

RUF Bible Study – The Gospel According to Peter
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Jesus Meets Peter

John 1:40-42 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John's witness and followed Jesus. The first thing he did after finding where Jesus lived was find his own brother, Simon, telling him, "We've found the Messiah" (that is, "Christ"). He immediately led him to Jesus. Jesus took one look up and said, "You're John's son, Simon? From now on your name is Cephas" (or Peter, which means "Rock").

Luke 6:12-14 One day soon afterward Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all his disciples and chose twelve of them to be his apostles. Here are their names: Simon (he also called him Peter).

Matthew 16:16-19 Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. "And that's not all. You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven."

This semester we're going to look at the life of Peter shown to us through the gospels, the book of Acts and the book Peter wrote. Peter is an amazing fellow, and undergoes a tremendous transformation through these pages. He's the person we know the most about after Jesus. He's the most fleshed-out secondary character in this narrative of Jesus' life and ministry. We know next to nothing about Bartholomew or Thaddeus. Or James, the brother of John. Or John, for that matter.

But we get to hear from and see Peter. He's a leader, *the* leader of the apostles. And he seems to become Jesus' best friend. As we go through these pages, we'll look and attempt to see how being around Jesus changed and transformed Peter.

The Lake

Our first stop is where Peter meets Jesus. Do you remember when you met certain VIPs in your life?

I remember meeting Julie in the dorms of Johnston Hall at the University of Missouri for dinner one day. I've seen her beautiful face nearly every day for the past fifteen years of my life now. That was an important moment.

When you meet your husband or wife, if God-willing you get married, what will it be like that very first moment, the first minute, the first conversation? You might already know that person (take a deep breath...).

What was it like when you first met Jesus? What will it be like when you first hear from him?

Peter was fishing on the lake.

I love the lake. I like going to the lake more than almost anything else. Way more than the ocean. At the ocean you have the sand everywhere and the salt water and you can't really swim and you get sucked under and stung by jellyfish and bit by sharks. At least that is what I associate with the beach.

But the lake provokes images for me of waterskiing and tubing, of brats and burgers, of a cooler on the boat, of a dip into the water to cool off, floating there in your life vest without a care in the world. (except nibbled on by catfish). I would love to live on a lake.

Jesus met Peter on the lake. Yeah. Peter was fishing on the lake.

Not pleasure fishing, not fly fishing (which I did for the first time in Montana last month and loved). He was a fisherman.

On A&E or the Discovery Channel, you can watch shows about fishing. One great one follows the Alaskan fishboats as they go out each season. They are dangerous, stressful, lonely jobs.

And smelly. Can you imagine what Peter must have smelled like after a full day of hard work on a fishing boat? Nasty. Real nasty.

That's how Peter met Jesus. Not in his best Sunday clothes. Not after a shower and with some body spray on, some product in his hair. No, he smelled like sweat and fish. He was tired. He didn't want to meet new people. But here was this guy his brother had brought to him. A guy named Jesus. And his brother told him that this Jesus was the Messiah, the one they'd been waiting for all their lives, the one the Jews had always hoped would save their people. Andrew said he was here.

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For this series, I used commentaries all throughout the gospels. I also used as my base text Michael Card's book, *The Fragile Stone*. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

The Name

So Peter meets the person who would change his life there on the shores of the lake, and it is not a normal conversation. There is intensity here. The first word we notice is “immediately.” Andrew led Peter to meet Jesus immediately. There is a certain tone set by that word. Not leisurely. Not inevitably. Not someday I’ll get around to it I hope. Not next weekend. Not tomorrow. Immediately.

The other one is in the word “look.” This word “looked up” is also one of intensity. It’s not a casual glance. It’s not a “nice to meet you” pleasantness. It’s like he looked at him and SAW him. That must have been weird.

What would someone see if he looked and SAW you? What would you feel like? Think about that. When you start new things, like college, you get to slightly or radically redefine yourself. You can decorate your room, pick your classes, make new friends, join new groups – you can do a lot. But when will someone really know you? Down to the core? What would a person see down there?

And if you’re honest, don’t you wonder if you’d really be liked and loved if someone really knew you? Isn’t that what we’re all worried about? Isn’t that why we constantly practice image control, why we manage people’s knowledge and perception about us?

In an instant, Jesus looked at Peter and knew him to the core. They connected.

And Jesus spoke first. “You’re John’s son, Simon?” He asked. Simon bar Jonah. John’s son. Simon Johnson. This would have been like the most common name possible. Like John Smith for us, though I’d guess there aren’t that many people really named John Smith. Look up Smith in the yellow pages, however and you’re going to find a lot. Simon was his name.

But Jesus gave him a new name. Or really, to be more exact, he gave him a nickname. What are your nicknames? I know some of them – WadSack, Annie Panties, C Bitty, ChubChub. I call Todd Loftin TRL for some reason. There are bad nicknames – Booger, Fatty, Stink. There are easy nicknames – Justin Donathan turns into JDo, Matt Oliver becomes Moliver. Brian Hewes is Hewie. There are nicknames that don’t stick – Muffin, Slipknot, Toast. There are all kinds of nicknames. There are ironic names. I knew a guy who was Swedish, and he never talked, and we called him Puff Daddy.

Jesus gave one to Simon and it certainly stuck. He named him Peter, Cephas in Aramaic, which means Rock. We have someone around RUF whose nickname is Rocky, and I’ve never asked him how he got that name. His real name is George.

We’ll look at more the what and the why of the name Peter in a minute. Peter/Cephas is not a common name of this time period. It would be like naming a child Perseverance to stick with Biblical themes or Magnesium Sulfate to stay with mineral themes.

