



## Week 5: Persistence

### Day 1 - The Faith of Simon Peter, Part 1

#### Matthew 16:13-23

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' <sup>14</sup>And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' <sup>15</sup>He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' <sup>20</sup>Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

<sup>21</sup> From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup>And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' <sup>23</sup>But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

#### Understanding the Passage:

So which is he—Stone or Satan?

His name used to be Simon son of Jonah (at least that's who he was when he first got involved with Jesus). But he's a different kind of man now. He's the first person in human history to make a confession of faith in Jesus as the Chosen One of God, so Jesus gives him a new name. Now he's Peter, or *Petros* in Greek, meaning Stone. Simon son of Jonah is the cornerstone on which Jesus will build his Kingdom movement.

We must remember there's nothing extraordinary about Stone. He's perfectly normal people. If you passed him on the street, you wouldn't recognize him, and he wouldn't draw attention. He's nobody and he's everybody. Stone is one of the billions of normal humans you've never heard of and will never meet.

But that's what makes his confession so important. He's all of us. He could be any of us. He *is* us, when we strip away the labels we like to wear. And for a moment—until there's a

second person to confess Jesus is the Messiah—Stone is the one believer on the planet, the only believer who has ever lived.

Let's pause for a moment and thank Simon Peter. Without him, there's no us.

But then Jesus starts being clear about what it takes to be the Chosen One. It means humiliating failure. There's no glory, no fanfare, no approval from the people who matter. And suddenly the Church of Jesus Christ loses its one member. Now Simon isn't Stone anymore. He's Satan. He's the Tempter himself. Tempting Jesus to take the easy way of being the Chosen One; the way of heroics, instead of the right way; the way of sacrifice.

So which is he—Stone or Satan?

But, let's thank Peter again because he is more than a model for the confession of faith. He's a model for the endurance of faith.

Peter gets Jesus right, then he gets Jesus wrong, and then he tries again. He doesn't give up. He keeps going.

Peter shows us the humanity of faith. Nothing is more human than being right, then being told you're wrong, then trying again. You score, you fail big time, and you play again. You live, your body lets you down and you die, and you live again. It's the human story. It's the *humane* story.

Let's try for a more humane faith. A humane faith won't see failure or doubt as problems. If the goal was perfection, then yes, failure and doubt would be dangerous. But perfection isn't humane. The word we're looking for is, progress. Progress assumes the rules of winning, losing, and trying again. Peter will make progress—not today but eventually—and that's what matters. Let's aim for progress in our faith, never perfection.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. When have you gotten Jesus wrong? What were the consequences?
2. When have you gotten in the way of someone else's faith?
3. What are you trying to learn about God these days? What are you struggling with?

## **Day 2 - The Faith of Simon Peter, Part 2**

### **John 21:15-21**

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' <sup>16</sup>A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' <sup>17</sup>He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup>Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' <sup>19</sup>(He said this to

indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

### **Understanding the Passage:**

More than any of the other Gospels, John sees Peter's betrayal of Jesus as a huge problem. Peter was supposed to be the Chief Executive Officer of the early church. How can Peter be the leader when he was so cruel to Jesus? Peter had the chance to step up and prove his loyalty. He could have saved Jesus! But he blew it. He all but murdered Jesus himself because of his failure to do the right thing.

Therefore, Peter's leadership in the church is a red flag. He could be leading the church down a wrong path because he doesn't understand the gravity of his actions and hasn't experienced what it's like to be forgiven. How can Peter speak hard truths to religious leaders when he hasn't heard the truth of his own sin? And how can he preach grace and forgiveness when he hasn't received it for himself?

So John makes sure to include this story. Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus, and three times Jesus will ask, "Do you love me?"—one for each denial. In the first two questions, Jesus uses the word *agape*, as in, do you *agape* me? *Agape* means self-sacrificing. Does Peter love Jesus in a self-sacrificing way? And as if Peter didn't hear Jesus clearly, or didn't want to hear him, Peter replies, "Yes, Lord, you know that I *philos* you." *Philos* means friendship. It is friend love. So no, Peter doesn't love Jesus in a self-sacrificing way. He loves Jesus in a friend way.

The third time, Jesus asks, "Do you *philos* me?" and Peter replies, "You know that I *philos* you." Jesus stops asking for something that Peter obviously isn't ready to give. One day, Peter will love Jesus in a self-sacrificing way. But not yet, not today. Today we're stuck on friendship. Peter could do worse.

