

IT'S ALL IN THE NAME

1 PETER 1:1, MATTHEW 16:13-18

In the first century, letters were written on scrolls that were unrolled as they were read. Today we conclude our letters with a signature, but that wasn't the case in the ancient world. Imagine receiving a letter and having to unroll this lengthy scroll just to identify the sender.

That's why in ancient times letters were signed upfront – at the top.

And here we learn from verse 1 this letter was written by **“Peter...”**

Ever noticed how some people are given names that fit them perfectly...

Recently, I ran across a list of doctors whose names describe their profession. How about, **“Dr. Lana Cain”** or **“Dr. James D. Cure”**

Or the optometrist named, **“Dr. T.C. Moore”** or **“Dr. Seymour Kern”**

How about the pediatricians: **“Dr. Kidd”** and **“Dr. Small”**

Or the podiatrists: **“Dr. Hopper”** and **“Dr. Toback”**

Or these surgeons: **“Dr. Gutman,” “Dr. Hacker,” “Dr. Kutteroff”**

Or these doctors who entered Family Practice:

“Dr. Howard Hertz” and **“Dr. Michael Achey”** and **“Dr. Stasick”**

Or the psychiatrist: **“Dr. John Looney”**

Here are three dermatologists:

“Dr. Whitehead,” “Dr. Skinner,” and “Dr. Cynthia Rasch.”

Finally, five different dentists: “Dr. Pulley,” “Dr. De Kay,” “Dr. Les Plack,” “Dr. Drewel,” and last, but not least, “Dr. Daryl B. Payne”

How’s that for a list of names that are apropos!

But these names are all in contrast to the name that appears in 1 Peter 1:1. This letter begins, “Peter...” The name “Peter” was one that just didn’t seem to fit the person. The Greek word “*petros*” means “rock” - yet the man, *Peter*, was more like *shifting sand* than a *solid rock*.

Peter was *impulsive, inconsistent, unstable* - not very rock-like at all. Someone pointed out, Peter’s modus operandi was, “Ready, fire, aim.”

Remember Peter was the disciple who in a flurry of faith jumped out of the boat and walked on the water with Jesus. Give him credit - he was the only disciple daring enough and brave enough to venture out of the boat.

But in typical Peter fashion – his flurry of faith was quickly drowned out by the storm. He took his eyes off Jesus, and fixated on the wind and the waves... and as a result, ole Peter sunk like a rock. And this was Peter’s life story - one moment a miracle, the next moment a blunder.

Though the name “Peter” means rock - the man was more a “Shaky” than “Rocky.” Names like “Shifty” or

“*Sandy*” would’ve been a better fit.

And it’s amazing that Jesus gave *him* this name, “*Peter.*” It was not his given name at birth. Jesus changed his name to Peter for a purpose.

When Peter was born, his parents called him “*Simon.*”

Until Jesus renamed him this man was known to his friends and family and fellow fishermen as “*Simon Bar-Jonah*” or “*Simon, son of Jonah.*”

For two years I coached a kid on my baseball team who also spelled his name, “*S-I-M-O-N.*” But rather than Hebrew, this kid was of Latin origin. I think he was from Mexico - thus he pronounced his name “*Si’mon.*”

Si’mon Estrada was a shy and timid kid - and the first year he played for me he barely knew which end of the bat to hold in his hand. In fact, when a ball was hit his way everyone cringed. Si’mon stood more of a chance to take a baseball off the head than to catch it in his glove.

Yet despite his awkwardness, you could see potential in Si’mon - it was raw, and it was well below the surface, but there was buried potential...

At the beginning of his second year on my team I was determined to mine that buried potential, so when I handed out the jerseys I assigned Si’mon #14 - my old number. I told him I didn't grant the cherished #14 to just anyone. I had confidence in him. I knew he'd wear it well.

And you wouldn't believe the progress Si’mon made that

season.

By the end of that second year he was hitting the ball as well as any other player on the team. Si'mon had turned into a Sammy Sosa.

And as I pondered Si'mon's improvement that season I can't help but to believe at least some of his success was attributed to the number he wore on his jersey. Not that the #14 had anything to do with it, but it was the coach's number, and I thought enough of Si'mon to assign it to him.

All of a sudden someone in Si'mon life believed he could succeed.

Someone cared about him - was willing to work with him - trusted in him *enough* to give him a new number that would remind him of his potential.

I believe *a number* or *a name* can inspire the player who wears it.

This is what Jesus did in Matthew 16 when he assigned to “Simon” a new name. Jesus and His dubious disciples were enjoying a mini-retreat - some R&R - at the northern outpost known as *Caesarea Philippi*.

They were under the mountains of Lebanon - in the shadow of the 8000 foot peak of Mount Hermon. Caesarea Philippi was a Greek city built over a pagan shrine to the god of Pan. The temple to Pan, and the city's other buildings were built in front of a reddish cliff – a sheer rock face.

Just below the cliff, on the outskirts of town, were springs bubbling out the ground. These springs formed the headwaters of the Jordan River.

