

Scenes from the Life of Peter IV

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 August 2011

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] About 20,000 teenagers a year I'd probably talk to, and I'd travel around the whole country. And so you'd become, and I'd do stuff on television and radio, and so I was like a bit of a D-grade celebrity in New Zealand, right?

Like in a very small segment of the population. But what would happen is it became quite well known, and so I would drive, I'd just be out, and people would yell at me.

And they couldn't remember my name normally, but they'd just yell, Hey, it's the sex guy, right? Every time, that's what they'd say.

Hey! And it'd be like a group of 16-year-old boys in a car driving past her. Hey, it's the sex guy! Hey! Yeah! And it was, I guess it was fun.

And, except when I was on like a date. And then it was, you know, just kind of weird and awkward, right? And because I'd want to sort of go, you know, there's more to me!

[1 : 11] I have hobbies! You know, like, I'm an interesting person. It's not my whole life. I don't just talk to children about sex. Like, I like music and stuff.

You know, like, it's a terrible thing to kind of be identified with something, and solely with something. Or, have your identity corrupted by other people, I think.

The passage we're dealing with tonight is concerned with two things. Identity and purpose. Christ's identity and purpose, and our identity and purpose.

Now, I think you guys have probably a pretty good idea of Christ's identity and purpose. If I said, who is Christ? I think you could probably give me a fairly solid answer to that.

If I said, what did Christ come to do? I think you'd do pretty well. I think you'd be in the B, B plus range, right? Of, like, give me a pretty good theological answer of what Christ came to do.

[2 : 12] But as it relates to us, as it concerns our life, how we should live, what it means to be a disciple, I think this is where we have a tendency to fluff it a little bit, to fudge it a little bit.

Here's why. Our call as Christians bumps up against some of the most fundamental messages of a secular society.

It bumps up against them. A secular society says things like, you know, be the best you can be. Go for the dream. You know, you deserve it. Just do it.

Be happy. I'm just making stuff up, right? But, you know, these are kind of big messages. But Christ, when he talks about what our lives should be like and what he calls us to do, it's so provocative.

It is so different to that. It's such an upside down way of thinking. Because here's what he says. He says, take up your cross and follow me.

[3 : 36] Take up your cross and follow me. Deny yourself. Suffer. These are some of the things that Christ calls us to do.

And it's one of the core messages of Jesus, I think. I mean, this passage in Matthew here, this is mentioned in all four Gospels. So this line here, take up your cross and follow me, is probably something Jesus said quite a bit.

Now that is pretty much the end of the sermon. That's where I want to arrive at. But there's a whole lot of stuff before it. So let's take this little story from the start.

I'll make some observations. And I will arrive at this point again. Because it's worth spending a little bit of time on it. Pastor, we are in week four of our series called Scenes from the Life of Peter.

And the passage today is just a great passage. It's so meaty. It's lovely. I love it. It's like a big meaty stew, you know. So the story starts with the disciples.

[4 : 44] Okay, they're with Jesus. They've kind of been knocking on the door of Jesus' identity a little bit. They kind of have some ideas about who he is. And for some reason, Jesus feels like this is the time to clear it up.

So he asks them the big question. Who do people say that I am? They respond by naming some prophets. And then he says, well, who do you say that I am? At this point, Peter is having a really great day.

He says, you are the Christ. Which is awesome. It's an incredible moment. And in fact, I think this is like, I think this is the start of the church right here.

I think this is where the church begins. Jesus follows it up by saying something really nice to Peter. He says, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Now, Catholics and Protestants have long argued over this passage and what it means. The Catholic tradition, Catholic theologians will say that Jesus is talking about Peter himself.

[5 : 49] That when Jesus says, Peter, he's saying, you are the rock, I'm going to build my church on you. Which has implications for the office of the Pope, for the authority of the church, etc.

Protestants tend to say that what Jesus is talking about here is not Peter, but rather the truth of what Peter said. Now, I think the passage is fairly clear.

And at the risk of being controversial, I think it's clearly saying both. I think it's very clearly saying, you know what? This is where the church started. Because the church is a group of believers bound by a common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I think it's talking about the people there, represented by Peter as the kind of de facto leader. But obviously, what he said.

They are bound together by what he said. You are the Christ. That's the thing that binds them together. So as I said, Peter's having a really great day at this point. And then Jesus, after sort of sorting out who he is, his identity, tells him what his purpose is.

[6 : 56] Tells him what his time on earth is going to look like moving forward. And here's what he says. He says in verse 21, From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed.

And on the third day be raised. Yeah, Peter's day takes a turn for the worst here. He takes Jesus aside and he scolds him.

He says, Jesus, this is no. No, this is not right. You've got this wrong. And I want us to have a little bit of sympathy for our man, Peter.

He is Jewish. And so from the time he was born, he was probably told that a Messiah is coming and the Messiah would be the king of glory and he'd rise up and he'd defeat their enemies.

So when Jesus outlined what victory looked like, and what it looked like was death, Peter just thought, there's no way. This can't be right.

