

The Refining of Simon Peter

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References: **John 1**, John 1:40-42; John 6:35-37; John 10:2-4; John 17:6-7; John 17:20; Malachi 3:16; Matthew 16:13-19; Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 22:24; Luke 22:31-33; Luke 22:54; Luke 22:62; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; Galatians 2:11-13; 2 Peter 3:15

Introduction

It's interesting that one of the things that separates the Bible from all of the other writings is the fact that it has so many names in the scriptures. And every page has different names—name after name after name after name. God is interested in the individual, and He names them.

So tonight, I would like to take just one of those names. We can't take a lot of them, but one very interesting one, a prominent figure in the New Testament. I'm not talking about the Lord Jesus. He, of course, stands out as the name above every name. But the name Simon Peter—like a short biographical sketch of Simon Peter's life. There are interesting details and lessons to be learned.

I was surprised to find out that there are 156 mentions of Peter in the New Testament. Amen. And he had a couple of other names, too. Cephas. Peter is his Greek name. Cephas, which means the same thing in the Hebrew or Syriac. And then he was also known as Simon, son of Jonah—Simon Bar-Jonah. So putting them all together, you have many, many—almost 200 mentions of Peter in the New Testament. I never believed it, but I have an app that tells me that's so. I didn't have to count them; they did it for me. And it wasn't AI. This was done by a Christian—so, a real Christian man.

The Little Flock

We're introduced to Simon Peter in John chapter 1 and verse 40. Now, two disciples of John the Baptist, one of whom was Andrew—it says:

[John 1:40-42 NKJV]

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have

found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

That tells me that there were some who were looking for the Messiah actively. These two young men—and I understand that they were young; all the disciples were very young—they were looking for the Messiah. So intimately and regularly looking for the Messiah. They were one of the little flock that is mentioned a few times.

Just a little aside here, because Peter was part of what we might call a movement, or a certain little group. They belonged to the Father, and the Father had them in a little flock. And when Jesus came as the Good Shepherd, He called that flock out to Himself. Now look over to John chapter 10, verse 2:

[John 10:2-3 NKJV]

² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens,

John the Baptist was the doorkeeper of the sheep. He was the one that announced the coming of the Great Shepherd Himself. And he opened the door by declaring, "I am not the Messiah." But he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." And so to him, he says, "The doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice":

[John 10:3-4 NKJV]

and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

That is this little company. And I'll name a few more: there was Zechariah and Elizabeth; there was Simeon, and there was Anna; there was Joseph, and there was Mary; and there was Andrew and Peter and Nathanael and John and James. They were all the Lord's people. The sheep follow and He leads them out, as it were.

Now, over to chapter 6 and verse 37.

[John 6:37 NKJV]

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

And He describes those who are the Father's in the previous verse. Jesus said unto them, "I am the bread of life."

[John 6:35-36 NKJV]

³⁵ And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen Me

That is, those who saw Him in this day on earth, who actually saw the Lord Jesus. He says,

[John 6:36 NKJV]

and yet do not believe.

You've seen Me, but you don't believe. But He says,

[John 6:37 NKJV]

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

He's speaking here not generally of us today. He's not speaking it spiritually. That was a physical thing that happened in His day—that this little flock that were the Father's, He gave them to Jesus.

John chapter 17, please, and verse 6.

[John 17:6-7 NKJV]

⁶ "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the

world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷
Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.

And then He says down in verse 20—He makes a difference now. This now is us. He was praying for His own—those that He had chosen, those that the Father had given Him on the earth. He says, "I do not pray," verse 20, "for these alone"—His own—"but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."

[John 17:20 NKJV]

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;

And in John chapter 10, He said, "Others I have that are not of this flock. They shall be one flock," speaking of believers after Pentecost.

So the reason I bring this before us tonight is to show that there was a movement; there was a group. Malachi spoke of them. He says in Malachi chapter 3, verse 16:

[Malachi 3:16 NKJV]

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name.

