



Potomac Hills Community Church, PCA

GRACE ORIENTED • CHRIST CENTERED

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Jesus and Peter: A Typical Relationship

“Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke

Luke 22:31-34, 54-62

OPENING THOUGHTS: *The Primacy of Peter?*¹

The Gospels are full of Peter!

No disciple spoke as much or as often as Peter did.

And Jesus spoke to him more than any other of His followers.

No disciple was rebuked by Jesus as much or as strongly as Peter was, and he was the only disciple who thought it his duty to rebuke Jesus!

No disciple boldly confessed and encouraged Christ more than Peter — and none ever bothered our Lord more than Peter.

Peter was always talking — and his overabundance of words ranged from the ridiculous to the awe-inspiring. Sometimes he only opened his mouth to change feet, and at other times his words were immortal.

Christ spoke words of approval and blessing to Peter, the likes of which He never spoke to anyone else. But at the same time, and sometimes almost in the same breath, Jesus said harder things to Peter than to any of the other twelve disciples, including Judas.

All the Gospels testify to Peter’s primacy.

He was the first among equals.

In each of the four lists of the apostles given in the Gospels the order of the names vary, but Peter’s is always first and Judas’ is always last.

Shortly after Peter’s calling, when he observed the miracle of the great catch of fish, he made a very astute observation, **Luke 5:8**, “*When Simon Peter realized*

¹ Introduction and Exposition of the text is adapted from Preaching the Word: Luke, Volume Two by R. Kent Hughes, pages 325-326, 347-354 and Moments with the Savior by Ken Gire, pages 337-342. Other works used in this message are The Gospel According to Luke, Volume Two by Joseph Fitzmyer, page 1460; The Gospel of John, Volume Two by Raymond Brown, page 1121; The Gospel According to St. John by J. H. Bernard, page 709; The Gospel According to St. John by C. K. Barrett, page 487.

what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "**Oh, Lord, please leave me — I'm too much of a sinner to be around You.**"

He was profoundly aware of his own sin and his own need.

In answer to Christ's question as to who He was, Peter's immortal response in **Matthew 16:16** was, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*"

And yet a few moments later when Christ spoke of the cross, **Matthew 16:22**, "*Peter took Him aside and corrected Him. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to You!"*"

Foot-in-mouth disease ... Peter suffered from it terribly!

On that stormy night on Tiberias, it was Peter who bravely called out to Jesus, **Matthew 14:28**, "*Lord, if it's really You, tell me to come to You by walking on water.*"

But then a few moments later, **Matthew 14:30**, "*when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.*"

It will always be to Peter's credit that when the others abandoned Jesus, and Jesus poignantly asked about the disciples in **John 6:67-68**, "*Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you going to leave, too?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? **You alone have the words that give eternal life.**"*"

But it was also Peter who later on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Jesus shone like the sun, made the preposterous proposal in **Matthew 17:4**, "*Peter blurted out, "Lord, this is wonderful! If you want me to, I'll make three shrines, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*"

Later, in the Upper Room, John's account records Peter as saying, **John 13:8**, "*"No," Peter protested, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "But if I don't wash you, you won't belong to Me."*"

Then, hearing Jesus' explanation, he loudly reversed himself, **John 13:9**, "*Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"*"

Finally, after the Resurrection his unforgettable devotion was memorably expressed in **John 21:17**, "*Once more He [Jesus] asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know I love You."*"

When I think of Peter, I imagine a big, loud, talkative extrovert. He was a headstrong hulk who was always getting into trouble and causing Jesus plenty of trouble too. Sometimes we preachers use him as a whipping boy. It's great fun to portray Peter slipping below the waters of Galilee!

But we forget that **none of us** have ever walked on water!

Peter's sheer humanity makes him everyone's teacher.

As the old preacher Clarence Macartney so well explained: "His impulsive

deeds, his frequent questions, his eager exclamations and confessions, the praise and honor and rebukes that were bestowed upon him, his sometimes manly and sometimes cowardly acts, his oaths, his bitter tears — all this makes Peter the great companion and the great instructor of his fellow men and his fellow Christians.”

And the night of his failure is, perhaps, the most instructive night of his life.