And Jesus never really calls him by this name. He calls him Simon almost every time he talks to him. So Peter is Peter’s title. This is like Christ in Jesus Christ. His name is Jesus. His title is Christ, the Messiah. But we’re so used to hearing it together that we don’t blink an eye to hear Jesus Christ or Simon Peter.

Jesus renames Simon, a common name into Peter, a specific title within the first few seconds of meeting him. You have to be named from the outside. You get named by others, not by yourself. You can’t give yourself a nickname, and if you try it’s almost always really lame. Wait for it, and it will come. Others will tell you what they see in you. They will give you your name from what they see about you. Peter was named by Jesus. He was named the Rock.

The Call

We have an interesting delay in the Bible to hear about Jesus’ motivation for naming Simon “Rock.” For awhile we just go with it. You are named Tree. You are named Table. You are named iPod. We don’t know anything except that we understand the definition of this word. In our first encounter at the lake, Jesus says, “You will be called Peter.”

In Luke 6, we hear Jesus call his apostles out of his disciples. Many were following him (John 6 makes this clear), but out of that group, he called 12 to be nearer to him, to be invested with an authority unlike the others. Simon Peter was one of those.

What would that have been like? Have you ever been called out like that? I think first of the Academy Awards, when the camera shows each of the candidates and then four of them lose and one of them wins. Hooray, we follow the winner to the podium for a speech.

I was tapped out of my Boy Scout Troop to be in the Order of the Arrow. I can remember the anticipation, wondering if this was the year I’d make it. A few times it wasn’t, and I was disappointed. Then I was, and I was thrilled. (and it was sort of a let down once I figured out what the Order of the Arrow was).

Some of you were picked for a sorority already. You wondered what house would pick you and then you finally found out. Now you’ll see if you want to do it through the semester, learning more and more what it is you’re getting yourself into.

We try to make a name for ourselves, sure. But we get called by someone else.

Peter had been hanging out with Jesus for awhile now. This event occurs in Luke 6. If you look back in your Bibles, you’ll see that Jesus had done a lot of things already, most of them healings. He’d drawn a crowd around, but now he called his disciples to himself.

The first one is Simon, whom he called Peter. The Rock.

He called Peter to follow him more closely, more intensely than he had been. He called Peter in order to send him out, for that's what apostles are after all. They take the message out.

He called him to a life of discipleship, of discomfort, of study, of new experiences, of difference. And Peter was the leader. Peter is always named first in the lists of the apostles. Judas is always named last, ominously so. Peter steps into this role as a leader of this group, and you know he doesn't realize what he's getting into. It didn't matter. Jesus called him.

Has he called you? Why are you here at OU? What difference do you think you might make? Will you lead in some area? Will your faith make you uncomfortable at all? Will you love with the love of Jesus? Will you study and learn from him?

We are called just like Peter to follow Christ.

The Church

Our last glimpse this week is from the famous passage in Matthew 16. Here we don't get a summary of Peter's leadership, we see him stepping out as a leader, as the representative of the apostles. This passage comes well into Jesus' ministry. Everyone is abuzz about who he is and what he's about.

It's sort of staggering to realize that his apostles had been around him for years at this point and still they weren't exactly sure what and who he was. It must have been too mind-blowing to see both God and man in one person with two natures. Not everyone is sure about this. He's been apprehended by his mother and brothers, who think he is crazy. He has been rejected by the leaders of Judaism. He has offended the Romans. He has cozied up to the prostitutes, the poor, the lepers, the women, the children, the tax collectors, the Samaritans and just about anyone else you could think of that would be of disrepute.

What is going on here, Jesus? *Where* are we following you?

Jesus calls the question. Who do you say I am? It's a great question, one for you today. How will you answer?

Simon says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Bingo.

Jesus answers him, "God bless you, Simon bar Jonah." His name, given to him by his father. But Jesus then calls him Peter again, his nickname, given to him at the lake years ago. "*You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.*"

There is a progression finalized here. You will be... He called him... You are. That's what we'll be looking at this semester.

Jesus finally explains *why* he gives him this name. Jesus didn't give Simon the nickname Peter because of anything inherent in Simon. No, we see again and again, writ large, Peter's failures. He is named the Rock because he stands on Jesus. The first words he uses to explain the nickname are these: "This is the rock on which I will put together my church." You're the rock because you will build on *me*. Peter is a key rock built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ himself.

The Rock, Peter is a prophetic name for Simon, given to him by Jesus. Jesus never calls him that name, as he is still Simon to him. Simon Peter puts these together for us. Simon, the hotheaded leader, the brash speaker, the shameful deny-er. Peter, the Rock of leadership, the faith-filled speaker, the repentant brother. We are this. We are all Simon Peters, aren't we?

Each of us comes to the table filled with sin. We think wrong thoughts. We do wrong things. We could name our sins and not be done over the next few days. You have probably in the last week been faced with and perhaps succumbed to new temptations and sins not yet known by you. You've been dropped off in a city with 20,000 other 18-22 year-olds and given practically no supervision, a lot of free time and enough discretionary money to do plenty of things. This is a recipe that might be questioned. But this is where we are.

You are Simons. But you are also Peter. If Jesus has spoken into your life, if he has called you, if you have confessed that he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and you want to follow him above all else, then you have a new name. Peter. Christian. Little Child. Son. Daughter.

But all of that lays ahead for Simon when he meets Jesus at the lake. He doesn't yet have the keys to the kingdom. He has a net in his hand. He doesn't have a close friendship with Jesus. He has a strange encounter with a man named Jesus. He has no idea what lies ahead. It will be fun to watch the progression.