

Simon Peter: Defending (and Rebuking) the Saviour

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

- [0 : 00] All throughout last week there was a lot of speculation as to who the Vatican would nominate as the new Pope.
- ! Back in 2005, shortly after the death of Pope John Paul II, somebody called Roger Cadenhead, registered domain space for Benedict.
- He didn't know that the new Pope was going to be called Benedict, but took a bit of a punt looking back at history, at popular names among Popes, and so he registered the website www.benedict16.com.
- Before the new Pope's name was even announced. He secured it before Rome even knew they needed it.
- See, domain space is quite lucrative. He wasn't the only one in on this. Somebody else had registered a very similar one, whereas he had registered Benedict 16.
- [1 : 17] Somebody else had registered Pope Benedict 16.com and put that on eBay and it surpassed \$16,000, believe it or not.
- But Cadenhead didn't want any money for this registered domain space. A Catholic himself, he was happy for the Vatican to have the name.
- He said this, I'm going to try and avoid angering over one billion Catholics and my grandmother. He did, however, ask for something else in return.
- In fact, he asked for three things and these are the three things that he asked for. Number one, a free stay at the Vatican Hotel. Number two, one of those hats.
- Number three, complete absolution, no questions asked for the third week of March 1987. Now, it was never publicly said what actually happened during the third week of March 1987 and you can use your imagination.
- [2 : 35] But I would hazard a guess that every single one of us has got a third week of March 1987 somewhere lurking in our lives, whatever that was.
- A week, a day, a weekend, a month, a year, even a decade that we just wish hadn't happened. That we look back on and we cringe over.
- These things can haunt us. They can take a grip on us. They can take a grip on us. See, everybody is a combination of the good and the bad and the downright ugly.
- And if you spend a lot of time worrying, preoccupied over whatever your third week of March 1987 might have been, welcome to the club.
- No, welcome to the human race. Because every single human being on this planet has a combination of the good and the bad and the ugly.

[3 : 48] Bring on Peter. Bring on Peter. And that's what I love so much about Peter. And I want to suggest, whilst there are so many different things that we can draw on from his story, from the character of Simon Peter as he's presented to us in the Gospels, I want to suggest that what we have there is a combination of getting it spectacularly right and getting it spectacularly wrong.

But Jesus still called him his disciple. And that's important. You see, even in this one scene, he stands out as the one who gets it right.

When Jesus is saying, well, who do you say I am? And Peter puts his finger right on it there and then. You are the Messiah.

And yet, almost in the same breath, he finds himself being rebuked by Jesus, because it becomes very clear that he has radically misunderstood what being the Messiah is about.

And we'll come on to that in just one moment. The combination of the spectacularly right and the spectacularly wrong. He got it right so many times, and yet he also finds himself rebuking Jesus, being rebuked by Jesus.

[5 : 20] He eventually denies Jesus. And yet, Jesus still went on to call him the Rock.

You see, God believes in you, even when you don't believe in him.

Jesus knew the worst things, as well as the best things, about Peter. And it's okay. Jesus knows the very worst things about you and me.

And it's okay. What I love about Peter is the way he just blurts it out. He hasn't got a filter.

Which means sometimes what he blurts out on those finer moments, you're the Messiah. Yes. Comes completely unfiltered. But at other times, no, I don't know him.

[6 : 29] Unfiltered. Spectacularly right and spectacularly wrong. Jesus knows the very best and the worst about Jesus, about Peter.

And it's okay. I think that lack of filter tends to apply in relationships, when we're closest, with the people that we're closest to.

Those that we really love, those that we're really open with, those who probably do know the worst things about us. And it's okay. We tend to let the filter down.

Just an illustration. Just imagine that there's two people in a car. That's a busy high street. And that car needs to be parallel parked. And it's a tight spot. And there's loads of traffic queuing up behind.

And there's quite a lot of pressure on. And just imagine that the two people in that car, two people that have just met for the first time. Maybe they're just work colleagues and they're on their way to a meeting.

[7 : 30] And they haven't known each other very long. And all the conversation is pretty polite, surface level stuff. And one of them is trying to park this car. And the other relatively, well, basically a stranger, but a very new person in their life.

They interact with one another as this car is in the process of being parked. The conversation couldn't be more polite.

Oh, sorry. Just back a bit. Yeah, no. I think back a bit. Sorry about this. I'm not very good at parallel parking. It's all right. Neither am I. Honestly, I don't think I would be doing a very good job either.

Just back a little. Oops. Oh, you nearly hit that thing. The car there. Don't worry. There's a bit of traffic behind me. Don't feel pressured. No. It's all right. That's right.

Oh, thank you very much. Same situation. Stick a married couple in that same car. I know I don't need to say any more.