The Father had a little flock, had kept a little remnant all the way through the years, down through the centuries. There was this little flock that communicated. And as we are studying 2 Kings, we saw pictures of that little flock. There was Jeremiah, and there was Amos, and there was Josiah, and others that would join into that little flock that remained faithful to the Lord all down through the centuries. And now when we come to the time when the Lord Himself appears, we find John himself also looking for the Messiah. As Simeon, it says of him that he was looking for the "consolation of Israel"—another name for the Messiah Himself. And so God the Father already had a little people prepared for the Lord Jesus, this little flock that He leads out. They hear His voice, and they follow Him.

And so he says, when Andrew heard John the Baptist point out, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world," he quickly runs back to Peter: "Peter, we found the Messiah." And so he was looking for that Messiah to come.

Now, when He came—again, John chapter 1, if you go back there, the Lord gives him a new name. John chapter 1 and verse 42. Now, when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon, son of Jonah."

[John 1:42 NKJV]

Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

Cephas, of course, is, as I mentioned, the Syriac or the Hebrew, which is very similar for a stone. Peter is the Greek, meaning a stone—Petros. He gives him a name: Cephas or Petros.

A Stone in the Slinger's Hand

Now, we're going to learn tonight that even a little stone in the hand of God is a powerful weapon. Amen. But the stone has to be prepared. You remember David? He didn't go down and just pick up five stones. We read that he picked up five **smooth** stones. Otherwise, the stone from a sling would not fly accurately and would not accomplish its purpose. It would just fly off in a different direction. In other words, a stone has to be tumbled over and over against other stones and against big boulders and across the gravel, and carried by the current down until all the rough edges are taken off. And now, it's a smooth stone that can be used by the slinger. And David did that to the destruction of Goliath.

And the Lord said, "Peter, you are a little stone." Petros—that means a little stone. So now what happens is Peter waits. He's waiting for the call. He has found the Messiah. And one day Jesus comes, and they're working on the boat, and He says, "Peter, follow Me." Peter was ready immediately. They left their home. They left their father. They left the servants. They left everything and followed Jesus. They were ready; God had prepared them to follow. They knew the voice of the Shepherd, and they followed Him.

Now, we all are familiar with his personality—Peter's personality. He was a bold, sometimes even brash, very active man—a man of action, but also a man of quick words. He was often the first to blurt out something, like one of the times at the Transfiguration, when the Lord was transfigured before them. There was Moses and Elijah. And what does Peter do? Well, he says, "Lord, let's build some tabernacles, some sort of semi-permanent dwellings for You and

Moses and Elijah." Because it says he didn't know what to say. So he points it out. If you don't know what to say, don't say it!

What's the old saying? "It's better to be quiet and to be thought a fool, rather than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." I don't know if that translates into Mandarin. Did you get that at all? No? It's better to be thought a fool without speaking—not speaking—than opening your mouth, and then everybody knows you're a fool, right? Anyway, that's a saying. It didn't go over quite the same as it does in English. Okay.

It's also one of his first acts, isn't it? Remember in the garden? The company of the chief priests' soldiers come, and the guards—the temple guards all come with torches in the garden, and He says, "Who are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." He says, "I am He." And they all go back and fall down to the ground. And I think it's about that time that Peter seizes the opportunity, and **in the flesh** cuts off the servant of the high priest's ear. He acts in the flesh very quickly—speaks and acts very impetuously.

However, Peter was a natural leader. That's why the Lord was preparing him specifically. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 16. Matthew 16. He was quick spiritually, as well. He had a lot of spiritual discernment. Verse 13:

[Matthew 16:13-19 NKJV]

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" ¹⁴ So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Upon this rock—not as the Roman Catholics say, that Peter is the rock. It's a different word. The Rock that I'm going to build this on is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fact that He is the Son of God. God established the church on that truth and on the person of the great Rock. And that's why we sang Rock of Ages tonight—the connection.

