

Simon Peter, the Restored Disciple

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 40:26–31

Background Scripture: Mark 8:27–29; Luke 22:7–38;

John 18:15–18, 25–27; 21:15–17

Mark 8:27–29

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

²⁹ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Luke 22:31–34

³¹ “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

³³ But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

³⁴ Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

John 18:25–27

²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”

He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

²⁶ One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

John 21:15–17

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Key Text

The third time [Jesus] said to [Peter], “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” —John 21:17

Introduction

A. Broken Made Beautiful

Kintsugi is a centuries-old Japanese technique of pottery repair. The process involves using a special lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum to repair damages to broken or cracked pieces. Other methods of ceramic restoration aim to hide the damage or make it less noticeable as if the object were “like new.” *Kintsugi*, however, highlights the imperfections and brokenness of the pottery, transforming them into a new artifact. The restoration process transforms the damaged pottery into something whole, with the lacquered repairs serving as a visual reminder of the item’s history and use. Rather than obscuring the damage, this technique celebrates it, making the once-broken pieces beautiful and usable for many more years.

Similarly, God’s work of salvation brings healing and reconciliation to sinful humanity. Today’s account demonstrates how God restored one of the first apostles, Peter. Through Christ’s forgiveness and restoration, Peter’s story becomes more beautiful than he could have imagined.

B. Lesson Context

Peter was a fisherman from Bethsaida, a village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). Here, Peter worked with his brother Andrew (Mark 1:16). While fishing on the Sea of Galilee, Peter and his brother are called by Jesus to follow him and “fish for people” (Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–42).

We also know that Peter was married (Mark 1:30; 1 Corinthians 9:5). At some point, Peter, his wife, and at least one other family member moved to Capernaum (Matthew 8:5–14), a town approximately five miles southwest of Bethsaida.

The New Testament notes three names for Peter. His Hebrew name is *Simon* or the variant *Simeon* (Mark 1:16; Acts 15:14). Later, Jesus calls him *Peter*, a designation based on an ancient Greek word meaning “rock” or “stone” (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16); this is his most frequently occurring name in the New Testament, found over 160 times. The third name is *Cephas*, an Aramaic word for “stone” (John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; etc.).

The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses

Unit 2: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount the major events of Peter’s life.
2. Explain how Peter’s life demonstrates God’s ability to use people in spite of their failings.
3. List ways that personal shortcomings can become opportunities to depend on Christ.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Broken Made Beautiful
- B. Lesson Context

I. Identity of the Messiah (Mark 8:27–29)

- A. What People Say (vv. 27–28)
- B. What the Disciples Say (v. 29)
Who Is Jesus?

II. Failing of a Follower (Luke 22:31–34)

- A. Jesus’ Encouragement (vv. 31–32)
- B. Assertion of Devotion (v. 33)
Are Ye Able?

- C. Prediction of Denial (v. 34)

III. Prediction Realized (John 18:25–27)

- A. Second Denial (v. 25)
- B. Third Denial (vv. 26–27)

IV. Reinstating a Leader (John 21:15–17)

- A. First Exchange (v. 15)
- B. Second Exchange (v. 16)
- C. Third Exchange (v. 17)

Conclusion

- A. Time to Change the Story
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

I. Identity of the Messiah

(Mark 8:27–29)

This first passage of Scripture comes from the third and final year of Jesus' ministry. He has just fed the five thousand (Mark 6:30–44). As a result, the people intend to "come and make him king by force" (John 6:15). When he refuses to accept such an earthly crown, many stop following him (6:66).

Over the next several months, Jesus is on the move. He goes westward to Syrian Phoenicia (Mark 7:24–30) and then to the southeast to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and into the Decapolis (Matthew 15:29; Mark 7:31–37).

Then Jesus and the disciples cross the lake to Dalmanutha, where they face the Pharisees (Mark 8:10–12). Following this encounter, Jesus returns to Bethsaida on the other side of the lake (8:22). From there, Jesus and his disciples travel north.

A. What People Say (vv. 27–28)

27a. Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

Without the constant distraction of crowds or opposition, Jesus prepares *his disciples* for the next phase of his ministry. They visit the *villages* in Caesarea Philippi, an area nearly 30 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee, overlooking the northern end of the Jordan River valley.

