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## A Rock On Which To Build

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### Matthew 16:13-18a

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, *“Who do men say that the Son of man is?”* And they said, *“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”* He said to them, *“But who do you say that I am?”* Simon Peter replied, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* And Jesus answered him, *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...”*

Maybe you know some people like these.

Maybe you know someone like the man who is an usher in a large church. That church has a lot of wealthy and well educated people in it, a lot of professional and business people in it.

But this fellow is not one of those people; he is a poor, uneducated, hard-working regular guy who makes his living as a mechanic. In his younger days, he had an accident on his job, and lost most of the first three fingers on his right hand.

One of his jobs as an usher at church is to count the attendance at every service. What he does, every Sunday morning, after the opening hymn has been sung, is walk down the side aisle, jabbing what is left of his index finger into the air as he points at each person, counting attendance.

When he sees a youngster who is looking back at him, he always does the same thing. He appears to poke his finger - his finger that isn't

there - all the way into his ear. He crosses his eyes, and sticks out his tongue.

Every Sunday morning,  
     during the Invocation,  
         during the announcements,  
             during the solemn service,

the rest of the people can hear the squeals of laughter coming from the children as that usher pokes his missing finger in his ear, makes his faces, and then goes on his way toward the back of the sanctuary.

Now some of the people think his behavior is shameful. They think the minister should make him stop.

Maybe you know someone like the elderly gentleman whose great love is to make evangelistic calls on behalf of his church. He checks the visitor's sign-in book every Sunday, and if a visitor writes in a name and address, this fellow shows up at the visitor's door on Tuesday evening.

Some people think he's too much of a blunt talker to go out and visit visitors.

Here's what he says to those unsuspecting visitors: "How long have you lived here," he asks. "Eight months! And you're still shopping around for a church!

"Well, are you still looking for a school for your children to attend? Are you still shopping for a pediatrician? Have you bothered to make a commitment to a local bank, yet? I know you've done all that. So, why haven't you joined a church, yet? What are you waiting for?"

Some people in his church are offended by his bluntness. They think the minister should make him stop.

Maybe you know someone like the "Candy Man." That's what they call him because every Sunday morning he shows up at church with a bag full of candy. He stands at the door of the sanctuary and passes out cellophane wrapped candy to all the children.

All during the service, the sound of cellophane wrappers being opened drowns out some of the prayers. After the service, the church is littered with cast-off cellophane, while a whole bunch of sticky two and three and four-year-olds are herded off toward the wash basins.

Some of the mothers think the minister should make the Candy Man stop passing out candy.

Maybe you know someone like the woman who finally made her dream trip to Rome. She dreamed about making that trip for decades. It took her that long to save up enough money to do it up right.

When she got back, she had with her hundreds of pictures. She put them together into a slide show presentation, and whenever anyone visited her, she'd set up her screen, pull out her slides, and re-live her dream trip to Rome. Actually, she got real good with her presentation. Her knowledge of ancient Rome was superior.

She learned to limit her presentation. She honed her lecture to truly interesting facts. She actually was asked to present her slide show to different groups and clubs.

The last picture she always put on the screen was of the Appian Way, the ancient highway outside of Rome - that first road of all the roads that lead to Rome. And she would always say, "My heart was moved as I realized that on these very stones on which my feet stepped, our Lord Jesus Christ himself had walked."

You all know what's wrong with that. Jesus never went to Rome. He never got within five hundred miles of Rome!

Some people think her minister ought to set her straight.

Maybe you know someone like this last fellow. He proved himself to be intelligent and capable, and although he was a relative newcomer to the church - because he was a good steward of his personal financial resources, because he was a willing worker - he was made the chairman of the stewardship committee.

He was worldly wise in business, but he was naive about church business. It shocked him to learn that there were people in the church who did not give regularly. It shocked him to learn that there were even some people who were very active in the church who didn't give a thing.

He thought something ought to be done about that. So, he had his private secretary type up letters on his private stationary. He provided all the postage himself. He sent about a hundred letters out into the community. All hundred letters were addressed to members of his church who were not giving money to the church.

"I can't believe you don't give to our church," his letter began. "I know how much money we need to support the church. Who do you expect to provide that money," he asked in the letter.

He ended his letter with this observation: “One of the church’s duties is to train people to be good stewards of their possessions. Inasmuch as we are failing completely in this duty with you, maybe it would be to your advantage to find a church that will succeed in doing just that.”

There were two days of ominous quiet as the US Postal Service went its deliberate way. Then, suddenly, the phone started ringing. It wasn’t the new chairman of the stewardship department’s phone ringing. No, it wasn’t the author of the letter’s phone that was ringing. It was the innocent, ignorant minister’s phone that rang. They wanted they minister to do something about this situation! For weeks, the ringing of the telephone caused the minister to shudder and cringe.

Do you know any people like them? They all have three things in common.

First, they all had a minister who didn’t say anything to them.

Second, they all are people who made mistakes. They all stumbled and fell and rubbed somebody else the wrong way.

And third, they all are people who tried. They gave it a shot. They tried to do something.

They are people who brought their varied gifts and gave them. They weren’t perfect gifts, but they were good, honest gifts.

Do you know anybody like that? If you look around this room, starting with me, you’re going to see some people like that. You’re going to see some people who stumble and fall, some people who make mistakes, some people who give imperfect gifts.

They’re the kind of people with whom Jesus Christ surrounded himself. In fact, his right-hand man was like that.

His name was Simon. He was a stumbling, bumbling, mistake-prone fellow; but there was something about him that Jesus really liked. Jesus really liked Simon, because Simon was the kind of man who was not afraid to try. He was willing to speak his mind. He was willing to give his gift, no matter how flawed it was, and he always did it unashamed.

