

## Sermon- You will be called little Rock

Scripture: John 1:42

Nov 22, 2015

Last Sunday we saw the calling of Jesus' very first disciples. In fact they were the first two, Andrew and most likely John. This week we will be looking at the third disciple who came to Jesus, Andrew's brother Peter. Now Peter came to Jesus because Andrew told Peter that they had found the Messiah. Now Peter as you know becomes the head of all the disciples and this first encounter between Jesus and one of the 12 is very uniquely described in our passage and that is what we are going to look into today.

To get into our story you have to picture this encounter in your mind. Andrew is bringing Peter with him to see Jesus. Now when they approach Jesus suddenly, Jesus looks at Peter intently. Some commentators have described it as Jesus looked into his soul. I don't know if you have ever had that experience. I remember once when I was in school now I did pretty decent. I was very on top of the class but I was always above average and I usually did the best in Science and Math because and I could understand it easily. On the other hand the local languages were my thorn in the flesh. It was in those languages that would test how low I could go score wise. And I remember the first time I actually failed a test in was in my Hindi class. I really could not bear the thought of showing my report card to my parents. But that day I knew I had to go home and I knew I had to show my parents my report. Personally I think that period between when you get your score and when your parents come to know about it is the worst period in any kid's life. I remember that day as I walked home I was running all these opening statements in my head trying to figure out the best way to break the news and soften the blow. Then I walk in the house and my mom takes one look at me and asks "what's wrong?" The funny thing is at that point she has already looked into your soul and seen something there and they is no point in hiding anything even for a minute so I spilled the beans. I tell her exactly what happened. No chance to soften the blow or anything. But when you look at relationships, you can put up a front quite easily with a stranger or even a casual friends. But the longer and more intimately you know an individual the less easy it is to fool them. Now you might be thinking, yes that is true, I know exactly what you are talking about but how is this relevant here in our passage because we are talking about Jesus' very first encounter with someone. Good question, let me address that. You see besides emotional closeness to an individual, there is also the matter of the authority level of the person you are dealing with. The higher up an individual is the

more the risk there is in lying to them because the higher the individual the smarter they are and the more sources they have are connected to be able to find out the truth. So that is very in an interrogation people spill the beans when the interrogator establishes his authority. Two concepts here, the more emotionally connected you are to someone and the more authority a person has the more transparent you become to them. This is true at the human level. Now when you think of your relationship with God. God is someone who has the highest level of authority and knowledge about everything right? But you might ask the question, God may have the capacity to know but does he want to know people everything about me. After all there are 7 billion over people on the planet right now and I personally am really not that important anyway. Well to find out who God is interested in we have to take a quick look at what the Bible says. I want to start my survey with two Psalms, beginning with Psalm 1. Psalm 1 describes two kinds of people, the righteous person who enjoys God's words and his commandments and the wicked person who scoffs at God's commandments. Now I want to point out that the righteous person is not necessarily a sinless person. The righteous person is just someone like King David who found a certain joy in God's commandments. Now in verse 6 you will find that it says God "knows" the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Another Psalm which is a favorite of many people Ps 139 opens with these words, "you have searched me and you know me. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely". Verse 6 goes on to say "such knowledge is too wonderful for me". But there is one more thing that the Bible reveals to us about himself and that is the depth of his love for us. John 3:16 says, God so loved the world, meaning you and me that he send his son to die for us, so that we could have eternal life. In other words God loves you more than any human being on this planet, more than your parents and more than your spouse even. So let's piece the whole picture together now. When you look at God, you are looking at someone who has the highest level of authority in the universe, the highest capacity to know and the highest desire to know you. There is nothing hidden from God. One more thing God may love you and know you deeply. But it only helps you if you turn your face towards him. James 4 and verse 8 puts it this way. It says, "Draw near to me and I will draw near to you". And this is what you were witnessing when Andrew's brother Simon stepped towards Jesus that day 2000 years ago. As he walked closer to Jesus began to look at Simon. He did not just look at his clothes or his face or even his eyes. He looked beyond to what he was thinking and even beyond that to what he was going to think. As Peter drew near to Jesus, Jesus looks right into his soul.

Then Jesus does something stunning. He introduces Peter to himself. Isn't that just mind boggling? In every normal human interaction, you introduce yourself or a mutual friend