This is a familiar story that we will take up in detail when we come to Luke 22:54-62. But here we must notice that in the crumbling atmosphere of the Upper Room, one of Jesus’ most trusted disciples, one of the inner circle, His most confident, enthusiastic supporter, vowed, *“Lord, I am ready to go to prison with You, and even to die with You.”*

Peter – the rock of Gibraltar among the disciples.

And yet this foremost disciple would succumb to cowardly denial and infamous failure. The rock would crumble. He would be reduced to a mere pebble of a man.

The Upper Room, so festive with table and candles a few minutes before, was now dark and somber. The betrayer had gone out into the night, waiting for the right moment to trap Jesus. Shameful dissension had broken out over who was the greatest. And denial and failure was about to come from the most unlikely of apostles.

And in the first part of this passage, Jesus addresses Peter specifically because his voice overpowered the others in the quarrel.

And so we see ...

v. 31-34: PETER’S PRESUMPTION

Luke 22:31-34, *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to have all of you, to sift you like wheat. [32] But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. **So when you have repented and turned to Me again, strengthen and build up your brothers.**” [33] Peter said, *“Lord, I am ready to go to prison with You, and even to die with You.”* [34] But Jesus said, *“Peter, let Me tell you something. The rooster will not crow tomorrow morning until you have denied three times that you even know Me.”*”*

You will recall it was in the Upper Room, amidst the din of the disciples’ chest thumping and annoying complaining about who was the greatest, that Jesus unmasked Peter’s presumption.

Peter reacted to Jesus’ prediction of his failure by saying, *“Lord, I am ready to go to prison with You, and even to die with You.”* It was a completely sincere presumption — “I’m telling you, Lord, that right now **I can do this**. I’m a strong man, and if I put my mind to it, that’s it!”

Peter meant it. He wasn’t bragging.

But it was a dangerous presumption.

Perhaps if the angels were present, they winced and reflected, “Peter, you shouldn’t have said that — at least not like you did. Proverbs 16:18, Peter — pride comes before a fall.”

Alexander Whyte, the great Scottish preacher, wrote: “Peter was born a supreme man. Nature herself, as we call her, had, with her ever-bountiful and original hands, stamped her supremacy upon Peter before he was born. And when he came to be a disciple of Jesus Christ he entered on, and continued to hold, that natural supremacy.”

We often see this kind of presumption in a naturally gifted athlete who finds it hard to listen to coaching advice because he feels no need. Sadly, the sidelines are strewn with has-beens who refused to learn from the wisdom of others and never developed the technique and understanding they needed. Perceived natural strength can be a disadvantage — especially in spiritual matters.

Peter’s fateful presumption was also aided by his intense love for Jesus.

How could he love Jesus so much and conceive of disappointing Him under any circumstance? That’s unthinkable! Peter was just plain naive.

You see, on this night, Satan has asked for a crack at Peter. He would thresh his faith and beat it into the ground until the husk broke open. Then he would show the world what was really inside Peter’s heart. And once the other disciples saw that; then Peter, the rock, would be crushed.

He didn’t understand the spiritual Mount Everest before him. He figured all he needed were some strong legs and a good pair of sandals and he could scale any spiritual peak. It was hard to get Peter to see reality, but the Lord was adamant, *“Peter, let Me tell you something. The rooster will not crow tomorrow morning until you have denied three times that you even know Me.”*

And so we see ...

v. 54-62: PETER’S FALSE POSITION

Luke 22:54-62, *“So they arrested Him and led Him to the high priest's residence, and Peter was following far behind. [55] The guards lit a fire in the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter joined them there. [56] A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally she said, "This man was one of Jesus' followers!" [57] Peter denied it. "Woman," he said, "I don't even know the man!" [58] After a while someone else looked at him and said, "You must be one of them!" "No, man, I'm not!" Peter replied. [59] About an hour later someone else insisted, "This must be one of Jesus' disciples because he is a Galilean, too." [60] But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about." And as soon as he said these words, the rooster crowed. [61] At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered that the Lord had said, "Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny Me three times." [62] And Peter*

left the courtyard, crying bitterly.”

The hour is late; the night is dark and cold and damp. Peter has followed Jesus all the way to the temple courtyard where the Savior, under heavy guard, awaits his hearing. Peter comes because Jesus is his Lord, because Jesus would have come for him. He comes to help, not knowing what to do, or how, or when.

