

The Twelve: Solidifying the Rock, Part 3

Luke 6:14

March 19, 2017

Simon was a Galilean fisherman. He was actually the owner of a small fishing business that he operated on the Sea of Galilee, along with his brother Andrew, two of his friends, the two sons of Zebedee, James and John. Simon was not, not a man who was who had been considered in his day an educated man, though he was educated. He just wasn't educated in the rabbinical schools, but he was a sincere believer in all that he had learned from the Scriptures. He'd responded to the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. He sought out John the Baptist, the prophet at the Jordan River, and he responded to John's preaching and repentance and faith, and he came to be baptized in anticipation of the coming Messiah. For Peter this was a fulfillment of everything he'd been reading in the Old Testament; he was excited. So when his brother Andrew came to him one day telling him, "We have found the Messiah," Simon wasted no time.

He immediately left John the Baptist and started following Jesus. And that was the day that marked the end of Simon and the beginning of Peter. Jesus took one look at Simon and said to him, . "You are Simon son of John, you should be called *Cephas*," 'kay-fas' in Aramaic, *Petros* in Greek. It's a large fragment of rock that would be united to the greater living rock, the *Petra*, who is Christ Himself. So as we've been saying, Jesus, when he looked at Peter that day, he didn't identify rock-like qualities in Simon and choose him to be on his team because of Simon's inherent leadership qualities and steadfastness and all of that. Rather, Jesus called Simon Peter, not because of what he saw in Simon, but because of what he intended to do in Simon. Jesus is there speaking prophetically about Simon; perhaps we could say he's speaking aspirationally. That's a made-up word, by the way, so be careful when you use it. He's speaking aspirationally, if I could turn that into an adverb. Aspirations of Jesus, though, are prophetic.

When he aspires to do something, we know that it will come to pass. He only does the will of his Father in Heaven, John 5:30. And we know that the Father will accomplish all of his good pleasure, Isaiah 46:10. And it was the will of the Father through the ministry of the Son to transform an unreliable Simon

into Peter, the Apostle who remained steadfast to the very end. As you know, last week, I stopped sort of mid-story. We were looking at the greatest lesson that Peter would ever learn from Jesus. So if you have your Bibles, you can turn them to John 18, which is where we were last week. We were really in the middle of a point, illustrating an important point, namely, that Peter had been attempting to serve Christ, but he was attempting to do so according to his own understanding of love. He was doing so according to his own naturally defined concept of what love and loyalty to Christ should look like. Watching how that played out in Peter's life, seeing how that led to his greatest failure, it's not only instructive for us, but it's essential for understanding what actually happened to Simon. This is how Jesus changed Simon from being such an unstable, vacillating, unreliable man and how he turned that man into Peter, the steadfast, rock-like foundation stone of the Christian church. And for Peter, as we're going to find out, it was all about learning the power of divine love.

We've been watching this transformation take place over the past couple of weeks. It's kind of like one of those documentary videos where you see this time-lapse video with an under-the-soil view of a seed germinating roots growing downward and

shoots growing upward. That is what we've been watching with Peter. It's underneath the soil at this point. We're going to see some real growth this morning. That is going to give life and fruit to his later ministry. We've already covered a lot of ground, you can see the outline in your bulletin, and we've constructed our outline of Peter's life around that triad of Christian virtues: faith, hope and love. Because like every true believer, Peter followed Jesus in faith, he learned from Jesus in hope, and Jesus had been teaching Peter all along for more than two years of daily intimate fellowship and instruction he had been teaching him. And the most important lesson of all, what Peter and the Apostles needed to learn most, it had to do with the motivation for all service to God, for all ministry toward God, for all ministry to the good of other people. It had to be done in love. Not just your own self-definition of love, not just your own understanding about love, but the love of God. In Paul's words, 1 Corinthians 16:14, "Let all that you do be done in love," in love. Peter thought he had that down.