During this period, several towns are named "Caesarea" in honor of the Roman emperor. A more prominent Caesarea, for example, is Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coastline. However, the town where Jesus and his disciples gather is called *Caesarea Philippi*, named in honor of Philip II (also known as Philip the Tetrarch), the son of Herod the Great and brother of Herod Antipas.

27b. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

Answering the question "Who is Jesus?" is a fundamental issue that everyone, especially the disciples, must face. Where does Jesus come from? What is his purpose? The answer to these questions shapes how we respond to him.

28. They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

The disciples report the various opinions and rumors circulating about Jesus. Some believe that he is *John the Baptist*, who had already been killed by Herod (Mark 6:14–29; compare Matthew 14:1–12; Luke 9:7–9). Others think that Jesus might be *Elijah*, the Old Testament prophet known for speaking out against a king (see 1 Kings 21). The Old Testament prophesied that a person like Elijah would someday return (Malachi 4:5–6), a prophecy that was fulfilled through the ministry of John the Baptist (see Matthew 17:10–13).

The disciples do not mention the possibility that Jesus could be the promised Messiah. Even so, there seems to be some inclination in that direction (see Matthew 9:27; 15:22; John 4:29).

B. What the Disciples Say (v. 29)

29a. "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Now the question becomes pointed and personal: *Who do you say I am?* Have the disciples come to a conclusion about Jesus' identity?

Who Is Jesus?

One of my earliest memories involves my dad reading bedtime stories from a children's Bible. The intricate illustrations in that Bible are still vividly etched in my mind. The stories he read and the spiritual instruction he provided became the foundation of my faith.

As I grew older, I realized that simply knowing Bible stories and memorizing verses was not enough. It was insufficient to rely solely on my parents' beliefs about Jesus. I needed to form my own conclusions and be able to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" for myself.

While knowing how others answer that question is valuable, what matters most is how you respond. How do you answer the question, "Who is Jesus?"

—B. R.

29b. Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

The title *Messiah* is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek title "Christ" (John 1:41; 4:25). Both designations mean "the anointed one." Numerous Old Testament texts point to the Messiah's

arrival and reign (Psalm 110; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9; etc.).

First-century Jewish expectations regarding this figure were diverse. Some believed the Messiah would be a prophet like Moses or Elijah, performing miraculous deeds to lead Israel to righteousness. Others hypothesized that this figure would be a high priest like Aaron, coming to purify the temple and sanctify the people. The prevailing belief among most first-century Jews was that this person would be a political figure, a nationalistic king, who would sit on the earthly throne of David and rule over an earthly empire.

What Do You Think?

Why is confessing Jesus as Christ important for an individual believer and the church?

Digging Deeper

How can we help others move from having a general idea of who Jesus is to truly knowing him as Christ?

II. Failing of a Follower

(Luke 22:31–34)

It is Thursday night of Jesus' final week, "the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed" (Luke 22:7). Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion looms. He shares one final meal with his disciples, using the opportunity to teach them about their role in service to him (22:8–30).

A. Jesus' Encouragement (vv. 31–32)

31. "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat."

Jesus singles out *Simon* Peter and makes him a representative of the trials the other disciples will encounter. His representative role is communicated by the phrase *all of you*.

The role of *Satan* is similar to that in the opening chapters of the book of Job: a heavenly official who accuses and tests God's people (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; compare Zechariah 3:1; Luke 4:1–13; Revelation 12:10). The warning that Satan *has asked to sift . . . you as wheat* evokes the image of separating valuable wheat kernels from the useless

chaff (compare Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17; Amos 9:9). The text does not specify what the "wheat" represents. Instead, Jesus' point is that Peter will undergo a season of trial as Satan tempts him away from faithfulness to Christ.

32. "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Jesus has *prayed* to strengthen Peter's faith and devotion. This is not the only time Jesus prays for his followers (John 17:6–26; 10:27–29; etc.). Even today, the risen Christ is our "advocate" with the Father (1 John 2:1).

The Greek term translated *faith* encompasses more than simply "doctrinal belief." The term can also convey meanings such as "loyalty," "fidelity," and "faithfulness" (compare usage in Luke 18:8; Acts 14:22; etc.). Although Jesus knows that Peter will soon deny him (Luke 22:34, below; see 22:54–62), he prays for Peter to experience only a temporary failure of faith rather than a complete disavowal.

The Greek term translated *turned back* often has the sense of turning away from a wrong course, which aligns with the concept of repentance (examples: Luke 1:16–17; 17:4; Acts 3:19; 26:18). Jesus assures Peter that he will be restored. Peter's experience will ultimately *strengthen* the faith of others (compare 1:15–26; 2:14–40; 8:14–25; 15:7–11).

