

Matthew 16 : 13 -19 New Living Translation (NLT)

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

¹⁵ Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

One of my earliest memories is standing in the kitchen with my Grandmother in Cromwell watching her cook pikelets on a skillet on top of the coal range in her little cottage. Apparently I asked for them every morning when I was there.

My Grandmother was a devout Christian lady. She lived in a very old cottage across the road from the Cromwell Anglican Church. The buildings are still there apparently.

Gran had quite an influence in my naming and I owe my name largely to her. She passed away when I was very young, about 4 years old.

The passage we have just read is one that I always remember with a degree of fondness. My parents called me Peter John Duston They named me after the apostles Peter and John. I am proud to be associated with Peter in most ways. This Sunday is St Peter's Sunday.

Peter had many failings. Jesus knew Peter well and he was still happy to keep him around. He was very human, he was impulsive and often went off half cocked, he leapt before he looked. He was black and white in his approach to things and yet he was also a very positive influence in the early church showing love and respect for all of God's children. In human terms Jesus would have been justified in looking for a more suitable disciple with the required leadership qualities than Peter's obvious shortcomings.

Peter's greatest strength was that he knew just who Jesus was. He was the first to openly express his belief that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, God's promised Messiah.

Remember this was at a time when the Jewish expectation was of an all powerful God riding a conquering white stallion leading a powerful heavenly army into battle for the Jewish nation. Jesus was a quiet natured radical who worked with his students to teach them about God. He won a great victory for us over death because he was the perfect sacrifice for our sins and death could not hold him.

So at the start of this reading, Jesus was testing the disciples and asked, “Who do people say I am?” The people were trying to figure out what is giving this man the obvious wisdom and power to heal and perform miracles. The disciples tell Jesus that he is being compared with the prophets of old and with John The- Baptist.

It’s not until Jesus asks, “But who do you say I am?” that Simon Peter comes out with who Jesus really is.

Jesus congratulates him because he has had the truth revealed to him and he has accepted the truth willingly.

In fact, Jesus renames Simon. He says Simon means pebble, but I will call you Peter which means rock. Then he makes a prediction about Simon Peter’s future.

He says, “On this rock I will build my church.”

Peter became the foundation stone on which the early church was built. His leadership was vital in the establishment of the church and later on, he was involved in the inclusion of the gentiles into the church as well. If it weren’t for Peter we’d all be excluded from Christianity as a religion.

One of the pleasing things for me is to see how Peter develops as a disciple of Jesus throughout his life. When he starts out he is very impetuous and leaps into situations with little regard for others. He slowly over time becomes quite wise and sensitive to things of the spirit. He remains fiercely faithful to Jesus but there is a loving undercurrent of leadership that permeates his makeup. He leads with power and wisdom tinged with a love for his fellow men and women.

Peter was spoken to by Jesus when he met with the disciples on the shore of Galilee. He asked Peter “Do you love me?”

Peter answered, “You know I do.”

Jesus responded, “Then feed my sheep.” This discourse went back and forth 3 times which was likely a deliberate ploy by Jesus because he knew Peter had denied Him 3 times before the crucifixion. Peter had a deep regret for his failing and then Jesus asked him the question 3 times and instilled in Peter a feeling of forgiveness and empowerment for the future.

Jesus charged Peter with the task of building the church and encouraging those who would come to know Him after He ascended to His father.

During his ministry Peter was very successful in establishing the church and it is a strong institution right to today and it continues to grow quickly throughout the world. The older more traditional churches of Europe and the world have gone through their major growth and are slowly shrinking but the church in China, India, Africa and many other places is thriving.

Peter experienced several miraculous events as he ministered around the world. He saw visions, was rescued from jail several times and he was shown that the gentiles were to be a major part of God’s church too.

Eventually according to tradition Peter was crucified and because he felt less than worthy to follow his master Jesus, to the cross according to the traditions, he was crucified upside down.

Peter was a humble fisherman. A bit rough around the edges but a loyal and willing follower of Jesus. Over his life he was changed by the Lord until he became a strong and great leader.

He was tasked with building the church. He led the people in ways that were new to them. He established the way the church ran and he grew along the way to be more and more like his master Jesus.

When the church wanted to establish what it was that God wanted for them they asked Peter to rule on God's behalf.

Peter would pray and fast and establish a relationship with God that would allow him to decide an outcome. For example, in Acts 11 the early church were arguing about whether or not they could partake of, "unclean food." Peter sought the truth from the lord and there followed the story about the sheet being lowered from heaven and God declaring everything on it to be clean. Initially Peter wouldn't eat off the sheet, but God told him that if He has declared it clean why can't Peter eat it. Peter then showed his new-found wisdom. He told the people that if they ate traditionally unclean food it was acceptable unless it caused a stumbling block to a traditional Jew.

The difference from his early days with Jesus to when he began the work of building God's Church are plain to see in the word of God. At the start Peter was impetuous and often jumped into situations in an unhealthy sort of way. Later Peter developed strong leadership skills and had a very good understanding of Jesus teaching. So much so that the early church turned to him for advice and direction.

Peter was a great man and I am pleased to be associated with the rock, being named after him. I only hope that I can live up to his example in my life too. If I could achieve half of the stuff he did I will be satisfied with my life.

Let Us Pray

Lord I thank you that all those years ago you had a plan for us as a small part of your church in this world. We praise you for your direction throughout time. Lord help us all to emulate the life of Peter and grow in our faith as we go through life growing from strength to strength.

Amen