He's like us, right? He thinks he's serving Christ appropriately, sufficiently, but he'd been getting it wrong. He was serving Christ in his own strength, his own understanding, he was depending on his own understanding of loyalty and love

the power of his own affection, that that had the power to keep him near and close, standing firm, but he had a lot to learn. Last week, we read the first eleven verses of John 18. And just as a reminder, to set up the context here, Jesus was here with his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. He was waiting here for his betrayer to lead the band of soldiers to arrest Jesus and take him to his appointment, his eventual appointment with the cross. Judas Iscariot was there along with the Jewish leaders, accompanied by Roman troops. All of them came that night into the garden to arrest Jesus. We know that they were doing the bidding of Satan himself, who had personally inhabited Judas Iscariot. And yet, at the same time, we need to understand that all of them were actually carrying out the eternal decree of the Father, the decision that he had made in eternity past to redeem his people from their sins through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. God was accomplishing His eternal will on this very night. This didn't happen to Jesus; God did this.

As Peter later understood clearly, as he proclaimed to his own people, the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, those Jewish people who committed the most tragic act in human history by crucifying their own Messiah. Peter told him in Acts 2:23, "This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and

foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Yeah, there's the free actions of human beings. There's the sin of human beings as they murdered an innocent man. But there's also the eternal decree of the Father, his plan that was coming to fruition on this very night. Peter didn't understand that, though, on this very night. He didn't understand the gospel truth when he was with Jesus in the garden on the night of his betrayal and arrest. Peter, he was in fact completely out of step with God the Father; he was out of step with the stated will and intention of Jesus Christ, who told the disciples repeatedly, "I will be put to death, but I will rise from the dead." He didn't get that here. He had no sense about the activity of the Holy Spirit; the triune God intended to see Jesus crucified that night. And Peter, for his part, was dead set against that, which put him in direct contradiction to God Himself. Here's our Apostle folks.

How many of us through misunderstanding can be put in the very same position? Here he is intent on preventing the arrest the death of Jesus Christ, John 18:10, as you can see there. Peter whips out his sword, and he takes a swipe at Malchus's head. He missed, took off his ear instead. That had to hurt. John doesn't bother telling us that Jesus healed Malchus.

Matthew and Mark, they don't mention either. But it's Luke here, the beloved physician, who gives us the little detail that Jesus did a little repairing surgery there. It's an important detail, especially if your name is Malchus. But again, Jesus, he had to rebuke Peter here for his rashness, not simply because it was impetuous and reckless, but more to the point, look at Jesus' question in John 18:11: "Peter, shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

As I said, he'd been telling Peter and his Apostles about the necessity of suffering. He'd been abundantly clear ever since Peter had made the good confession there at Caesarea Philippi, identifying Jesus as God's chosen Messiah and Matthew 16:21 says, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed. And on the third day, be raised." It's pretty clear, right? But Peter kept standing in his way. Peter kept saying, "No." Peter wanted to stop this suffering. He just wasn't getting the point. He wanted to prevent what God had planned. He wanted to prevent what Jesus intended to do. And he thought here that he was showing such great loyalty, expressing affection and love for Christ, but it's merely human love. It really had more in common with Satan

than with Christ as Jesus rebuked him and said, "Get behind me Satan." We all know people like that, right? People who listen to some of the stuff on television, some of the stuff on the radio that tells us that "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." And it's all about sweet roses and great financial prosperity, and everything is going to be good in the future. We're going to avoid suffering. We're going to avoid persecution, we're going to avoid difficulty, marginalization, ostracization in this world. No, we're not.

Jesus said, "If they hated me, they'll hate you." And the way to glory is the way of suffering. It's the way of the cross. We can't prevent that, nor should we. And as the scene unfolds here, we're going to find the Peter is going to learn the most important lesson in his life. It's one that he'd never forget. And it would come for him at great cost. It would come with extreme sorrow and anguish, something he'd never forget. But it was vital to Peter's usefulness in the apostolic service of Jesus Christ.

Let's pick up the story where we left off last time with John 18. In verse 12, it says there that "the band of soldiers

and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father in law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. And it was Caiaphas, who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple [we know that disciple's John], and 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. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, 'You also are one of this man's disciples, aren't you?' He said, 'I am not.' 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." And we'll stop there for a second.