Jesus and his men were chilling next to the water when He quizzed them on public opinion. “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

And they all had their ear to the ground... They knew what people were saying, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” That’s when Jesus asked them the \$1,000,000 question, “But who do you say that I am?” And that is the most vital question any man answers... *what do you believe about Jesus?*

And it was *Simon* who stepped up and answered correctly, “You are the Christ (or Messiah), the Son of the living God.” *Simon aces the test!*

In fact, Jesus compliments His star student on the fact that he’s been listening to God. He says to Simon, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” You’ve received *heavy revys* – communiqués from heaven!

Yet later in the same conversation, Jesus explains to His disciples that the path He is on leads to the cross. And again, Simon steps up to the plate – boldly and confidently. This time he even takes it on Himself to rebuke Jesus. Here’s *Simon, son of Jonah* correcting the

Son of God...

"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

Jesus answers him, "Get behind me Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Wow, talk about bursting your bubble. Simon gets whittled down to size.

He goes from *revelation* to *devastation* – from the peak to the pit.

And this was a journey Peter would take again and again...

At the Last Supper Jesus was teaching His disciples the importance of serving one another. But when the Master goes to wash Peter's feet, he becomes adamant, "*Never!*" Jesus explains if Peter refuses this foot-washing he has no part with Him. Suddenly, Peter backtracks...

He blurts out, "*Then wash me head to toe – I'll take a bath.*"

On that same night, Peter boasted that He would never betray His Lord. Yet before the rooster crowed twice He had denied Jesus three times.

He was good at mouthing commitment, but he often failed to count the cost. Much of Peter's confidence was misplaced, self-confidence.

As a result Peter was always up and down - hot and cold. He was as dependable as an Atlanta Braves closer – or a Ford Pinto – or a Toyota gas pedal... He was

always on that journey *from the peak to the pit*.

Yet Jesus saw potential in this Si'mon... It was raw, and well below the surface, but it was there... He never gave up on his struggling disciple.

Despite Simon's impulsiveness, inconsistency, pride - Jesus looked deep inside him, and saw God at work in His life. He saw a man "under construction" – and He gave to "Simon" a prophetic new name, "Peter."

The name "Simon" means "to hear or to obey" – but this was Simon's problem. At times He heard God clearly. He received revelations. Yet on other occasions what Jesus said sailed in one ear and out the other.

Simon's obedience vacillated and fluctuated.

He was *unsteady and unreliable*. Spiritually speaking, he didn't know which end of the baseball bat to hold! One minute he was *God's mouthpiece* – the next minute he was *Satan's stooge*.

Simon lived in a spiritual no man's land. He was always somewhere – hanging – in spiritual limbo between faithfulness and feebleness.

And I think we've all been there with him... living in that zone between faithfulness and feebleness. Standing strong... then shrinking back.

Year ago we use to take our Middle School group to a retreat center on Saint Simon's Island – and I always chuckled, what a fitting name for the location of a Middle School camp... The real Saint Simon acted a lot like he

was in Junior High. Simon Bar-Jonah was immature, and unsettled, and impulsive, and shaky. He was as stable as shifting sand...

Yet despite his wobbly character – even in the midst of one of his severest wobbles - Jesus changed his name to "*Petros*" or "*Peter*."

Jesus said to His misguided disciple in Matthew 16, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I say to you that you are Peter..."

The word "*Petros*" means "*a small stone*."

Jesus was the rock! Throughout the OT the idiom used most often for the Messiah was "*the rock*." The psalmist cried out, "*Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I*." In another passage the Messiah was referred to as the "*chief cornerstone*." In Daniel, Messiah was seen as a supernatural stone that strikes the kingdoms of man and they crumble before Him.

Yes, Simon was shifty and shaky – but Jesus gave him a new name.

Jesus the Rock gave Simon His number. He called His disciple a "*little rock*." Jesus knew that by identifying *with* Simon, and caring *for* Simon, and believing *in* Simon - He could turn a "*Shifty*" into a "*Rocky*."

Simon got a *new name* - for Jesus formed in him a *new nature*.

Perhaps you vacillate between hot and cold. Maybe you're on the journey from peak to pit. Your life is full of spiritual ups and downs.

At times you're capable of hearing revelations from God, at other times you're spewing the venom of Satan. Yet like Peter, Jesus loves you. He's put His Spirit in you. Even though we're all *Simons*, Jesus calls us "*Peter.*"

The first word of this book teaches me a valuable lesson...

Remember *when* Jesus changed this man's name from "*Simon*" to "*Peter.*" Get the chronology right or you'll miss a great encouragement...

Jesus gave Peter his new name... before Peter became Satan's accomplice and tried to steer Jesus away from the cross...

His new name was given to him years before he refused to humble up and wash some smelly feet... before he got impulsive and chopped off Malchus' ear... before he fled the Garden, and abandoned his Lord...

He was given Jesus' number before he followed Him at *a distance*...

Before he stood by the fire as denied he knew Jesus to a little girl...

Before the rooster uttered the dreaded cock-a-doodle-do...

Check this out my friends... while he was still a *Shifty Simon*... Jesus loved this man and chose to call him by a

new name. He said, “Peter.”