What Do You Think?

Have you ever experienced a time when your faith was tested? How did it affect your relationship with God?

Digging Deeper

How does knowing that Jesus intercedes for us (like he did for Peter) encourage you in your struggles?

B. Assertion of Devotion (v. 33)

33. But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

Peter has been with Jesus since the beginning of his public ministry (see Lesson Context). He is the most outspoken of the disciples, and he tends to speak with the most conviction (examples: Mat-

threw 14:22–33; Mark 10:23–31; Luke 8:43–48; John 6:67–70). Peter’s association with Jesus leads him to boldly assert his devotion to the *Lord*, even unto *death* (compare John 13:37).

Peter now understands the possibility that Jesus might experience imprisonment and death. This marks a shift in perspective from his previous confessions (see Matthew 16:21–22; Mark 8:31–32).

Are Ye Able?

The church I grew up attending sang hymns as part of its worship services. I came to recognize at least two categories of hymns: the bright, uplifting kind and the dark, melancholy kind. The melancholy hymns included titles like “Almost Persuaded” and “‘Are Ye Able,’ said the Master.”

Without a doubt, I can say that the dark, melancholy hymns had far more influence on my journey to becoming a Christian than did the bright, uplifting ones. The words of the dark ones were eerily convicting. Consider these lyrics:

“Are ye able,” said the Master
“To be crucified with me?”
“Yea,” the sturdy dreamers answered,
“To the death we follow Thee.”

Over the years, I often wondered what made such hymns so convicting. Then one day I found the answer in an article about learning styles. The article said that there were, broadly speaking, two ways to learn: from our own mistakes (“learning by experience”) or from others’ mistakes (“learning by wisdom”). I’m more attracted to the latter style by nature, and the melancholy hymns served me admirably in that regard. Consider Peter’s mistaken bravado in Luke 22:33 as echoed in the words of “Are Ye Able.”

But that’s just me. What about you? How can you set yourself on a path of learning via wisdom rather than experience?
—R. L. N.

C. Prediction of Denial (v. 34)

34. Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

A word *rooster* is a bird known for its tendency to crow during the early hours of the morning. This



Visual for Lesson 6. Display this visual during the lesson conclusion and ask, “How is God’s mercy on display in the example of Peter?”

reference to a rooster’s crowing also highlights the illegality of Jesus’ trial. According to Jewish legal tradition, a trial for a capital offense cannot be conducted at night. Such clandestine judicial meetings are often seen as corrupt and unjust.

Although the rooster’s crowing is typically associated with the break of a day, in this context, it does not signal a new day. Jewish custom marks the beginning of a day at sunset, not sunrise. Thus Jesus predicts that Peter’s denial will happen on the same day as the nighttime meal, during the overnight hours leading up to dawn.

The verb *deny*, having the sense of “renounce,” also appears in Luke 9:23, where Jesus says, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” When we consider this verse alongside the current passage, two choices become clear: either (1) deny oneself and affirm Christ, or (2) affirm oneself and deny Christ. It is impossible to affirm both oneself and Christ simultaneously.

III. Prediction Realized

(John 18:25–27)

After Jesus is arrested and taken by the soldiers and Jewish officials, Peter and another disciple, likely John, follow the crowd into the high priest’s courtyard (John 18:15–16). As Peter enters, a servant girl accuses, “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” (18:17a). Peter denies this and

joins the others who are warming themselves by the fire (18:17b–18).

A. Second Denial (v. 25)

25. Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

A second accusation against *Simon Peter* arises, essentially the same as the first. John’s account of this event is more concise than the other Gospels (compare Matthew 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:54–62).

B. Third Denial (vv. 26–27)

26. One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”

The third accusation comes from one of the *servants* who was in Gethsemane earlier that night during Jesus’ arrest (see Mark 14:32, 43–46). This servant is related to Malchus, a servant of the high priest, whose right ear Peter cut off (Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10). Fortunately, due to Jesus’ mercy, the injury was not fatal (Luke 22:51). Thus, this servant has good reason to believe that Peter was *with Jesus in the garden!*

27. Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all note that *Peter* wept after his third denial and the rooster crow (Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62). Jesus’ prediction has come true, and Peter responds to this realization with shame, anguish,

How to Say It

Aramaic	<i>Air-uh-may-ik.</i>
Bethsaida	<i>Beth-say-uh-duh.</i>
Dalmanutha	<i>Dal-muh-new-thuh.</i>
Decapolis	<i>Dee-cap-uh-lis.</i>
Gethsemane	<i>Geth-sem-uh-nee</i> (<i>G</i> as in <i>get</i>).
Malchus	<i>Mal-kus.</i>
Phoenicia	<i>Fuh-nish-uh.</i>
Tetrarch	<i>Teh-trark</i> or <i>Tee-trark.</i>

and remorse. At this point, there is nothing he can do to change what has happened.