Throughout this section it's interesting how John constructs the narrative. We're going to see John shift the scene back and forth. The camera is first on the steadfastness of Jesus before his accusers. We see how he interacts with them how he most of the time just keeps silent. Then we also see the

camera flip over and look at Peter. We see the behavior of this so-called "rock." This charcoal fire is burning in the quadrangle at the center of the high priest's home. The rooms of the home in those days, especially the larger homes, they're built around an open square. The high priest's servants, they were milling around in this open square, and they built a fire there. It was cold at night, and Peter was standing around the campfire with the soldiers, the guards, the officers. This is a man's campfire, manly men, manly conversation around this campfire. And I love the fact that God sent Peter, he sent him a female to test his strength, standing among all these manly men, having manly conversations, exhibiting and exuding just manliness. You know they've got swords on them. They're tough. Here's Peter. He's also a manly guy, fisherman, Galilean, tough. His hands are leathery and strong. He's tested by the gentle inquiry of a woman and not even a fully mature woman, just a little servant girl. She's of no consequence, especially to this group of soldiers who are standing around the campfire. I mean, she's hardly even an issue, dismissive of her. She's exactly the kind of test that exposed Peter's character. He crumbled, absolutely came apart.

Mark tells us, painting the picture vividly, and Mark 14:66 and following, "As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you mean.' [That's an interesting way of phrasing that, isn't it?] And he went out into the gateway is trying to get away from her and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them.' But again he denied it. And after a little while, the bystanders again said to Peter, 'Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.'"

This little servant girl, she's pretty persistent, isn't she? I have a daughter like that, two have them in fact. You know how young girls can be right? She's completely unaware of the implications of outing Peter here. She's not thinking about that. She's just very innocently identifying him and saying, "No, no, no, no, don't, don't trouble me with all this other stuff. I know who you are. I have eyes. I have seen you before." She's simply trying to verify his identity. And she's incredulous here that Peter doesn't just admit his identity and confess his close association with Jesus. Certainly, she would,

if she knew him. God even gave Peter a preemptory warning, as the rooster crowed once just to get his attention. It was to no avail.

We're in John 18; look at verse 25. "Simon Peter was standing warming himself. [You see, John brings us back to the same scene there.] So they said to him, 'You are also not one of his disciples are you?' [And] he denied it and said, 'I am not.' [And] one of the servants of the high priest, a relative of a man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked [him] '[Didn't] I see you in the garden with him?' ["I'm pretty sure you're the guy." And] Peter again denied it. And at once the rooster crowed."

Matthew's account tells us that Peter invoked a curse on himself. That is, he swore by oath, before God in heaven, "I do not know the man." Back in Luke's Gospel, we read a little detail that really pierces the heart here. Luke tells us in Luke 22:60: "Immediately, while he was still speaking, [that is, while he was swearing an oath before God, while he's pronouncing a curse on himself, should he be lying.] the rooster crowed. [And then this detail, get this.] The Lord turned and looked at Peter. [Can you imagine that? That look was a dagger through his

heart.] 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 he wept bitterly."

Look, Peter trusted Jesus, and he followed him. This is not his best moment. Obviously this is a failure. This is a sin. But he did try. Jesus, he's there in the courtyard. His faith is weak; it's failing, it's faltering, and it completely let him down. But he did try to come, he probably justified to himself, "You know, I don't want to, you know, reveal my identity because I'm here with the soldiers, I'm kind of listening in to what they're saying, because this is strategic for our eventual rescue of Jesus, as I break into where he's held, and I break him out of prison. And we run off and we rid the land of the Romans, and we move on to messianic glory, the glory of the millennial kingdom, when Jesus is on the throne, and I'm going to be there." He's got all this stuff in his head all figured out. He's standing there with the soldiers because he's gathering intel. I know what Peter's doing. I know how he's rationalizing this. Why? Because there's a little bit of Peter in all of us, isn't there? And God sent a little servant girl, a little servant girl to call him to account. He failed here.