Here we see two important lessons. First, in the long journey of faith, we will mess up and it won't be without consequences. We will need to be forgiven. We will need to be restored into the circle of grace just like Peter was.

And we shouldn't get in the way of our own forgiveness. We treat forgiveness as radioactive. Yes, it has its purposes in certain controlled circumstances and it may work for other people, but we'd never try it ourselves. We're somehow above it. We somehow don't need it, or shouldn't need it. But we do ourselves a great disservice when we don't take our own sin seriously, avoid the necessary pain of self-awareness, and allow ourselves to be forgiven. To be forgiven is to see our mistakes for what they are: missed-takes at being who we knew we should have been. Let us not feign blindness. Let us see them for what they are and allow ourselves to be forgiven. Only then, like Peter, can we move on.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. When have you betrayed Jesus in thought, word, or deed in the past week?
2. Think of a time when you felt welcomed back into the fold.
3. What's the next step in your journey with Jesus? It doesn't have to be big. What's the next right small step?

## Day 3 - The Faith of John of Patmos

### Revelation 1:9-11

9 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup>saying, 'Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.'

### Understanding the Passage:

So begins the first vision of the prophet John on the island of Patmos. He'll have three more visions, curate them all in a letter, and address the letter to these seven churches in Asia Minor (what is now the country of Turkey). Yes, Revelation was a *letter* and not, as you might have heard, a heavily coded fortune-telling of what the end of the world will be like. He was writing to his church members—people he knew and loved, people in a specific time and place—and interpreting the tragedies of the present in the context of the ultimate victory of Jesus.

Here at the beginning, John is placing himself in his church members' shoes. They're being persecuted for claiming Christ as Lord; so is he (he's in exile and separated from his churches by sea). Their citizenship is in the Kingdom of God—so is his. And they're enduring the hardships of this present season of suffering, with no end in sight—so is he.

What's John's advice? He's a pastor, after all, and we look to our pastors for advice—if not solid answers then at least a little bit of wisdom. So here's Pastor John's advice (this, by the way, is what Revelation is all about, so mystery solved, you're welcome):

Be faithful. When times are hard; when there's no light at the end of the tunnel; when you don't know where you're going, be faithful—which is the same thing as saying—don't aim to be successful. Don't aim to be perfect. Don't aim to have all the answers, or any answers. Don't even aim to know God's will. All you need is faithfulness.

Faithfulness has almost the same meaning as integrity, except integrity means being true to who you are, whereas faithfulness means being true to who God says you are. God says you are beloved, chosen to live according to God's ways, set apart from the world, and meant to live for love of God and love of neighbor. For the rest of Revelation, John will lay out in graphic and, admittedly, mind-numbing complexity what it means to be faithful to who God says you are.

But we can't go wrong with sticking to the Way of Jesus. It's a pattern of living, a method of life. And though it's the harder way, Jesus calls it abundant life. To be faithful is to being true to that path with every second and every breath. It's who you are for the long haul. Yes, it's a hard haul. It's a grind. It's a hustle. But that's life. You can't be faithful without obeying what Jesus (almost) said: Blessed are the gritty, for they shall endure.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When have you compromised your values because it was the easier thing to do?
2. When did you *not* compromise your values and you had to endure the consequences?
3. If you could write a letter to yourself at the beginning of the pandemic, what would you say?

## Day 4 - The Faith of the Syrophenician Woman

### Matthew 15:21-28

21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' <sup>24</sup>He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' <sup>26</sup>He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' <sup>27</sup>She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

### Understanding the Passage:

This one is hard. There's no getting around Jesus calling this woman a "dog." It's there and we can't avoid it. So what's going on here?

We have to remember something fundamental about Jesus: his ministry was to his family, and his family was the people of Israel. That means Gentiles, non-Jews, were not the focus of Jesus' ministry. When Gentiles show up in the Gospels, it's like they're extras in a movie where the lead actor is Jesus and the lead actor's family is Israel. The lead actor is on a mission to save his family no matter the cost. The extras are, well, extra to the plot. They're mostly irrelevant.

But here comes this Canaanite woman from the region outside Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon are huge cities. This woman isn't from there. She's from the small town outside the big city, the kind of place you stop to get gas and a soda, and you forget people actually live there. Who knows how many times she walked to the big city looking for help for her daughter? Who knows how much money she wasted on big city priests?