There were moments when Simon soared like an eagle, but there were other moments when he crashed and burned. He was a big, rough fisherman - a guy who prayed one moment and cursed the next.

Simon was there the day Jesus asked, “*Who do men say that the Son of man is?*” [Matthew 16:13] The other disciples flirted with an answer.

“They say you’re John the Baptist... or Eiljah... or Jeremiah... or one of the prophets.”

Jesus changed his question. *“But who do you say that I am?”* [Matthew 16:15] And Simon rushed in with his answer. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” [Matthew 16:16]

At that moment Simon soared higher than any man had ever soared before. It was an incredible moment. Simon’s answer is the greatest statement of faith in the scriptures. It was his best moment.

Jesus must have been so proud of Simon. Jesus went on to tell the disciples about his God-determined destination of Jerusalem, where Jesus would have to suffer and die.

But impetuous Simon didn’t know when to keep his mouth shut. Simon spoke up again. “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” [Matthew 16:22]

Up until then, Simon had been soaring, but then, he crashed and burned. Jesus looked at him and said, *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me...”* [Matthew 16:23]

That was just like Simon. He didn’t know when to keep his big mouth shut. He didn’t know when to keep his opinions to himself. He didn’t know when to think before speaking. His big mouth kept getting him in trouble.

But Jesus liked Simon for his big mouth. Jesus saw through all of Simon’s mistakes, all of his blunders, all of his speaking before thinking - surely, when Jesus looked at Simon, he saw a man who was flawed. But, Jesus knew Simon was a flawed man who always acted out of love.

Simon was the kind of man who had good motives, but the wrong technique.

All of you married women out there - wouldn’t it be great if your husband left you a little message tomorrow morning, a little written note that said, “I love you” - wouldn’t that be great? But what if he wrote that message in the dust on the dining room table?

Good idea - wrong technique.

That was one of Simon’s specialties.

Look at what Simon did this time. Jesus told his disciples not to depend on wealth and riches. Jesus said, *“Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is*

*easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*” [Matthew 19:23-24]

And Simon wanted to point out that he had given up everything he had to follow Jesus. “Lo, we have left everything and followed you,” Simon said. Then, he added, “What then shall we have?” [Matthew 19:27]

Simon was ready to embrace the theory of unselfish service and sacrifice, but somewhere in his mind was the thought that there had to be something in it for him. “What’s my reward going to be,” he asked Jesus. “What am I going to get out of following you?”

Doesn’t Simon speak for you? Don’t you want to know what’s in it for you, too?

Look at what Simon did this time. He was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas had kissed Jesus. The soldiers were moving in for an arrest. And, Simon pulled out a sword!

What was Simon doing with a sword? Jesus was a man of peace. Jesus never advocated violence. Jesus never condoned violence. After all the time Simon had spent in Jesus’ presence, Simon showed up there, at a place of prayer, carrying a sword!

Simon heard Jesus say, “*Love your enemies...*” [Matthew 5:44]

And Simon said, “That’s the truth, Jesus!”

He heard Jesus say, “*Do not resist one who is evil... if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...*” [Matthew 5:39]

And Simon said, “Amen to that!”

He heard Jesus say, “*Blessed are the peacemakers...*” [Matthew 5:9]

And Simon said, “Tell it like it is!”

Always in agreement, listening to everything Jesus had to say, but all the while Simon could feel the security of cold, hard steel hidden away. Yes, he agreed with what Jesus had to say, but he always had a sword “just in case.”

Look at what Simon did this time. He had heard Jesus talking about forgiveness, and he said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” [Matthew 18:21] He wanted to know how many times, exactly he had to forgive.

Remember, Simon is the one who wanted to walk on the water with Jesus, but I suspect he would have worn a life preserver had he had one.

Simon was the fellow who was always stumbling, always fumbling, always saying the wrong thing.

Simon's no stranger to you, is he? He's just like you. Moved to faithful obedience one moment, than disobeying the next. Climbing out of your boat in courageous faith, then slipping under the surface in a fog of doubt. Nodding your head in agreement with lofty goals of brotherhood and peace, yet hiding a sword away "just in case." Pledging undying loyalty no matter what comes, then falling asleep.

But do you know what? The man who made all those mistakes, that stumbling, bumbling, mistake-making man was the one Jesus called his "rock."

*"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona!"* Jesus said. *"... You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church..."* [Matthew 16:17-18]

"Peter" is the English translation of the Greek word "Petros" which means rock. Simon was his rock, the firm foundation upon which Jesus would build his church.

You can be his rock upon which he builds his church today. You!

Jesus wants you. He wants you to be willing to make mistakes for him. He wants you to be ready to blunder ahead for him. He wants you to give all of your imperfect gifts - your warts, your blemishes, your flaws - he wants you to give them all and let his church be built on the foundation of your faith - a faith that is strong enough, and brave enough, and courageous enough to stumble.

You can look back at your life, and think you're not good enough.

You can remember all your failures and figure you're not smart enough.

You can look in a mirror and picture you're not pretty enough.

You can moan over all the aches and pains and feel you're not young enough.

Well, it's time to remember Simon, the rock.

Your song may come out a little off key, but keep on singing it.

Your prayer may be awkward and disjointed, but keep on praying it.

Your personal witness for Christ may be filled with mistakes, but keep on witnessing to God's good work in your life.

Certainly, my friends, certainly, almost every gift that's given comes out a little bit flawed. Certainly some days are going to be better than other days. Certainly you're going to make some mistakes along the way.

But remember Simon, the rock.

Jesus wants you to be his rock right here, right now.

You can be the rock.

You can be the foundation

upon which this church is built.

There's nobody else to do it. It has to be you.

Can your God,

can your Jesus,

can your church

build a future on you?