But he did love Christ; he'd learned from Christ. He had been in the context of a daily, intimate communion, a relationship with him for three years, the better part of three years. And when it came to loving and serving Christ, it's true: The nature of His love, it needed to grow. In fact, the nature of His love had to change. And it had to change fundamentally. It had to move from a love that's defined by human sentiment, to a divine love, one that does not come from himself, but one that comes directly from God and is planted in the heart and then works its way out. It's a love that's defined by fidelity to the truth. It's a love that perseveres through suffering. It's a love that's demonstrated in self-sacrifice, and loyalty, even ultimate loyalty, loyalty unto death. Peter, he'd been trying to serve Christ. But he'd been doing so in his own power, with his own energy, and it let him down. So once again, Christ designed a trial for Peter, which would expose his self-reliance and reveal the weakness of reliance on self, reveal the fickleness, the weakness, the smallness the frailty of human love. Sovereignly, God designed this trial because he knew Peter would fail, that he would really blow it. But sovereignly also, God had a good and wise purpose in mind, that he might build Peter up again. And then through Peter, teach all of us here two thousand years later, what is truly essential.

Here's where we're going to get into our final point in this survey of Peter. He's a lot like us; we need to understand that. In faith he followed Christ, I hope you learned, but the most foundational lesson that he needed to learn was the one that would make Peter useful to Christ. And that brings us to a third point: In love he served Jesus Christ. In love Peter served Jesus Christ. We've left poor Peter there weeping bitterly over his spiritual defection. By the way, how would you like your worst spiritual failure recorded on the pages of sacred Scripture, guaranteed by the eternal God to stay in writing, never to go out of print? All your closest family members can read it. But look, since it serves to correct and instruct the church, I can tell you that Peter, he wouldn't have it any other way. "I must decrease," in the words of John the Baptist, "but he must increase." We're not going to leave poor Peter in this condition of failure and defection, and the Lord didn't leave him there.

So let's read about his restoration. Just turn over a couple pages to John 21, John 21. And we're going to see how Jesus rounded out Peter's training, how Jesus restored Peter to useful service, and then how he deployed Peter into apostolic

ministry. At the time, we get to John 21. Jesus has been arrested. He's been tried and sentenced by the Jewish leadership. And then he's been crucified by the Roman soldiers with the permission of Pontius Pilate. Jesus died on the cross; he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. He was aided by Nicodemus, a former Pharisee both of those men had been members of the Sanhedrin. But they didn't assent to Jesus' crucifixion. They had become disciples of Jesus, but secretly, John tells us, for fear of the Jews. Jesus did not stay in the tomb that they buried him in. He was raised from the dead three days later. He didn't stay wrapped in the cloths that they provided. He didn't stay covered in the burial spices. He'd risen from the dead. He left the tomb. He appeared to some of his disciples, first to the women at the tomb, Mary Magdalene, then the other women, Mary the mother of James the Lesser and Salome. I find it interesting that the first appearances of Jesus to any of his disciples is to females, not to males. Isn't that interesting? Then Jesus appeared to two disciples on the Emmaus Road. And then, only then, did Jesus appear to Peter, according to Luke 24:34.

And it's interesting that before Jesus appeared to the other disciples, the other eleven gathered as a group, he

appeared to Peter, he appeared to him alone. It's a moment the Bible simply acknowledges in Luke 24:34. It doesn't tell us much about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They tell the other eleven, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon. "Just a simple statement. No doubt, this appearance of Jesus that we don't know really anything about, it had to be, though, a total shock to Peter. His mind had to be in a whirl as he processed the fact of the resurrection, as he saw the risen Christ before him. But in thinking about Jesus, and why did he want this private moment with Peter, before seeing any of the other Apostles, he wanted to see Peter first, to visit with him alone. It's such a tender moment of affirmation in our Lord, how he had a love and a tenderness and affection and a compassion for Peter, knowing he was stung by this defection, spiritually.

I love it, too, that in all that the Lord had to accomplish, there's never a sense of hurry. He can take time; he can stop and pay attention. And he does. Peter saw Christ after getting over the fact of the resurrection, processing all of that, no doubt the feelings of guilt and shame had to hit Peter full force. No doubt, he's replaying the memories in his mind over and over again—how he denied the Lord, how he wishes he could go back and do it again. The one he followed in faith, the

one he had learned from in hope. The one to whom he professed such love and loyalty, even to the point of death, "even if everybody else denies you, I will not," so he said. It's the one he had so utterly and completely let down. That was not his intention. But with every post-resurrection encounter, Peter had to feel the weight of that shame. And as he remembered his sinful abdication and defection and had to bring the tears over and over again, so in love, Jesus intended to stop that and restore him.