- [8 : 39] The filter comes down with those that we're nearest to. And I think that's what we see going on with Peter in the way that he interacts with Jesus.
- Whatever Peter blurts out, when we see Jesus' response, it's really clear and it's consistent. Jesus knows the worst thing about him.
- And it's okay. He knows the worst thing about you. And it's okay. You know, I often think to myself that, you know, probably if you knew the worst things about me, you would not want me to be your minister.
- And if I knew the worst thing about you, I probably wouldn't want to be your minister. Well, that's not how it works. God does know the worst things about you and me.
- And it's okay. And it's okay. So how do we see this in more detail actually played out in the life of Peter? Well, let's zoom out for a moment and let's see where this part comes in Mark's telling of the story of Jesus.
- [10 : 04] So Mark's Gospel is structured in a very, very clear way. 16 chapters, two halves, eight chapters each. And the first half is this kind of whistle-stop tour of ministry.
- It's not very reflective. It's just very fact-based. It's to the point and it moves very quickly. We've got a scene with teaching going on, with healing going on, with calling disciples going on, with healing, with teaching, with miracles, signs and wonders.
- It happens really, really fast-paced. That's the first eight chapters. The second eight chapters, the second half of that Gospel, is given over to the last week of Jesus' life, his journey to the cross.
- And landing right there in the middle is Mark chapter 8, where we have this story, this scene at Caesarea Philippi, where it brings it right into focus. With all this going on, who do you say I am?
- Who is this guy? Who is Jesus? What is he about? What's all this happening for? Why all of this ministry leading up to this halfway point? And why what is about to happen in the journey to the cross?
- [11 : 04] It's all played out in this one scene. Who do you say I am? The prophet? John the Baptist? Elijah? No, you're the Messiah. Now the other fascinating thing that runs through the Gospels, and we find this in Mark's Gospel as well, is what is often referred to as the Messianic secret, which can seem a slightly bizarre thing when we first come across it.
- The Messianic secret. In other words, for all the proclamation about the signs, about the kingdom of God, about the stuff that Jesus is doing, Jesus seems to want to keep it secret.
- Where he says to somebody or other, and we see it in this very scene with Peter, he says, don't tell anybody about this. We see it on occasions when people are healed. Don't tell anybody about this.
- And here, Jesus is saying, the Messiah, don't tell anybody about this. Why? Well, we find that becomes clearer as Mark's Gospel unfolds in that second half.
- And it's focused in on this middle centrepiece in Mark's Gospel, because as soon as Peter has said, you're the Messiah, that's who you are, and then Jesus goes on to say, and he said, there's nobody about this, but he then just goes on to talk about how, as the Messiah, he has to go to the cross.
- [12 : 27] He must suffer and die. In other words, he wants this kept secret unless it's properly understood. It can only be proclaimed when it's going to be proclaimed accurately and clearly as it is.
- If you're going to go off and preaching who Jesus is for the wrong reasons, then forget it. The only way you can understand who Jesus is is when you grasp that he has to go to the cross.

The only way you can understand what being a follower of Jesus is authentically is when you understand that it's not an easy ride. That to follow Jesus means following him, yes, through those first eight chapters of the signs and wonders and all the big amazing stuff there is to happen, but also it doesn't stop there.

If you're going to confess him as Messiah, you need to know that you're following him through the whole Gospel, all 16 chapters which lead to the cross. In other words, if you're going to be a follower of Jesus, if you're going to know that God knows all the very worst things about you and it's okay, great, but that's not just some nice, sparkly, fluffy, clean, fluffy, wrapped message that just, just to massage your ego and to make you feel good about yourself.

It's a message that says, yes, he loves you and accepts you unconditionally, but when you start to accept that and follow him, it's not going to be an easy ride.

[13 : 57] Following Jesus is not just about having a positive self-image. Now you believe in God. It is that, but it's so much more.

And Mark's Gospel tells us in no uncertain terms what that is. That the discipleship is costly. It involves taking up your cross. It involves rolling up your sleeves. It involves taking risks.

It involves life that will be difficult. Because as Bonhoeffer famously said, God's grace is free, but it's never cheap. If you're going to know the unconditional love of Jesus, you need to know that it's costly stuff.

He will call you into places, into situations where frankly you will not want to go. Because that is what being a follower of Jesus is about. He knows the worst things about you and it's okay.

God meets you where you are, but he will not leave you there. So back to Peter.

[15 : 01] And let's just see what happens here because what we see is he says, you are the Messiah. father. Then, we also see that later on, even after he has been corrected by Jesus and it's been explained to him what Messiahship means, the cross and resurrection, and whilst it also sees that discipleship means a tough ride, we find him later on denying Jesus.