Petros means a massive rock—a big crag, a big, huge boulder that might have been moved by some great glacier and left lying someplace. Petros, which is Peter, is a small rock, a chip off that big rock, off that crag, off that cliff—which is Petros. So it's a different word altogether.

But notice now that He says to Peter, "I'm going to give you the keys of the kingdom." Now, there was another set of ears that was listening to that, especially when He says, "And I'm going to build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." There's another set of ears that were listening. Can you guess who that might be? Peter? If you open, you might get a prize—can't guarantee it, but I could. Who would be listening to that? None other than **Satan**. The gates of hell will not prevail against us. Ah. Now, Peter is going to be marked out specifically.

High Hopes and Sharp Rebukes

Because not only was he a natural leader, but God was going to refine Peter. And already the prophecy was that he was going to have the **keys of the kingdom of heaven**: open up the gospel to the Jew on the day of Pentecost—that's the first key—and then open up the gospel to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius—that's the second key. Why is preaching... later on, he opened up the gospel to the world—the kingdom of heaven, he preached the gospel. So Satan is now involved very much with the life of Peter, and he's going to be part of the refining process of the development of this great leader in the Christian church.

But before leadership, there comes the testing. All confidence in the flesh must be broken. He said, "Upon this rock I will build My church"—not upon the flesh, Peter. You won't have it; he will not have a part in that in the same sense. It won't be built on Peter, not one bit.

What happens right after this incident? Again, Matthew chapter 16. From that time, we read verse 21:

[Matthew 16:21 NKJV]

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

This is a critical point in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Up until now, He had come—He had been coming into the world, and the gospel of the kingdom was preached. Now, He's rejected, and now there's a pivotal point. He's no longer coming. He says there in verse 20—

He commanded His disciples they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. This was not the message anymore. Instead of coming, He's now going to the cross. His purpose now is to die upon the cross. He's been rejected as the Messiah; He tells them no longer to witness of Me as the Messiah. "I'm going to the cross." And now He instructs His disciples.

But Satan had already kind of gotten around. Peter, I think, was a little bit puffed up: "I'm going to give you the keys to the kingdom, Peter." So what does Peter do? What's his reaction? Verse 22:

[Matthew 16:22 NKJV]

²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

Nice going, Peter. A good friend, you know, is going to say, "Maybe that plan isn't going to work. Lord, that's not a good plan. You die on that? We don't want to hear that kind of stuff." So he says... he began to rebuke Him and said, "Far be it from You, Lord. This should not happen to You." What did Jesus say?

[Matthew 16:23 NKJV]

²³ But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

How quickly Satan grabbed onto that man, Peter! And he was a willing and unknowing tool of Satan. He was just acting in his normal way, as normal Peter would. A good friend giving good advice—what's wrong with that? Well, good **fleshly** advice is never good. Peter soon found out. The Lord said to him, "Get behind me, Satan." Satan was the one who encouraged that statement.

Sifted Like Wheat

Now we move along over to Luke chapter 22. We are not looking at all the things that Peter did and said; it would take us a whole month to uncover all this kind of stuff. But verse 24—chapter 22, verse 24.

[Luke 22:24 NKJV]

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

This is... do you know when this took place? This is during the time of the Passover. They were arguing about who is going to be greatest in the kingdom. Can you imagine? Now, I can say, from Peter's point of view, he could say, "Well, look, the Lord has already given me the keys to the kingdom, whatever they are." Maybe he knew more than I would of that. He'd already taken him up to the Mount of Transfiguration with James and John. There were other times, too, when there was a child raised from the dead that He just took Peter, James, and John. He said, "Obviously, the Lord has a special place for me, so I'm probably high up in the kingdom." And others disputed that, of course, and with good reason. But they were all wrong, and the Lord teaches them.

After this exchange, the Lord talks to Peter, because it sounds like Peter was the initiator of this. Because He says, verse 31—notice this: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you..."