Look at John 21 verse 1: "After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the sea of Tiberius, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter Thomas called the twin Nathaniel of Canaan and Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. And Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We'll go with you.' And they went out, got into the boat. But that night, they caught nothing. [That sounds familiar, doesn't it, from Luke 5. There they are fishing again, another frustrating night of fishing. And another fishing miracle is on the way. Look at the next verses.] Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore. Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. And Jesus said to them, 'Children, do you have any fish?' [He knows

the answer. Do you have any fish?] And they answered him, 'No.' [It's got to be dawning on him.] But he said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it. And now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish, and that disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'"

I think he knew. I think he has just waiting for confirmation from the frustrating night of fishing. This stranger on the shore: "Children do you have any fish?" I think John is clued in from that point. He's just waiting for confirmation. And he gets it. He knows exactly what's going on. He remembers that, back in Luke chapter 5, he knows who this is. And once he passes on the news and it dawns on Peter, Peter does not hesitate. He doesn't waste a second. It says that "when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and he threw himself into the sea. [That's Peter again, throwing himself around. I love it.] The other disciples came in the boat. [So Peter left them behind, right? "You guys get the fish. I'll be over there on the shore." He threw himself into the sea.] Other disciples came in the boat, dragging a net full of fish, but they were not far from the land, "about a hundred yards off." He leaves his

buddies behind to do all the hard work of gathering in the fish, jumps in the water, runs toward Jesus. And again, we just have to point out that there is an endearing picture of Peter here, isn't there? He's not estranged from Jesus.

You know, who else committed a heinous act of spiritual defection about at the same time Peter did? Judas. Judas also wept bitterly when he realized he betrayed the Messiah. How did Judas respond, though? Where did his sorrow lead him? It led him to suicide. Where does Peter's sorrow lead him? Right back to Jesus. Right back to him. Where's he going to go? Jesus is the one with the words of eternal life. He has an affection for Christ, no doubt about it. But it's not complete. It's not perfect. There's more to learn. Look at verse 9: "When they got out on land, they saw the charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' And so Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them and although there were, [look how eager he is to obey Jesus, go get some fish. Peter says, Okay, I'll get you some fish. How about 153? I'll get all of them. He's jumping over there to get into the work because he doesn't want to let Jesus down. He wants to obey Him.] Although there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' [And] none of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. [And] Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with a fish. [Now,] this is the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead."

The fishing miracle, it did connect them back to their original calling to full-time discipleship in Luke 5, right? This is a reminder of, "Hey, remember that calling that I gave you back then? I still mean it. No longer are you to be fishing for fish. I've called you to fish for men. And this whole thing about the crucifixion, my death on the cross, burial in a tomb, and the fact that I'm risen from the dead, doesn't change my will. I still mean it." Then look back there at verse 9. You see that charcoal fire? What does that remind them of? Last time we see recorded in John's Gospel, a charcoal fire, Peter's standing around one of those in the courtyard of the high priest. He's warming himself from the heat of a charcoal fire in John 18:18, and reminded here of Peter's defection. Servants, the officers, had made a charcoal fire because it was cold. They were standing and warming themselves, and Peter was also with them. He's standing and warming himself. And is he standing around? Who's he standing around with? With them, with the enemies of Christ.

He's standing in the pathway of sinners, isn't he? Psalm 1:1. He's warming himself by their fire. He's standing in their light. He's feeling their heat, while Jesus is in custody, while he is facing the hostile inquisition that would lead to his crucifixion.

But remember, let's never forget that the crucifixion here would pay the penalty for sin, including this sin of Peter's defection, many other sins as well, as you and I know full well. Let's look at the next verse in John 21, John 21:15. There's a section here in John 21:15 through 17, which is all about Jesus' restoration of Peter, and I want to walk through those verses just one by one, noting a few things along the way. "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' And he said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'" Don't stop there. Notice the use of "Simon, son of John?" What is Jesus reminding Peter of? He's reminded him of his earliest identity. "Simon, son of John, you're still the Peter that I called you to be. Simon, son of John, this is not what I intended you to be. Simon, son of John, you're something more." He comes back. He says, "Do you love me more than these?" More than what? More than the other disciples? No, I think that

what he's talking about is more than these, like the fish, the boats, the fishing. He's trying to break him from his Simon-thinking that wants to go back to fishing and give up on all of this. He says, "Do you love me more than these? Or is your affection for me more than going back to this? Are you going to stay near me?"