- [7 : 58] And I think nobody thought that this would be the case. I mean, everyone's thinking when they think of the Messiah, they're thinking of the king of glory, right?
- Defeat their enemies, good times. But Isaiah is a passage that Ryan read out. You know, the Messiah is also the suffering servant.
- I don't think people have put those two things together. So Peter gets a scolding, a big one. Get behind me, Satan.
- It's not a nice thing to say. In fact, it's not the first time Jesus had said that. The last time Jesus said, get behind me, Satan, he was actually talking to Satan.
- In the desert, you sort of know the story. Jesus in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. I mean, it's a very harsh thing that Christ says, right? I remember being with a friend of mine once. We had a group of guys.
- [9 : 04] We were just out of high school. My mate Ben. And a friend of mine said to Ben, you know, you're just like your father. And Ben just started sobbing because he hated his father.
- I mean, it's horrible being called something that you don't like, right? Now imagine being called Satan. And think about how gentle Jesus is normally with people.
- Like he's normally, like think about the woman by the well and sick people and stuff. He's like usually, it's usually pretty cool, like really gentle and nice to them. And then he busts out this get behind me, Satan thing.
- Like why would he do that? Why didn't he just sort of go, listen, you got a little bit wrong. I need to sit your right here. Well, he was really heavy on Peter. Because of the seriousness of Peter's misunderstanding.
- I mean, if you get this part wrong about Jesus, that he has come to suffer and die for us, if you get that wrong, you've missed everything.
- [10 : 10] Because you've turned Christ into like, just like all the other religious leaders. Just a guy who says really kind of cool kind of things and you can follow him or not.
- I mean, you've got to understand that the big difference between Christianity and every other religion is this. Or every other religion says this. They have a religious leader, like a prophet.
- And they say, you know what, guys? You need to do this, this and this. And your life will be good. You live out these rules, these ideas, and your life will be good.
- You live out this truth, your life will work. That's the key to happiness. And Christianity is radically different to that. Because it doesn't say that here's what it says. It says, you cannot live out this life.
- I'm going to live it out for you. I will live out this life for you and I will suffer the pain that you should have suffered for all the sins of all the evil deeds that Christians have ever done.
- [11 : 10] I will suffer the consequences of that on the cross. If we take that, if we misunderstand Jesus and make him a prophet and just a good teacher, we've lost it all.
- We've got Martha Stewart. You might as well just watch Martha Stewart. She's got interesting ideas about making stuff. You know, I go to her website, it's great.
- But that's all you've got. You've just got this cool person who can teach you some cool things. You don't have a savior any longer. That's why Jesus was so harsh on Peter. Completely misunderstood what Jesus was about.
- Now I said at the start of this message it was about identity and purpose, Christ's identity and purpose and our identity and purpose. So Christ's identity we've talked about.

Christ came to defeat our great enemy's sin and he was to do this through his own death. Our identity was established when Jesus said to Peter, I will build my church on this community, on this truth.

- [12 : 26] Now what does this passage have to say about our purpose? How we are to live? What it means to be followers of Jesus? verse 24. Then Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

for whoever would save his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German martyr, lived in the days of Nazi Germany.

He wrote a few books, they're all good, you should read them. One of the really good ones was a book called The Cost of Discipleship. In it he said this, When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

So if we had asked Jesus, Jesus, who am I? What am I supposed to do with my life? He would say, come and die. Follow me to the cross.

This whole thing of identity and purpose and stuff is a very important question today in our society. And there traditionally have been two ways of looking at it.

- [13 : 42] The modern way of kind of finding yourself, finding your purpose in life, finding out what you should be about is, I mean it's basically you ask yourself a few questions. You know, what am I good at?

Maybe I should do that. What gives me good feelings? Maybe I should do that. But the question itself is a very modern question.

A couple of hundred years ago, if you had asked somebody, you know, what's my purpose in life? Like if a kid, like an 18 year old having an identity crisis, went up to their parents and said, what am I going to do with my life? They would beat you.

Like what a stupid question. You know, go out to the field and pick some turnips. You know, like what do you mean what are you going to do with your life? Like that's just stupid. Well, what?

You're part of this family. Go and get me some sticks to start a fire or something. You know, you've got a task, get on with it. So I think that the traditional way of looking at this question is basically to ignore it.

- [14 : 41] It doesn't exist, which I think is dehumanizing. I think the modern way of looking at it, just find out what makes you feel good and what you're good at. That's just, that's just selfish. Christ's answer to this question is unlike any answer ever given before.

Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me. You've probably heard that verse before and you know what the great tragedy of this is?

The great tragedy is we fluff it. We read it and here's what we hear. You're right, Jesus. I need to give up some things. I need to give up some stuff.

We think of it in terms like that. I need to give up some activities which I like. Stuff or activities. We treat it like Lent.

We've got to give up chocolate for a month to make us feel kind of spiritual or something. We treat it like an extended Lent. If that's what we think it's saying, we haven't scratched the surface of the meaning.