[Luke 22:31 NKJV]

³¹ And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

So it sounded like Peter was the leading one in this dispute about who is going to be greatest, because the Lord singles him out of the other ones. And He says, "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." You think of Job, don't we? There's a parallel there—the most righteous man on the earth, and he was sifted by Satan and came out like gold. But he wasn't finished yet. Thank you. It took his three friends. What Satan couldn't do, his three friends finished off. Good friends, they were!

But He says this: "He wants to sift you as wheat." And he's going to do that—we'll see that as we go along, where Peter denies the Lord. But He says, "I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail. And when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." And he said, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

[Luke 22:32-33 NKJV]

³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

You would have thought that would have had its effect on the man, Peter, but no. You see, they were in the upper room. There were lights on the wall. They were among all their friends. They'd been together for three years. There was a familiar feast in front of them—it was all familiar. The world outside was far away. And so he felt complacent, self-confident among his peers.

He didn't know that this was the hour and the power of darkness. They were moving into—when they left that upper room—they moved out into the very structure of the god of this world. Every available power and principality and demon was probably in Jerusalem at that feast, surrounding the Savior as He went to the cross. "This is your hour and the power of darkness," He would say to Satan. But what did he do in the upper room? He doesn't have a clue, completely oblivious to what's coming. He says in verse 33:

[Luke 22:33 NKJV]

³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

In other gospels, you can read, he goes into more detail than that: "Never! Never! I'll die with You." But Jesus sadly shakes His head and says to him, "Peter, I tell you, the rooster will crow this day twice before you deny Me three times that you know Me."

Denials and Tears

Peter's failure. In the garden... they move out into the garden, and three times the Lord says... He takes Peter and James and John, leaving the other disciples—the eight of them. He takes the three, Peter, James, and John, a little further on into the garden. Then He Himself goes in about a stone's throw further.

Now, it's a full moon, because this is the Passover. Passover is always at the full moon. So there's light; they can see what's going on. They can see Him there. But He says before He leaves Peter, He says, "Peter, watch and pray lest you fall into temptation." He goes and He

prays. He comes back and He says again, "Peter, couldn't you watch for one hour? Watch and pray." And He goes and prays again. He comes back and said, "You couldn't pray? Wouldn't watch for one hour? Rise, let us be going." And so they go.

In the courtyard of the high priest, after the Lord has been taken by the delegation of soldiers and the temple guards—they were given a quaternion, I believe, of Roman soldiers as well as the temple guards to apprehend Him, as well as others who were there as well. And they all came, and they took the Lord Jesus—took Him into the courtyard of the high priest. And it's there we know the sad story in Luke chapter 22. In verse 54 it says:

[Luke 22:54 NKJV]

Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house.
But Peter followed at a distance.

At a distance. Yes, he'd already run away. But now his conscience got him a little bit, so he's drawn back—curious, and he follows at a distance. It's a cold night. Somehow he gets into the courtyard due to the influence of John, who knew somebody to let him into the courtyard. So he's in the courtyard. They've lit a fire. It's after midnight, and it's cold. It's early April, late March. It's cold there at the altitude of Jerusalem—2,500 feet above sea level. And there's a fire burning. And so they sat down there, and Peter sat among them.

First of all, he follows at a distance, then he gets entry, and then he sits. And Matthew says that he warmed himself by the fire. And then they're surrounded by the very people that had apprehended his Lord. He begins to deny three times. He curses and swears. First time, rooster crows—don't think anything of it, that always happens. You get used to that in the country, when roosters crow. Sometimes they crow so early in the morning, sometimes halfway through the night—it's crazy. Some of these roosters don't know what morning really is.

But then the third time, he denies the Lord with curses and oaths. And he has time between the first crowing and the second crowing—at least an hour. And the cock crows again. And he's in the courtyard and there, being examined by the high priest, the Lord turns and looks at Peter. What kind of look? Anger? No. Disappointment? No. He knew what Peter was going to do. "Before the cock crows twice, you'll have denied Me thrice." **Compassion.** "Peter. Peter." That's how compassionate our Lord is, even in our failure. Does that not humble us so much? Break us down? This exactly. Now the corners are coming off this proud, independent, self-confident fisherman. Peter—he went out and he wept bitterly, it says there. Verse 62:

[Luke 22:62 NKJV]

So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

He went out, wept bitterly. All is lost. Shattered. And it was public; he'd done it among the whole group with their curses and oaths: "I never knew the man." His public humiliation—he's a broken spirit.