And Jesus asked him the question. He said, "Do you love me more than these?" He says, he uses the word, *agapao*. There are four words in the Greek for love. There's *storge*, which is kind of like a familiar kind of love. Like a mother has an affection for her children, the *storge* familial affection. There's the word *eros*, which is really dominant in our culture today. That's what people mean, mostly, when they talk about "I love" this person or that person. They're really talking about what even the Greeks were talking about. They're talking about a lust. They're talking about a personal desire. They're talking about a romantic feeling and sentiments that drive them, and sometimes they feel can't be bridled. That's *eros*. There's also the word *phileo* or *philea* because that's the common Greek word for love. In the Greek language, it's the one that really was considered to be a highest form of love. It's the love that a friend had for a friend. But there's always in *phileo*, that kind of love,

there's always a sense of, "I'm gaining some benefit out of this." Listen, that makes sense to us, doesn't it? We love people because we're drawn to them. There's something about that person that attracts us. It's a natural, human kind of love and affection that one has for another, and it's a very common. It was very common in the Greek days as well. There was also one more word. It was the word *agapao*, and *agapao* was a word that was more philosophical in nature in the Greek language. It was kind of a word that was pushed to the philosophical margins. It was kind of like this ultimate kind of a love that really is just a love in theory. It's an idealistic love that one that would sacrifice all simply for the good of someone else with no self-interest involved at all. That was *agapao*.

It's interesting that when Jesus told his disciples in John 13 that "by this all men will know you are my disciples, if you have," what? "love for one another. What kind of love? *Agapao*, ultimate sacrifice for the good of somebody else, according to the will of God, with no self-interest in mind. That was out of favor in the Greek world, just as it's out of favor in our world. But it's exactly the kind of love that we're to be identified by. It's exactly the kind of love that we didn't know until Jesus died for us on the cross. Jesus questions Peter's

agapao: "Do you *agapao* me?" And Peter responds honestly. Here he says, "Yes, Lord. You know [and he uses a synonym he thinks is a synonym,] you know that I *phileo* you." "You know that I have an affection for you, a strong affection." Notice the call to service here. Jesus doesn't stop and correct anything. He just calls him to service. He says, "Okay, then, 'Feed my lambs.'" "Feed my lambs." What's it calling him to, shepherding? Jesus died for Peter and all of his people, and the Great Shepherd is calling Peter to shepherding, in the pattern of himself, as Peter is an undershepherd of the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. That doesn't do it. That's not it. Look at verse 16. "Jesus said to him [to Peter] a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'" "'Do you *agapao* me?'" "He said to him, 'Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.'" Again, he's talking to Jesus. He is, he knows Jesus can see right through him. He's not trying to shade anything. He's not trying to be duplicitous. He's not trying to be hypocritical in any way. He's trying to be guileless, straightforward, as straightforward and honest as he can be. And he says, "You know, Lord, that I *phileo* you." "You know I have an affection for you. You know I love you."

Look at the call to service here and the nature of the service. Jesus not only says, "Feed my lambs," but he says to

Peter, "Tend my sheep." The word "tend" is the word "shepherd."
"Shepherd my sheep." Shepherding is a broader concept than feeding. Feeding is what they need to eat. Sheep need to eat so they can be healthy. But tending, shepherding, that's a broader concept. It involves a whole lot more: keeping them out of danger, steering them away from wolves, guarding them against wolves, fighting wolves, fighting against bandits and everything else. Look at verse 17 now: Jesus "said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him [a third time again], 'Feed my sheep.'"

Peter's grieved, *lupeo* is the word, he's feeling deep, deep sadness. He's feeling deep, deep sorrow. You know there's a wound there ever since he defected from the point of the courtyard, where he denied Jesus three times, the rooster crows, he gets that look from Jesus, that dagger that pierced him right through, and he cries, he weeps, the tears are flowing and he has never forgotten that. Time has only put a scab on that wound. And Jesus, he's messing with that. "Do you love me?" and he's pushing on it and it hurts. This third time, though, he rips that thing wide open. He rips the wound wide open.