would introduce you. But here Jesus introduces Peter to himself. And this introduction is remarkable because it includes not just the individual who exists right now but even the individual who he will become in the future. Now this is a huge revelation of identity and that is why we need to spend some time understanding what Jesus is revealing here. Let's start with the basics. First Jesus tells him, you are Simon son of John. Now the name Simon means "obedient". So Jesus is naming Simon's character trait of obedience here. Now there is an exact parallel to this first encounter in Matt 16 Verse 17-18. And in Matt there are some small differences in the details that I want to explain. So in Matt Jesus addresses him as Simon, Son of Jonah instead of John. You may wonder then who is Simon's actual father, John or Jonah. Well, actually in the Jewish culture "Son of Jonah" was actually a Jewish idiom. Now Jonah literally meant "dove" and so the phrase "Son of Jonah" literally meant "son of a dove". Of course I just don't see the phrase "son of a dove" becoming popular in American culture but in Jewish culture of that time it was actually a complement and it also seamlessly matches the obedience that Simon's name communicated. Now you might say, first of all "obedience" does not sound like an impressive trait. After all would you put "obedience" on your resume or would someone standing for higher office try to sell you on how "obedient" he or she was? No not really. But as an aside, to Jesus this trait of obedience was important enough that it made him choose this disciple as the leader of his group of 12. Why is that? You see in our culture, it is leadership that is prized. When you go into a bookstore it is books about leadership that are really popular. But when you look at the Bible, the emphasis is not on leadership but "discipleship". And discipleship is about mastering the art of being a follower of Jesus. Now the paradox of the kingdom of God is that when you become a faithful disciple of Jesus, then leadership roles will be assigned to you as a byproduct of the kind of follower you are. And Jesus recognized that obedience was written into the soul of Simon. And so he points this out to Simon in his very first encounter. Jesus tells him you as Simon, the obedient one.

Then he does something even more shocking. He tells him "you will be called a rock!" Well, Jesus uses the Aramaic word Cephias, which is Peter and means "a rock". This needs a little clarification. If you are thinking is not one of Jesus' own titles the Rock. You are absolutely right. And Cephias actually means "little rock" and not the Rock. In the Old Testament in a number of places twice just in Deut 32 verse 4 and verse 18 Moses refers to God himself as the Rock. In the New Testament in Matt 21:42 Jesus is talking about himself by quoting Ps 118:22, like this, "The very Stone which the builders rejected *and* threw away has become the Cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" So clearly there is no doubt that Jesus Christ is The Rock. So the new identity Jesus is giving Peter is not the Rock but the "little Rock" representing the Big Rock who is

Christ alone. Now changing someone's name is quite a big deal. Again of the 12, Peter is the only one who got a name change at least that was explicitly described. I also want to clarify here that Peter's naming is a little different from other name changes you see in the Old Testament. When you look at the name change of Jacob to Israel or Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah, those changes represented an old identity being overridden by a new identity. The difference here is Jesus is not overriding Peter's old name. Jesus here is simply giving him one more name. And that is why in the Gospel of John itself there are 15 places where this disciple is referred to by both names as Simon Peter. Because to Jesus both the qualities of Simon and Peter were important. When Jesus saw Simon Peter he saw someone who had obedience written on his soul, and going forward he would be a rock solid and dependable disciple, upon whom Jesus would establish the greatest "disciple making movement" in the history of the world.

Now you might say, wait a minute preacher. When you look at the stories of Peter in the Gospel neither obedience nor dependability come to mind. In fact in Matthew's Gospel chap 16 in verse 18 Jesus is calling Simon little Rock and 5 verses later he is rebuking him saying, "get behind me Satan". The Peter we see in the Gospels is impulsive, always putting his foot in his mouth and worst of all is that denies Jesus within 24 hours of boasting that he would follow him to his death. That does not look either obedient or dependable. Well, here is the deal. All this was surely known to Jesus before it even happened. In fact you can even say that he even say all this happening when he first looked at Peter. But Jesus is looking so intently that he sees even beyond all these follies of Peter to a time when the Holy Spirit would come on Peter. Jesus can see that Peter's immediately visible personality is actually linked to his sinful nature, but beyond all that there was another Peter that God created who was obedient and dependable when the Holy Spirit is in control. The old Peter may have denied knowing Jesus 3 times before a servant girl before Jesus' crucifixion. But here is what we know about the new Peter who eventually emerged. Tradition has it that Peter died being crucified upside down. And do you know why he was crucified upside down. Because Peter did not consider himself worthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus so he begged to be crucified upside down. I know this is hard to even picture but Jesus looked so intently at Peter that day that he would literally see this new Peter emerge, one who was obedient to the point of death and dependable enough to be able to lead the other disciples to Christ.

This brings it us as individuals who are becoming more faithful Disciples of Christ. Part of the process of becoming a disciple is allowing ours very souls to be examined by Jesus. Who are you at the very core of your being? When you allow the spirit of God to come

into you, he enables you to participate in this deep soul searching experience that questions everything about who you are. Your personality, your past and survival strategies that have made you who you are. Nothing is hidden from God. But remember this, nothing remains the same when God's eyes examine it. Just like Jesus did for Simon, Christ is inviting you to today to an examination of your soul to transform you to someone only God can make you because that was who he shaped you to be even before you were in your mother's womb. So here the words of Christ, introducing yourself to the real you and to the person you will become. You are Simon by friends, and you will be called Cephas! Let us pray.