Restoration and Power

What does Christ do? On resurrection morning, He appears to Peter first. A little private get-together—just Peter and Jesus. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and verses 3 and 4:

[1 Corinthians 15:3-5 NKJV]

³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

A little private meeting, and he was restored to the Lord. I imagine there were, if he wept bitterly when he went out, those were tears of repentance and tears of pure joy to be forgiven. No doubt throwing himself into the arms of the Lord, but he needed to be publicly restored. And that happened after a breakfast by the seaside in chapter 21, where there's public restoration now with all the other disciples. They knew the story—how he failed.

But the Lord was going to restore him not only to the other disciples, but He was going to restore him to a ministry—a public ministry. Three times: "Peter, do you love Me?" "You know I do, Lord." "Feed My sheep. Feed My sheep. Feed My sheep." Three times he denied Him; three times Jesus has him affirm his position again, and he's brought back and restored.

Conclusion

The keys were used in the power of the Spirit. Remember what Jesus had said to His disciples later on? He said, "Remain at Jerusalem until you have power from on high, and then you'll be witnesses for Me." And they waited. Power came from on high. On the day of Pentecost, Peter used the first key and opened up the kingdom of God to the Jews. That day, there were 3,000 saved. Later on, he opened up the key to the Gentiles in the house of

Cornelius, and the successful ministry of Peter was established. He became, especially as Paul writes to the Galatians, an apostle to the circumcised for afterwards, as Paul was apostle to the uncircumcised—we read that in Galatians chapter 2.

Lastly, how did he end his life? There's a tradition that he was crucified in Rome upside down. He didn't want to be crucified the same way his Lord was crucified: "Crucify me upside down. I'm not worthy to even be crucified the same way as my Savior." Well, that's a tradition, but the scripture does give us a little concluding remark.

Was Peter perfect? No. Paul had to rebuke him one time. Galatians, please—Galatians and the second chapter. Galatians chapter 2, verse 11:

[Galatians 2:11-12 NKJV]

¹¹ Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

He was a little bit of backsliding there—a little bit of duplicity. The Jews—the Jewish believers, not all of them—understood the liberty there was in Christ. And Peter didn't want to confront them about this, and so he deferred to them. But Paul stood him to the face and said, "You are being duplicitous here. You're being hypocritical." Verse 14—no, verse 13:

[Galatians 2:13 NKJV]

¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

So Peter was not perfect by any means, but Paul straightened him out. Now, you would have thought that a man of that stature as Peter would not take that kindly. He did, though. And you know how I know? It's because he says so himself. 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 15:

[2 Peter 3:15 NKJV]

and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

as all of his beloved brother Paul... written long after that episode there at Antioch, when he had been hypocritical in his actions. He didn't hold it. At the end, we see a humble, loving servant of the Lord, all the rough edges taken off. The Lord used that man mightily.

Even... again, that phrase: "even a stone in the hand of God is a mighty weapon." It brought down Goliath, the great champion of the enemies of the people of God, who defied the people of God—was brought down by one **smooth stone**. Well, we learn, I think, a little bit about self-sufficiency. We're so much like Peter, are we not? Let us learn something of this from this great man's life as the Lord dealt with him.

Father, thank You for Your grace to us for these pictures of this man, Peter, and how, Lord, he was very close to You and loved You. And how patient You were. How kind and compassionate and longsuffering. You saw what he needed, and You brought it to pass. And You used that man for the blessing of many. So, Father, we ask You to help us as we go on in our lives. In our ministries, Lord, we might be like a Peter—learning as we go. We thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. Amen.