peter? This narrative is here to glorify the character of the Son of God. Peter makes Jesus look good.

What does an honest assessment of ourselves reveal? We are just as flaky as Peter. As our church doctrinal statement says, *We are sinners by nature and by action*. But praise God there is one in the house who is faithful and true, courageous and unbending, obedient unto death. We don't die for him, he dies for us!

Why Does God Take us Through "Courtyard" Experiences?

By courtyard experience I mean failure. How are these times spiritually helpful?

Peter - *"I will lay down my life for you."*

Jesus - *"Will you lay down your life for me?"*

Peter's comment is so revealing of his heart issues. Peter is impressed with himself and his own level of devotion. His own commitment. Peter thinks he's the one laying down his life.

Tragically, the boast that he would never deny his Lord, even to the point of death, displays not only gross ignorance of human weakness, but a certain haughty independence that is the seed of the denial itself. (Carson, John, 486.)

The real issue for Peter was not in the courtyard, but in his heart. Jesus knew this. How could Peter ever lead the church someday? How could he ever serve without his proud heart being broken? He was so sure of himself. So full of himself. Peter needed to see himself as Jesus saw him. The events surrounding Jesus' arrest and death provided a necessary subplot for the future leader of the church. He was shown for what he truly was on his own – proud and weak.

My dear friends, we're all Peters, and if God is ever going to use us, we have to go through courtyard experiences where the charade of our self-boasting is revealed. A little servant girl asks, *Aren't you one of them? I don't know the man!* It's almost silly. Yet when I think of some of the stupid things that I have said, the boastings of my heart, the grandiose words I have proclaimed, it really is appalling.

I can relate to Peter. I've spent some time in the courtyard. How about you? *Me? Surely you are joking. But I am hoping some of the proud people I am attending with today are listening carefully. They so need it.* I think it was Moody who said, "It is doubtful that God can use a man until he has broken him."

Here's the challenge when God is slowly crushing our sense of self. We need to realize that this grinding and breaking is really God's grace to us. He does this because he loves us and his goal in us is Christlikeness. Is it just a coincidence that the guy with the greatest *fame* is the guy with the greatest *failure*?

What is God producing in all his people?

- *Savor the gospel that God saves sinners like me*
- *Treasure his love and grace to someone like me*
- *Marvel that God would use someone like me*
- *Equip us to meet and help others in their humbling*
- *Eradicate our self-reliance and replace it with God-dependence*

This is hard, but I have found release from my anger and disappointment by truly acknowledging, *This is good for me*. It's good. But isn't it embarrassing? Yes, anything that helps me die to self is good for me.

If you were to ask Peter, what was the single most important moment in your life, I think he may say, "Hearing the rooster crow."

I wonder if you might look at the courtyard experience you are in from this perspective. Why are you there? Somebody hurt you. Somebody wronged you. Fear. Anger. Hurt. Whatever. Can you see in Peter the deeper reasons we go through these things? What man intends for evil God intends for good. (Genesis 50:20) From the painful perspective of my failure in the courtyard, the Savior in the house is all the more wonderful and beautiful.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)

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