Why does Jesus do that? Torturing? Taking pleasure in Peter's grief? Is he making him really feel it, grovel before him? Sadness? The third time Jesus comes to him, he questions his love; the third time and this time when he questions him, he uses Peter's word for love. He, Jesus says, "Do you love me?" He said to him a third time, "Do you love me," and it's not the word, not *agapao*. It's the word *phileo*. "Do you *phileo*? Is there even that?" Peter affirms again his *phileo*, but he's torn from the heart. He affirms Jesus' omniscience, the fact that he knows every detail, the fact that he knows them through and through. "Lord you know everything, you know that I *phileo* you." It's there. And then the call to service: "Feed my sheep."

Why three times? Once for every denial, once for every crow of the rooster, once for every condemning crow of the rooster, there's a restoration. This is not torture on Jesus' part. This isn't sadism. This is loving, tender affirmation and restoration. This should tell us something about our coming to God and finding forgiveness. Folks, forgiveness isn't easy. Forgiveness costs—a lot. When you think about your forgiveness before God, think about the cross. Think about how much God hated sin that it would cause him to put his own Son to death

and pour out his wrath on him. It costs a lot; forgiveness is not cheap. It's not easy. And we should never think that we can come to God in a flippant manner and say, "I know I denied you, forgive me for that, pffffsh, it just slipped my mind." We should never come to each other either in such a flippant attitude seeking forgiveness. We should expect that identifying sin in our lives hurts. It does not feel good. Humility is hard, humility is painful. Listen for those who truly know God, who are truly regenerate, who have a new nature. That's the only thing we can do. We are going to come to people and just open ourselves up. And that's what Jesus does to Peter here. He just cuts, opens up. Why? Because he's got to clear that wound out and heal from the bottom of that wound all the way to the surface. This is a deep restoration, not superficial.

This is restoration to a service after the sin of spiritual defection. And you would think from Peter's instability, his vacillation, his weakness, that he can never be useful to Christ again. Not true. Peter could admit to Jesus here in all honesty, in all transparency, the true nature of his love. It wasn't the *agape* love that Jesus was asking about, it was what he had, it was a start. But the *agape* love would develop and grow in Peter's life, and that's exactly what Jesus wanted Peter to know

next. Look at verse 18. This is what he's going to affirm to Peter here. And he wants him to understand the next couple of verses here: "Look, I'm going to develop *agape* love in you and here is how you'll know: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me.'"

Tradition passed down to us from the early church tells us that Peter was put to death in Rome. He was crucified there by the Roman government. Some versions of the tradition say that he refused to be crucified like his Lord and he requested, and it was granted his request, to be crucified not like his Lord but upside down. There's actually another tradition that says his wife was crucified first right before his eyes. He had to watch her suffer and die in front of him before he died. Before he died, Peter had lived up to his name, though. And he loved Jesus to the very end. Not because there was something in Peter, but because something Jesus was doing in Peter could turn his own affection into the strength of divine love that would remain forever. He paid the ultimate sacrifice. From this point on,

Peter, he has moments of vacillation, moments of weakness. In fact, you can see right after this, Jesus said, "Follow me."

We were at the Shepherd's Conference this last time, and John MacArthur actually ended on this text. And he pointed out a very good observation here. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." The very next verse, Peter turned. Jesus says "Follow me," and Peter is all eager, filled with gusto about following Christ, but then he turned. He "turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?'" Again Peter is failing, again right off the bat. He's restored into service and what does he do? First step—falls flat on his face. In Galatians chapter 2 we find Peter vacillates again as he feels the pressure from the Judaizing element in the church and, yeah, he plays the hypocrite, and Paul calls him out for it publicly. But what does he do? He repents, he turns again.