- [15 : 47] It's not saying give up a few things you like. It's saying give up everything. Let's give up your whole life. Give up everything.

That's why it talks about the cross. Jesus hasn't brought up the cross before. He hasn't said previous to this, by the way, I'm going to be crucified. This is going to be our symbol. Just so you know that.

He didn't pull that imagery into this. No. From their mind, they hear the cross, they think instrument of death and torture. Before someone was crucified in the Roman world, the Romans would make the victims carry their cross to the point where they were crucified.

That's what Jesus is talking about, carrying your cross. When you saw someone carrying a cross, you knew that their life was forfeit. This is the way of Christ.

Christ. This is the way of discipleship. It's the way of death. It's the way of death to yourself, saying, I am no longer in charge of my life.

[16 : 53] And you know, it's the great paradox of Christianity, right? For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

It's a great paradox. You give up your life. You'll find yourself. You want to be free? Become a servant of Jesus and make Christ and his mission the heart of your world.

And this is going to involve suffering, but that is part of the Christian life. The Christian life is not glory, glory, glory, victory, victory, victory. That's a sign of spiritual immaturity, if you think that.

No, there is denying. There is suffering. There's a hard edge to it. I'm not saying there is no joy and happiness and praise and thankfulness. Obviously there are, and there are tons of scriptures that talk about that.

This one doesn't, so I'm not going to talk about it. It talks about the hard edge of discipleship. There is denying, there is suffering, and there is the ultimate denial of complete surrender.

[18 : 00] And I think the litmus test of this in your life is do you feel that bump?

Do you feel like your values bump up against societies? If they don't, you should ask yourself some tough questions. There's the story of a little boy who gets his hand caught in a priceless Ming vase.

Hands caught right in there. He can't get it out. They can't release it. It's tragedy. They have to break this priceless Ming vase. When they break it open, they find that his hand is balled up in a fist.

When he opens his fist, there's a dime in there. If he had let that dime go, if he had unball his fist, they wouldn't have had to break the vase. Christ invites us to follow him all the way to the cross, to be a part of his mission in the world.

That's the life for us. Anything else, you were just accumulating stuff and pleasurable experiences. We need people who are willing to unball our fists and let stuff go.

[19 : 13] You hold on to the dime, you lose the vase. You hold on to the small things, you lose the priceless thing. And these things which are holding us back from giving our whole lives to Christ, are trivial compared to the surpassing knowledge of being in a relationship, the wonder, the joy, the incredible thankfulness that comes with being in a relationship with Jesus.

And yet it is a paradox. Let me finish a bit on this paradox here. This is ultimately the path to freedom for us. I know it's counterintuitive, but let me give you some examples. many of us tonight, or many people, I'll just say people, people are often caught up or controlled by what others think, right?

Men often controlled by what women think of them, women often controlled by what men think of them, what parents think of us, what our peer group thinks of us, what our colleagues at work think of us.

When you give your life to Jesus, you have freedom from that. When you die to this life for the sake of Christ, these people no longer have control over you, because it's not your life.

Many of us are driven to be validated by financial, relational, and social success. We feel if we don't achieve these things, we don't count, we don't matter. the way of the cross frees us from that.

[20 : 52] You know Jesus died up on the cross, right? He died up there naked, moneyless, friendless, unmarried, and yet God was with him, and he was in the Father's perfect will.

If you follow him to the cross, your life might not fit into any normative pattern. and yet you are with the Father.

As we learnt a few weeks ago, it is better to be in the storm, in the water, with Jesus, than in the boat with a couple of other people.

You're free from the burden of thinking, man, my life doesn't match up to what society thinks it should. There's a story about a friend told me once about a career day at a high school.

It was a military career day. I guess they do this in the States. The Air Force and the Army and the Marines get one hour with the senior students of a high school. It was a big school. There were 500 students there.

[22 : 07] The headmaster or the principal said, okay, guys, you've got 20 minutes each to make you a big plug for your particular branch of the Armed Forces. The Air Force guy got carried away and he spoke for 30 minutes.

The Army guy didn't want to be outdone. He spoke for 25 minutes. It left five minutes for the guy to talk about the Marines. So he got up there and he spent four minutes just eyeballing everyone, just looking around the room, everyone in the room.

And then he said, I think there are only about three or four guys here who have what it takes to be in the Marines. And I want to see you guys afterwards. So of course, half the crowd went to see this guy.

Because there's something inside of us, eh? There is this spark, there is this hint, there is this thing inside of us that says, yes, we were built for something greater.

We were built for something greater than financial security and a pretty or handsome spouse and a good job.

[23 : 19] We were meant for something better than that. There's something more than just a cookie cutter life. And it's true, there is.

But we don't get it by grabbing the bull by the horns and being sort of like the marine type and being all you can be. We get it by letting go of everything.

Complete surrender to Christ. Lord, help us. Lord, help us do this. In Jesus' name.

Amen.