

A PIECE OF THE ROCK

A sermon of discipleship, Mt. 16:18. (Read us. 13-20)

Introduction: A play on words; a double meaning.

1 = "A large boulder" (petra), or 2 = "A little stone or pebble" (petros). The notes of the Harper Study Bible indicate that "the church is not built on Peter or any other individual as its foundation stone, for Peter himself makes it clear in I Pet 2:4-8 that Christ Himself is the only cornerstone of the church (cf. also Eph 2:20-22)." The church, then, is built upon the person of the Lord Jesus, and its membership includes properly only those who have confessed Him as Peter did. The question then is not whether or or not the word "rock" in the phrase "upon this rock" refers to Peter, but whether it refers primarily to Christ Himself or to the confession of faith that Christ is the Son of the living God. There is not much difference between these two choices, but I personally prefer the interpretation that it refers primarily to Peter's confession of faith in Christ as the Son of the living God. Notice the intervening statement of Christ that the Father in heaven revealed this truth to Peter, and the same Heavenly Father reveals this truth to every believing Christian, and it is on this common Christian confession of faith in the deity of Christ that the Church is founded and built.

Every Christian then can have a piece of the rock by being the same kind of Christian believer and confessing the same faith in Christ as Peter.

I. By Being the same Kind of Christian Believer as Peter was.

A. Not a perfect believer, but a real believer.

Peter made many mistakes, and his faith was not perfect; but his contrition and repentance were genuine whenever he failed the Lord.

Note his betrayal of the Lord.

Peter, though humbled, was not crushed by his miserable fall. He learned from his mistakes. In the Book of Acts, beginning with the selection of a successor to Judas and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter stands out, along with James and Paul, as one of the recognized leaders of the Apostles. He became what his name signified, a rock -- and his boldness in the face of persecution formed a sharp contrast with his previous timidity.

He performed the first Christian miracle, and he conducted the defence when the Christian leaders were brought before the Sanhedrin. When the gospel was first preached beyond the local precincts of Judea, he and John were at once sent by the apostles to confirm the converts at Samaria.

One outstanding event after the Day of Pentecost was the baptism of Cornelius by Peter.

Another significant event was the establishment of the Church at Antioch, largely Gentile in membership, in which Peter no doubt had a part.

He was imprisoned and miraculously delivered from prison.

He was probably employed for the most part in building up and completing the organization of Christian communities in Palestine and the adjoining districts. He traveled about preaching the gospel, accompanied by his wife (I Cor. 9:5).

B. Peter's apostolic ministry after the Day of Pentecost was not perfect. He and the Apostle Paul came into conflict and disagreement, but they reconciled their differences.

This situation is seen in the Book of Galatians, chapter 2:

1. Peter's compromise at Antioch, v. 12.
2. The influence of his action, v. 13.
3. Paul's rebuke to Peter, vs. 11, 14.
4. Peter's response:
 - a. Not indicated here.
 - b. See 2nd Peter 3:15, with the reference to "our beloved brother Paul."

c. If Peter was weak enough at Antioch to compromise, he was strong enough to receive the rebuke, and to love the man who rebuked him.

d. He is not absolutely perfect in judgment, yet he is so mature in love that there was no bitterness in his heart.

II. By Confessing the same faith as Peter.

A. Without equivocation, he confessed quite explicitly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He did not say, "I sometimes feel that you might be in some vague sense almost god-like."

B. Some professing Christians today so qualify their theology and Christian profession that it is so watered-down and timid that it becomes meaningless. What they say of Jesus could be said of many other good moral examples or religious leaders of history.

C. Your Christian profession of faith should be bold, clear-cut, forthright, and unequivocal. Either Jesus is the Son of the living God, or he is a liar and an imposter, or else psychotic and demented for claiming to be someone he was not. Good reason demands that you claim him as your Lord and God, or else reject him as unworthy of your allegiance.

D. I am not suggesting that there will never be times of doubt in your mind and heart after you become a Christian. Of course there will be, as there was for Peter. But after you have time and occasion to think about it, your faith, if it is genuine, will be renewed and strengthened, and you will come back to the Lord in humility and repentance.

E. Look at a few glimpses of Peter's faith and life as seen in his two epistles:

1. Rejoicing in tribulation, I Pet 1:6-8.
2. Appreciation of the precious blood, precious faith, and the precious promises.
3. Exalting the Chief Cornerstone, I Pet 2:6.
4. The pastoral, shepherd heart, 5:1-4.
5. Unquestioned faith in the inspired scriptures, I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet 1:16-21.

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6. Solid bulwark against false teachers, II
Pet ch. 3.

7. Looking for and hastening the coming of
Christ, II Pet. ch. 3.

F. The key decision of Peter was made when he
first surrendered the control of his life to Jesus
as his Lord, as expressed so beautifully in these
words by George Macdonald:

One day there came along that silent shore,
While I my net was casting in the sea,
A Man who spoke as never man before,
I followed Him; new life began in me.

Mine was the boat,
But His the voice,
And His the call,
Yet mine the choice.

Ah! 'twas a fearful night out on the lake,
And all my skill availed not, at the helm,
Till Him asleep I waked, crying, "Take
Thou the helm -- lest water overwhelm!"

And His the boat,
And His the sea,
And His the peace
O'er all and me.

CONCLUSION; You, too, can have a piece of the Rock.
You may never be the big boulder, but you, like
Peter, can be a little rock chipped off of the
mountainside. No one but Jesus can be the Chief
Cornerstone of the Church, the Christian temple,
but you can be a little pebble holding together
some part of a wall.

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