

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

March 15-21, 2020

Sermon Series: This Changes Everything

Week Three: "From Simon to Peter"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Lord of life and love, help us to worship You in the holiness of beauty, so that some beauty of holiness might appear in us. Quiet our souls in Your presence, with the stillness of a wise trust. Lift us above dark moods, and the shadow of sin, so that we may find Your will for our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Throughout the Gospels we find that when people encountered Jesus they were changed, and for the better. That same transformation is available to you, a change for the better, when you encounter Christ in your life.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

Simon goes from being a follower to becoming a leader of the church. First, though, his pride had to be challenged and he needed to adopt the humility of Christ. Does your faith lead you to a prideful attitude or to humble service?

Sunday Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:13-18 (A group member should read the passage aloud)

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

Who is Jesus talking to in this passage? Where are they? (16:13)

How does Jesus refer to Himself? (16:13)

What identities to various people assign to Jesus? (16:14)

What identity does Simon Peter assign to Jesus? What two names does Simon Peter use for this identity? (16:16)

What adjective does Jesus ascribe to Simon Peter as a result of his identification of Jesus? What part of his name does Jesus use in addressing him? (16:17)

How does Jesus say Peter came by this knowledge of Jesus' identity? (16:17)

What part of Simon Peter's name does Jesus emphasize after his declaration of Jesus' true identity? (16:18)

What does the name "Peter" signify in Greek? (footnotes to 16:18)

What will Peter become the foundation of? (16:18)

How strong will the church be? (16:18)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged. These are "I wonder" questions that the group might want to pursue together.

Why do you think Jesus refers to himself as "Son of Man" (or "The Human One" in some modern translations)?

Why do you think people would have thought he was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah? What might Jesus have done that reminded people of them?

What would have made Peter decide Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God"?

What do you think it implies for Jesus to say that His Father in heaven revealed that to Peter? What would make that different from Peter figuring it out on his own, or having someone else tell him?

Why would Jesus start referring to Simon Peter as "the Rock"? What personal attributes are implied by the name "the rock"? What change in Peter does this name change reflect?

What does building a church on a rock suggest? How is this related to the statement that the "gates of Hades will not overcome it"?

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: Matthew 8:27; 11:2; 12:23; 14:22-32; Galatians 1:16; Revelation 1:1; Ephesians 2:19-20; Acts 2:14-39; Acts 10; 1 Peter 2:4-8

Peter's proclamation that Jesus "is the Christ" is the climax of the first part of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is the declaration of Jesus' true identity that all of the teachings, miracles, and actions of Jesus up to this point have been leading to. In several other places in Matthew's Gospel, leading up to this, specific questions have been asked about just who this Jesus really is. In Matthew

8:27 the disciples ask, “What kind of man is this?” In Matthew 11:2, John the Baptist asks, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” In Matthew 12:23, all the people ask, “Could this be the Son of David?” And when Jesus walks on water, in Matthew 14:22-32, the disciples proclaim, “Truly you are the Son of God.” But now, after all of this, Peter reaches the climactic conclusion: “You are the Christ.”

For the purposes of this week’s lesson, though, it is Jesus’ response to Peter’s proclamation that we want to focus on. Jesus recognizes that Peter is “blessed” as a result of his confession. Because Jesus knows that this confession is the truth, he acknowledges that Peter’s recognition of it is evidence of a particularly intimate relationship between Peter and God the Father. In fact, Peter did not reason his way to this conclusion – it was revealed to him by God the Father. The word used here for “revealed” is the very same word that Paul uses in Galatians 1:16 to speak of God’s revealing the Son to him, and that John uses in Revelation 1:1 to describe his “revelation” of Jesus Christ. In first-century Jewish language, when GOD was spoken of as the one doing the “revealing,” it was understood to be God’s way of imparting divine, previously hidden, truths to humans. What had been hidden was now revealed. To receive such knowledge was indeed evidence of “blessedness”!

As the first to be blessed by God with this truth, Peter becomes the de facto leader of the early church. Scholars disagree about whether Jesus gave Simon the new name “Peter,” or if he already had that name. Many Jews had both Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek names in first century Israel, and Peter goes by this name throughout the earlier gospel narrative. Is this because he already had that name, or because the story applies the name he was later known by even in the parts of the story that happened before the name change? It is probably impossible to know. In Aramaic, the name “Cepha” was common, and it literally means “rock.” The Greek name “Petros,” on the other hand, was not known as a name prior to Peter. The gospel writers’ use of the word to translate the Aramaic name “Cepha” was a masculinization of the feminine word for “stone,” “petra,” and the name became quite popular among early Christ-followers. Whether Jesus gave him a new name, or gave new significance to a name he already had, it is clear that the rock imagery is meant to convey an image of stability and endurance. Jesus will build a new community upon the foundation of the apostles (see Ephesians 2:19-20 for Paul’s use of this metaphor), and Peter has been designated as the first leader of this community (see Acts 2-4) – the rock upon which Christ will build his church. With such a stable and enduring foundation, the structure that is the church will stand against even “the gates of Hades.” The church is eternal – death itself has no power to defeat it!

It is clear from the stories that come after Peter’s declaration that this image of stability and endurance did not refer to an immediate change in Peter’s character itself. Even after this scene, Peter exhibits pride, fear, doubt, and disloyalty. And yet, Peter is being transformed into someone who will become the foundation of the church. Peter is still learning as a follower of Christ, and with each failure, Peter learns another lesson in servant leadership. But with the coming of the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter will fully inherit from Christ the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). The early chapters of Acts demonstrate clearly that Peter was the driving force in the earliest spread of the Gospel – even among the Gentiles (Acts 10). But even this “Rock” upon whom the church was built recognized, in humility, that he himself was but one stone among many, all of whom depended upon Christ – the “living Stone” (1 Peter 2:4-8).

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

How has making the declaration that “Jesus is the Christ” changed your life?

Are you more comfortable in the role of follower or leader?

If you answered “follower,” are there places where God is calling you to lead, but you are saying “no” because it is uncomfortable?

If you answered “leader,” is it from a place of pride (you just want to be in charge), or a place of humble service (you acknowledge that you lead as a representative of Christ, who is truly in charge)?

Do you have a clear picture of how God intends to use you, as a “stone” in the structure of the church?

If your “stone” stands on a stone that stands on a stone that stands on a stone that eventually stands on Peter (who stands on Christ), are there stones that are standing on you? How are you serving as one part of a stable and enduring foundation for their faith?

How do you demonstrate through servant leadership that your own faith is built on Christ, such that people put their faith in Him, not in you?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Loving God, teach us what it means to be a servant leader. Show us the places in our lives where we are called to lead, rather than to follow. Help us to adopt the humility of Christ, who shows us how to lead. And through the power of Your Holy Spirit, bless us with stability and endurance, so that we might serve as examples of faith for others. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.