“Do I fight?”

“Do I yell and scream?”

“Do I preach?”

“Do I just watch and listen?”

He’s not sure, so he comes to a campfire, to sort things out, to think, to plan his next move. And in the damp, dreary chill of a long night, Peter sat down amidst the enemy. Matthew says that he sat down with the guards “to see the end.” He was overwhelmed with cold, dark, listless depression.

Peter was in dangerous company. One of the servant girls of the high priest’s household had been studying him. And by the light of the flames, Satan will do his work. Perhaps the fire blazed up, revealing him more clearly, for Luke says, *“A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally she said, “This man was one of Jesus’ followers!”*

Peter feels the heat and so he denied it. *“Woman,” he said, “I don’t even know the man!”*

Peter’s words are a lie, a bald-faced denial.

At this time most of Christ’s disciples had run off and abandoned Him.

Peter had at least followed him.

But in a foggy instant he had abandoned the battle. He gave the impression that if he was not one of the enemy, he was at most a mutual bystander. The lie had thrown its first coil about him and it began to tighten.

Because it was cold, as Jesus’ interrogation continued behind closed doors, those in the courtyard stayed close to the fire. The conversation ranged from one subject to another — the Passover crowds, yesterday’s fight at the barracks, the new girl, this eccentric teacher from Galilee. They talk and nod and lay odds on His chances.

Then came another accusation, *“After a while someone else looked at him and said, “You must be one of them!” “No, man, I’m not!” Peter replied.”*

Another serpent’s coil slid about Peter. In his first lie he had denied knowing Jesus; in the second he denied being one of His disciples.

This coiled deception rested comfortably on Peter, imperceptibly tightening. *“About an hour later someone else insisted, “This must be one of Jesus’ disciples because he is a Galilean, too.” But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about.””*

Mark's parallel is more damning, **Mark 14:71**, "*Peter said, "I swear by God, I don't know this man you're talking about."*"

It was the moment of truth.

And in no uncertain terms, **Peter denies His relationship with Jesus.**

And somewhere in the night, a rooster stretches out its neck, shakes its feathers, and crows an indictment.

In the heat of his denial, Peter was oblivious to the shuffle of feet as Christ was being led out into the courtyard — and certainly he was not prepared for the excruciating next moment.

Luke tells us, "*And as soon as he said these words, the rooster crowed. At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered that the Lord had said, "Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny Me three times." And Peter left the courtyard, crying bitterly.*"

This is what the Puritan writers called "A Harsh Providence!"

It's a brief moment, almost too short to be intimate.

But a moment like this has a way of framing itself to hang in the mind.

Christ paused and looked right into the soul of Peter.

The Savior utters no words.

Nor does He shake His head in disgust.

Nor lower it in disappointment.

There is no 'I-told-you-so.'

Jesus is sympathetic, knowing what it means to fall into the hands of Satan. He has been there. For forty days and nights. He **knows** the adversary.

So His look carries no grudge.

It is the look of someone who loves ... and understands.

And with that look, all of Peter's emotions collapse.

He runs from the courtyard and the tears coursed down Peter's face like rain down a rock. He probably stops somewhere and beats his fists against a stone wall. He pulls at his hair. He gnarls his face.

The guilt is too much to bear. He collapses into a heap.

And he cries and cries and cries until there are no more tears to cry.

No one will ever know the anguish that Peter went through during the next few hours and over the next few days! Something died inside Peter that night — Simon the natural man with all his self-assured presumption.

You see, the winnowing of Satan is over. And Peter is a smaller man now without the thick husk of self-sufficiency and over-confidence that once surrounded his life. He is broken and he is bare. All that's left is a naked kernel of faith. It's a small grain, but it's a grain Satan couldn't touch. Satan can winnow the chaff all he wants, but the wheat belongs to Jesus.

And so we see ...

PETER'S PRESERVATION

The Lord was after nothing less than Peter's perfection. And this final terrible encounter with the Master reveals what saved the apostle.

- **Christ's Look**

The overwhelming pain that jolted Peter when their eyes met began the necessary process of remorse. Again he was "a sinful man," as he had earlier called himself after the miracle of the great catch of fish. But the knowledge of what he was ... was now stripped of any rhetoric.