So what's going on there? Why, why would Peter deny Jesus three times? Now for a long, long time I thought that was something to do with Peter being cowardly.

that he ran out of courage. Then it became clear, when you look at the life of Jesus, the life of Peter, whilst he had many faults, being a coward was not one of them.

I mean, just think about this. Putting aside the fact that he has just, in front of everybody else, he's the first one to step up to the mark and say, Jesus, you are the Messiah. That's a bold, risky and dangerous thing to do.

Look at the other things that happen in Jesus' life. Think, for example, of the way Matthew regards the story of when they were out at sea and Jesus is walking on the water towards the disciples.

[16 : 39] There was one disciple and only one who gets out of the boat and says, Jesus, I'm coming out towards you. And it's Peter. Of course, he quickly sinks but Jesus pulls him back up again because he's not a coward.

Or in John's Gospel where we have the story of when Judas, the betrayer, leads a group of Pharisees and Roman soldiers to come and arrest Jesus by night and they're armed and we're not told how many there are but we're told that there are the teachers of the law and the Roman soldiers.

We're told that one disciple is not having this and he stands in front of Jesus and draws his sword and takes on the Roman soldiers, the greatest fighting force in the world.

Cuts off the high priest's ear. Who is that? Peter. Tempestuous, yes. Hot tempered at times, most definitely.

But a coward, not Peter, never. So if it's not being a coward that would drive Peter to deny Jesus three times, what is it?

[17 : 57] I want to suggest, and I don't know this, this is just guesswork, but it's led by the patterns that we see in the character as he is presented to us in the Gospel narratives.

I want to suggest that what we see at Peter by the time we get to that denial is frankly a broken man. And that he's at that point where he denies Jesus frankly because he's lost the plot.

He doesn't know what's going on anymore. He's invested everything in following Jesus. He's given up everything, walked away and followed him for three years.

He's the one who dared to call him Messiah before anybody else. He's the one who got out of that boat and tried to walk on water towards him and found himself he did for a while whilst his focus was on Jesus and now he sees that same Jesus who's taken away, arrested and his whole world is coming crashing down.

Have you ever been in that situation where it feels that there is no hope left only despair to the point where you would deny everything that you've previously held dear about who God is and what God is like that you come to that conclusion that you cannot stand God that you cannot bear the word God that church is something you won't when I go anywhere near I'm thinking here of the image of the child who who screams to their parents I hate you I hate you I hate you when deep deep down inside is that security that enables them that space to be able to blurt that out even in that brokenness in his grief where he is torn apart and he's completely and utterly lost his way to the extent where he denies

[20 : 18] Jesus not just once not twice but three times Jesus does not stop believing in Peter and even though there may be times that you may have gone through I don't know maybe even going through quite now right now where you might feel like throwing the whole thing in and everything inside you screams God is not there or if he doesn't care I don't know who he is or what he's about even in those moments Jesus knows the worst things about you and it's alright we're going to pray in just a moment and as we come to pray I invite you to hold everything about you before him knowing that there's nothing you can hide from him anyway but he knows the worst things about you and it's okay you see it doesn't end at him knowing the worst things about us because he actually knows the best things about us as well including the best things about us that we don't know about or may struggle to accept things that in eternity will become complete but even in this life he sees things that we can't see when he looked at the Peter who denied him three times

Jesus didn't just see the one who let him down he saw the rock the one upon whom he said he would build his church he knows the worst and the best of each one of us and calls us like he did Peter to follow him so let's pray together now I'm going to close my eyes because I like to do that when I pray but don't feel that you have to invite you in this moment just to hold your everything about yourself before God the good the bad and the ugly and hold before him the worst things that you know about you here's a prayer as we confess those things to him

Lord you know the worst things about us and although we can't really get our human minds around this it's okay because you are love you accept us and you call us to be forgiven and to know we are forgiven and there are no exceptions there we thank you and we confess to you our humanness our brokenness and our sin and we are sorry Lord in this moment touch our lives afresh with your Holy Spirit and remind us that we are forgiven Lord we bring to you those moments those experiences where we feel perhaps so crushed and broken where we may feel so distanced from you where we are calling you into question where we may even deny you and Lord we lay that before you

Lord touch our lives afresh by your Spirit and remind us afresh that just like Peter you know the worst about us and it's okay Lord we're mindful that you not only know the worst but you know the best about us and that you meet with us but you don't expect to leave us in that place and so Lord we pray that your Holy Spirit would touch us and lead us and mature in us and grow us to the point that we would become the very best version of ourselves help us every day of our lives this week this day to hear your voice to respond to the challenge of your voice and to rise and to become the people that you long for us to be in every situation in every conversation whether that be in the home in the workplace in our interactions with people that we find difficult to interact with faith

Holy Spirit move in us we pray that your kingdom would come in our lives that we may become the people that you long for us to become now and in the time to come in Jesus name we pray Amen Amen