She calls Jesus, "Lord, Son of David." This is nothing short of a confession of faith in Jesus, making her nothing less than a Gentile believer. To the disciples, this would have been absurd and gross, like a cockroach with antlers (terrifying), so they try to shoo her away like the bug she is. Jesus is a bit more compassionate. He doesn't shoo her away, but he doesn't appreciate her company either. Remember, he was sent to save his family, and she's not part of the family. At best, she's an extra on the set.

But the woman keeps pressing, and therein lies the lesson. She pesters Jesus. Yes, that's the lesson: pester Jesus. She makes a good point that even dogs (Gentiles) are allowed to eat the crumbs (blessings) from the masters' table (where only Israel can sit). And Jesus grants

her wish. She's smart. She's savvy. She's desperate. She's relentless. Sounds like a good mom.

Being a pest may not sound like a profound lesson. Maybe you were hoping for something deeper. But then again, the things we want most in life are the things we're willing to bother other people for. If my child gets sick, I have no problem pestering the insurance people. If you want the job, you find a way to get your name across that person's desk. If you want to win the game badly enough, you'll push the referee on a close call. It's a rule of life: if it matters to you, you'll be a nuisance until you get it.

So why should it be different with Jesus? Maybe Jesus should be above pestering. But that wouldn't be a Jesus we'd recognize. He's God in the flesh, but the wrong kind of flesh. What we have in Jesus is someone who wants to be pestered, someone who wants to be inconvenienced. Pushed until you get his attention, because it shows your faith is more than lip-service; it's a matter of life and death and life again.

The woman can't *not* go back to Jesus. She has no choice. Jesus is her only hope. May it be so with us. May Jesus be our one and only hope—the One we go back to because we have nowhere else to go.

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. What questions about this passage remain unanswered for you?
2. When has your faith felt most challenged? What sustained you? Or what do you wish had sustained you?
3. What is your one most fervent prayer today?

## **Day 5 - The Faith of Little Children**

### **Mark 10:13-16**

13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' <sup>16</sup>And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

#### **Understanding the Passage:**

It's a message so simple and pure that it hardly needs explaining; all the books in the world couldn't do it justice. Be like a child. If you want to live by Kingdom rules, be like a child. If you want faith the Jesus way, be like a child.

But there's no stopping the adult in us from going, "Yeah, sure. Have faith like a child, I get it. Now tell me what to do to have faith like a child. Give me the *5 Steps to Having Childlike Faith*. Lay it out for me. I can do this."

Adults must be so frustrating to children. Here we are with our rules and policies—our do's and don'ts—all work and no play. But children just *exist*, and by their very existence they

live deeply. What happens to us when we get older that we can't simply exist anymore? That's the billion-dollar question Jesus never answers.

Instead, all he does is lift up a child as a living sermon example and say, "Look at this little one. This is what faith looks like. Be like a child." What does it mean? We have to drop all language of "doing" out of our vocabulary. We can't "do" Jesus, not any more than newborn babies can "do" anything. They are moved and positioned like so many chubby potted plants. The disciples love to think they can "do" Jesus. They are so wrong and don't know it yet.

Faith like a child has to be about "being" so that knowing Jesus is as effortless as existing. The child doesn't "do" anything to earn Jesus. The child is simply with Jesus, as Jesus is simply with her, and the child accepts this situation as a fact of life. Nothing strange here. No work here. Only being with one another.

So for now, there's where we land: being with one another. If you want faith like a child, simply be with Jesus, for Jesus is with you and there's no preventing it. It sounds so simple, being with Jesus, but if you want faith that lasts for a lifetime, when life is at its worst and best and everything in between, Jesus being with you is the constant. Let's not make this harder than it is.

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Why is it so hard to have faith like a child?
2. Would you have stopped the children from coming to Jesus?
3. Pray for at least three children by name right now.

#### **Video Discussion Questions:**

1. What are you enduring right now? What concrete choices are you making to respond?
2. How would you describe an endurance mindset?
3. What did Dr. Pace mean by the Kingdom being bracketed by persecution and patient-suffering? How does that change the meaning of the Kingdom of God?
4. How does Peter illustrate a resilient faith?
5. How does Dr. Pace describe resilience?
6. How can repentance ever be gentle?
7. Why is stubborn persistence a crucial element of faith?
8. How can you be pursuing Jesus with childlike stubbornness today?