Its raw meaning was there to stay, with all its sanctifying potential.

But the Jesus' look did even more — it maintained the link between Peter's soul and Christ. It was a knowing look that said, "Peter, it is happening just as I told you. Now remember it all! Because I prophesied more than your fall as the rooster crowed."

- **Christ's Word**

Christ's prophetic word in the Upper Room had foretold that Peter would be sifted by Satan's temptation, and the sifting process had shown that Peter was mere chaff in Satan's hand. Yet Christ was preserving him, so that only real wheat would remain. Peter was being made into a man of substance.

But there is more! Christ had said, "*So when you have repented and turned to Me again,*" prophesying Peter's repentance.

The message was clear: though through his denial he was a sinner *par excellence*, he would be granted repentance.

And repent he would.

Not only that, Jesus had said that when Peter turned back, he was to "*strengthen and build up your brothers.*"

He would have a ministry — a strengthening ministry.

The "sinful man" would actually become a pillar of the church.

- **Christ's Prayer**

Of course, the grand redemptive power, the reason Peter had not been sifted into oblivion, the reason he repented and was restored, was Christ's prayer for him back in verse 32, "*But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail.*"

When Peter was indulging in his post-supper nap in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for him. In fact, Jesus had been praying for him since the beginning of their relationship. We all need the prayers of others — godly parents and siblings and friends. But behind all those prayers are the prayers Christ offers for us.

Romans 8:34 says, "*Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is*

*the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, **pleading for us.***”

And **Hebrews 7:25** says, “*Therefore He is able, once and forever, to save everyone who comes to God through Him. He lives forever to plead with God on their behalf.*”

Even if those who love you are gone, Christ keeps praying for you.

Hebrews 4:14-16 says, “*That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him. [15] This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. [16] So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.*”

PETER’S PERFECTION

All of this was meant by God to perfect Peter in the sense of maturing him. Of course, Peter never became perfect in this life. No one does! Evidence of his imperfections abound. Nevertheless, a massive perfecting took place in Peter in respect to his worldly presumption.

From here on, the Scriptures record a different Peter.

It starts with ...

- **A Fish Breakfast**

Peter’s formal restoration came on the shores of Galilee when, after recognizing Christ at the water’s edge; he dove into the sea and came to sit around a charcoal fire with Christ in John 21. And there three times our Lord extracted a vow of love, also commissioning the fallen apostle three times.

After this Peter was never the same.

Gone was the presumption.

Gone was the arrogance.

Gone was the independence.

Gone was the self-sufficiency.

- **Pentecost**

In their place was the power of God freely coursing through a broken, humble man — and it was awesome.

Listen to the man who earlier cowered before a slave girl, now speaking at Pentecost, **Acts 2:22-24**, “*People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus of Nazareth by doing wonderful miracles, wonders, and signs through Him, as you well know. [23] But you followed God's prearranged plan. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed Him to the cross and murdered Him. [24] However, God released Him from the horrors of death and raised Him back to life again, for death could not keep Him in its grip.*”

The coward was now fearless!

- **Death**

After Peter's restoration at Galilee, Jesus prophesied that Peter would die by crucifixion himself, **John 21:18**, "... when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go" using what would become standard Christian language for martyrdom.

The Church Fathers used the term as referring to crucifixion.

There is significant support from tradition that Peter was indeed crucified — but upside-down at his request because he deemed himself unworthy to die like Christ.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS: *Relentless Love*²

God excels at perfecting his saints.

Delivering us from self-sufficiency is a major function of the ups and downs of this life. Paul sought the Lord three times to have a certain affliction removed, but God answered, **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**, "*Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in your weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. [10] Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

Peter has been purposely portrayed by the Holy Spirit in Holy Scripture as a very human man to whom we can all relate. He is an archetype of those who have come to Christ in loving submission but with the passing of time have succumbed to independence and self-sufficiency.

Peter is us!

Peter's experience is our experience writ large on the pages of Holy Scripture so that we will not miss it.

C. S. Lewis once wrote, "Though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him."

He warned people to "count the cost" before becoming Christians.

"Make no mistake," He says, "if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever

² C. S. Lewis quotes come from his book, Mere Christianity, pages 118, 172.

inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect — until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.”

And those who are overwhelmed said, “Amen.”