Peter is not a perfect man, and God has nothing to work with except imperfect men and women, right? That's why Peter is

so relatable to us. But he became the rock; he lived up to his name just as Jesus said he would. He became a steadfast witness for Christ. He became one of the foundation stones of the Christian church. In fact, he was the key Apostle who verified the progress of the Gospel, first among the Jews in Acts 2-4, then among the Samaritans in Acts 8-9 and then among the Gentiles in Acts 10-11. He preached the Gospel to Cornelius the Roman centurion, and he did that among the Samaritans, among the Gentiles, completely turning against the sentiments and the sympathies of his own Jewish people. He was a rock. We Gentiles, we owe God a great debt of gratitude for Peter. Because he stood, rock like, at the Jerusalem council defending the equal footing in Christ of both Jew and Gentile. He was withstanding very powerful, pro-Jewish superiority voices in Jerusalem.

In fact, if you turn in your Bibles just quickly to see in Acts chapter 15, we see a shining example of a triumph in Peter's life: his rock-like character that stood fast even when pressure was coming against him. It says in Acts 15:6 that the Apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider the matter." The matter is that there is a complaint against Gentiles joining in with the Jewish church and being counted as one with the church. So they are gathered together to consider

this matter. "And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'" Sounds pretty Pauline doesn't it? But that's Peter. He paved the way for Paul's ministry to us Gentiles as the Apostle to the Gentiles. And here is he is standing with men. He's standing in this council, and this time he does not fail, he does not vacillate, he does not exhibit any weakness at all. He's no longer Simon, he's Peter—he stands firm. Very rock-like.

What happened to Peter, by following Christ in faith, by learning from him in hope, by serving him in love, Peter's love is transformed. From that which is weak and vacillating, he took on the strength and steadfastness, the characteristic of divine love—true love, which Jesus demonstrated perfectly on the Cross.

That is what conformed Peter to God's love, made him steadfast and rock-like. We read about it particularly in the first chapter of Acts, as Peter led his Apostles in replacing Judas Iscariot with Mathias. We can see there how much Peter returned to the Old Testament Scriptures. He found time and again Christ revealed there, he saw the nature of Christ's ministry which he had previously not understood, he saw it clarified. And understanding it finally, the Holy Spirit then used Peter to lay this foundational doctrine of the church as he proclaimed the prophetic word. And Peter was submissive to that prophetic word, whether spoken or written, whether coming out of his own mouth and ministry, whether coming out of his own pen, or coming out of the mouth of another Apostle.

We read about his attitude toward Scripture, seeing the apostolic ministry as Scripture in 2 Peter 3:15-16. He commended to his readers not just his own writings but then also the inspired canonical scriptures penned by the Apostle Paul. He says, "just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you concerning the wisdom given to him." As he does in all his letters when he speaks of them in these matters, he says that they are on equal authority with Scripture, the rest of the Scriptures. His love, Peter's love, grew throughout time in real

knowledge, all discernment, just as ours does, as he found Christ revealed in Scripture. As you read his two epistles, that's what he commends all Christians. To pay very careful attention to God's Word in order that we practice true love. Not the kind of vacillating love that he had naturally, but serving God and one another in obedient, joyful love that's given from God. It comes from heaven, not from earth.

In fact, let's just close today, our time, by looking at 2 Peter 1. I want to show you something there—very important. It connects to something we talked about last week when we looked at the Transfiguration. Peter is nearing the end of his life in 2 Peter. He's imprisoned in Rome; he's facing certain death. You hear the tone of the elderly Apostle in this letter, fatherly concern for fellow Christians. Christians are being marginalized, even persecuted by the pagan world. They're being infiltrated by false teachers. Peter tells them several times in Chapter 1 verses 12, 13, 15 his purpose is to remind them of what they already knew. He wants to anchor their confidence and their hope in what's written. He makes his point in such a powerful way, telling them in verse 16, "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his

majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' [remember we read that last week?] We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." That is, Peter said, he's remembering the time when God said, "Pay attention to Christ." Verse 19: "We have something more sure." More sure than what? More sure than that experience, more certain: "the prophetic word to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." God is the guarantee of the truth of his Word. And Peter wants to anchor people—Christians following him—anchor them not in their experiences, not on their own confidence, but in God's holy Word. This is what happened to Peter. He went back to the Word of God, and he continued to rehearse and learn, and come to understand who Christ is.