



# Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple *“Bedrock or Stumbling Block”*

## Simon Peter: Flawed But Faithful Disciple (based on the book and sermon series by Adam Hamilton)

Peter is the disciple who helps us learn more about Jesus, and learn more about what it means to be a disciple.

This story is one of the most important stories in the gospels. It can be found in Matthew, Mark or Luke’s gospel. This is Matthew’s version:

### MATTHEW 16:13-19, 21-23

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Human One is?” <sup>14</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus replied, “Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you. <sup>18</sup> I tell you that you are Peter. And I’ll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won’t be able to stand against it. <sup>19</sup> I’ll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.”

<sup>21</sup> From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that he had to be killed and raised on the third day. <sup>22</sup> Then Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him: “God forbid, Lord! This won’t happen to you.” <sup>23</sup> But he turned to Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

Jesus brought the disciples to Caesarea Philippi for this discussion - and this is important. Caesarea Philippi was not a Jewish city. It was a city of gentiles and pagans. There were many shrines and statues of deities. There were 14 different temples to various gods in this city -- including a temple for the ruler, Caesar Augustus - who was considered semi-divine. A coin with Julius Caesar’s likeness also has the inscription that reads “Son of god.”

So, it’s good to know that when Jesus turns to ask his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” they are surrounded by all these shrines and statues to pagan gods.

People were confused about Jesus’ identity. Some thought he was John the Baptist, others thought he was a great prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah.

But then the conversation takes a personal turn. Jesus turns to his disciples and asks, “Who do you say that I am?” - an important question.

Only one of those disciples dares to say, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” The other eleven probably aren’t quite sure of who Jesus is.

“Christ” and “Messiah” both mean “anointed one,” and these two names are used for kings. The kings of Israel were appointed by God and anointed, meaning they were set apart for God’s purposes. Peter is saying, “When I look at you, Jesus, I see a king who is set apart for God’s purposes.”

But this isn't just any anointed king. The Jews believed God would send a special king who would come and make Israel great again. Who would release them from the power of the Roman government, call the Jewish people to faithfulness and make Israel a light to the nations.

When Peter calls Jesus the son of the living God, this stands in contrast to the stone statues of all the other "gods". When Peter says to Jesus, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, he was saying "When I look at you, I see God, the God who lives and is at work in our world."

When Jesus hears Peter's statement of faith, he responds in a powerful way. He tells Peter, "I tell you that you are Peter. And I'll build my church on this rock." Peter means rock. Not just a little stone you'd use to skip stones across the lake or kick down the road. A big, solid, unmovable hunk of rock. That's what Jesus was calling Peter.

Peter was exactly the person Jesus needed to build his church. A person who was bold and courageous - someone not afraid to step out of the boat and go and do what he'd never done before. A man willing to be a powerful witness to the love and power of Jesus Christ. A man willing to die for his faith. Peter was the first bishop in Rome and it was there he died - crucified as was Jesus, except legend has it that Peter did not feel worthy to die in the same way as his Lord, so he asked that the cross be turned upside down.

The last part of this conversation takes a sharp turn. Jesus begins preparing the disciples for what will happen when they get to Jerusalem. He talks about the suffering and the death he would experience at the hands of the elders, chief priests and legal experts.

This is the very last thing Peter wants to hear. He is human after all, and we human beings generally do not like pain or find value and meaning in suffering. Peter does not want anything about his relationship with Jesus to change. He wants things to go on as they have been - and he is determined to make that happen.

It's interesting and telling that in the span of a moment, Peter can go from being the one disciple who utters a profound statement of faith, to the disciple who just doesn't get what Jesus is really saying.

Jesus responds sharply. He tells Peter, "Get behind me Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts."

And Jesus is tempted - he wasn't looking forward to the pain and suffering and death that were waiting for him in Jerusalem.

Jesus keeps himself focused on the plans God has for his life. If he does not go to Jerusalem, God's plan of love and grace and salvation will not come to pass.

No one wants suffering. As human beings, we naturally avoid pain. But Jesus understands that through the pain of his death, we would see the depth of his love for us. We would see the lengths God would go to help us understand how deeply we are loved.

Faith is not always about being comfortable or avoiding suffering. Sometimes our faith demands that we step out into places and situations that make us absolutely uncomfortable. In fact, Jesus himself tells us to deny ourselves, pick up our crosses and follow him.

Like the youths who gave up a week of working their summer jobs or relaxing on vacation to travel to Florida in the hottest, muggiest time of the year to build personal energy transportation carts for those around the world who had lost the use of their legs.

Or the woman who gets in her car every week and drives 15 miles to the nursing home to play the piano for the nursing home residents.

Faith is not always about our comfort.

Jesus says, "Pick up your cross and follow me."

The two questions Jesus asks us today are the same questions he asked his disciples:

Who do you say that I am? And are you denying yourself, picking up your cross and following me?