What Do You Think?

How can we strengthen our faith to stand firm in difficult situations?

Digging Deeper

How can we help strengthen the faith of other believers in a similar situation?

IV. Reinstating a Leader

(John 21:15–17)

The next section of Scripture takes place following Jesus’ resurrection. By this time, the risen Jesus has appeared to many disciples and followers (John 20:11–29). He appears again to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (21:2), directing them to a large catch of fish before inviting them to breakfast (21:12).

A. First Exchange (v. 15)

15a. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

After breakfast, *Jesus* turns the meeting into a teaching moment. *Simon Peter* had previously boasted of his commitment and devotion to Jesus (Luke 22:33, above). But his pledge of devotion proved to be bluster. Jesus’ question probes Peter’s heart and loyalties.

What does the word *these* refer to? Is it the boats and fishing equipment? Is it the other disciples? Or does it mean, “Do you love me more than these other disciples love me?” We may conclude that Jesus means *these* as a general reference point: “Do you love me supremely, more than anything or anyone else?”

15b. “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Peter assures Jesus of his *love*, even reminding the *Lord* that he knows this fact. Jesus had correctly predicted that Peter’s previous declarations of commitment would prove false (John 13:37–38; compare 18:25–27, above).

15c. Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus laid down his life (John 10:15). If Peter loves Jesus, he will lead in

the same way, protecting and providing for the *lambs* who are God's people (see Luke 22:32; 1 Peter 5:1–4; compare Luke 15:3–7).

What Do You Think?

How can you actively show your love for Jesus in your relationships, work, and service to others?

Digging Deeper

What challenges might arise when trying to do so?

B. Second Exchange (v. 16)

16. Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

With only slight variation, the exchange is repeated.

C. Third Exchange (v. 17)

17. The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.

Jesus questions Peter's love a third time. For Peter to feel *hurt* at this repetition is understandable. Does Jesus doubt his answer? Or is Peter's distress the result of seeing a connection between these three questions and his three denials (John 18:15–18, 25–27)? Just as Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus allows Peter to affirm his love three times. Peter responds by being as absolute in his affirmation of love as he was in his denial.

Peter's response acknowledges that not only does Jesus know Peter's thoughts, but he also knows *all things*—a recognition of his deity (John 2:25).

Conclusion

A. Time to Change the Story

Following Jesus' ascension, Peter demonstrated his love for Christ and commitment to God's people. He played a key role in the first-century church

(Acts 1:21–22; 2:14; 3:12; 4:8–20; 10:47–48). His declaration of commitment to Christ, even while imprisoned, came to fruition (5:17–42; 12:1–11). He grew from being “unschooled” and “ordinary” (4:13) to being the author of the two letters in the New Testament that bear his name. Although we don't know the circumstances of Peter's death, tradition suggests that he was crucified in Rome.

Peter's story following Jesus' ascension is an important milestone marking his spiritual maturity. But we must not miss the formative issues of today's lesson. The most significant aspect of Peter's story may not be its beginning or ending but rather the remarkable turning point in the middle.

Peter faced a painful low point in his life when he denied his Savior. We too will experience painful lows on our road to spiritual maturity—every Christian does. When such a low happens, the primary issue is how we respond. Peter heard Jesus speak of four possible outcomes in hearing the Word (see Matthew 13:1–9). Three of those are quite negative, but they need not be considered irreversible. God redeemed Peter's failure and used his weakness to strengthen his faith. The same can happen with us.

What Do You Think?

What areas in your life do you need to surrender to God so that he can use your weaknesses for his glory?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take this week to surrender those areas to God?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are our Healer. You restore brokenness. Thank you for the testimony of Peter. We need your healing power, and we pray that you will restore, renew, and strengthen us so that we may help others and direct them to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Never underestimate what God can do with our weaknesses.