I hope you understand the implication for us today. This is the basis of Jesus’ dealings with His followers. Jesus names us, treats us, and views us... not as we are now in our feeble state, but as we’ll one day become.

Jesus calls us His own - gives us a new name - refers to us as holy, and righteous, and perfect. He gives us *His number* even when there's nothing in us that warrants His trust. It’s mind-boggling grace.

Just like Peter, as you ride the roller coaster from peak to pit and back again - Jesus stays focused on your potential - on the nature and power He's placed inside you. Instead of your shakiness and feebleness and inconsistencies – He remembers that you’re leaning on the rock.

At the moment you might be more *Shifty than Rocky* – but Jesus knows in time you're going to start hitting the ball. You’ll be a vital member on His team. His confidence isn’t in you, but in the Spirit of God that indwells you.

It’s not a trivial exercise to look at the first word of this book, and pause to take heart... it teaches me grace – it fills my heart with great hope.

Simon’s new name illustrates the Bible doctrine we call “*justification*.”

It’s a big word that describes how God treats Christians. Because of Jesus’ work on the cross, God chooses to treat the followers of Jesus as *justified* - which means, **He**

treats me just as if I'd never sinned, even though I do!

This is the lesson we're taught in this single word... **Peter.**

Shifty Simon was transformed into a *little rock*... by a *big rock!*

Let's go back to Matthew 16. In verse 15 Jesus asks His disciples...

"But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." But then Jesus adds...

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

When we go to Israel we visit Caesarea Philippi. It's one of my favorite places to hang out. You can walk right up to Jesus' campsite. There's His sleeping bag still on the ground. You can see the coat hangers they used to roast hot dogs and marshmallows. (Just kidding... Jesus didn't have a sleeping bag. But I'm not so sure He didn't make a few smores.)

Anyway, you can visit the spring that bubbles up outside the city. And when you look in the brook you notice it's full of pebbles – little rocks.

Here's the scene... the city was built into a towering cliff, and just below it is a spring, that flows into a riverbed full

of little rocks.

What happened between Jesus and His disciples was one of those incidents where you had to ***be there*** to fully grasp the implications.

Jesus grabbed a little pebble from this brook and told Simon, "***You are Petros***" - or "***little rock.***" ***Petros*** is the masculine form of the word.

Then Jesus turned and pointed to the enormous, towering cliff behind Him, and said, "***On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.***" This "***rock***" is a different word - the word "***petra.***" This is the feminine form. It refers to ***a mountain face, a cliff, an El Capitan.***

Jesus wasn't promising to build on ***Petros*** (the little rock, Peter). He's too shifty. The Church is built on the ***petra*** (the Messiah, Jesus Christ).

At his very best – on a good day - Peter was still a little pebble, but Jesus was, and always will be, *the massive, strong, towering Rock.*

Jesus is the rock of the OT – the Messiah. He's the "***petra***" - the huge mountain... *but He's making you and me into little pebbles.* Like Peter, Jesus is willing to work with us, and make us *chips off the old block!*

And this is what Peter's letter is about. Jesus is the rock, and we're little pebbles, but Jesus can use us. He'll help us reach our glorious potential.

Sadly, Roman Catholicism misinterprets the rock on which the Church is built as Peter himself. In that case we're sitting on a flimsy foundation.

They go on to assert that Peter was the first pope, and they trace all papal authority to Matthew 16 and this event at Caesarea Philippi.

I think before you assign such an exalted position to Peter you ought to consider Peter's own evaluation of Jesus words. In chapter 2 he'll refer to all believers as "living stones" or as Jesus called them, "little pebbles."

When we get to chapter 5, Peter addresses the elders, not as their *pope*, but as a "fellow elder." Peter was just one of the guys. He probably didn't mind if you called him *Chip*. His life had been changed by Jesus.

Shifty Simon was transformed into a little rock... by a big rock, Jesus! Despite Simon's shakiness and flakiness Jesus never gave up on him.

After His resurrection one of the first people Jesus appeared to was Peter. I love Mark's insight. At the empty tomb when the angel appeared to the women he told them, "Go and tell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."

The message was for all the disciples, but especially Peter. "And Peter," he says. Jesus knew Peter had fallen the hardest. At the end it wasn't just a wobble - it was a total collapse. He proved chicken before the rooster crowed. But God wanted Peter to know there was still

hope for him.

Later, Jesus meets Peter on the beach and challenged him three times to “**Feed My sheep.**” Peter denied the Lord three times – now three times he’s re-commissioned. It was another example of Jesus’ restoring grace...

We’ll get more into these truths as we go through the letter, but I believe three factors contributed to *Simon’s* transformation into *Peter*...

He gained **perspective at the cross**...

He received a **pardon from His risen Lord**...

And he was filled with the **power of the Holy Spirit.**

Perspective at Calvary... *pardon at the resurrection*... and *power at Pentecost*... all three combined to transform a *Shifty* into a *Rocky*.

At the cross... Peter saw that God works through suffering...

The Son of God died a hideous death, yet the Father used His wounds in an unexpected manner. He transformed utter defeat into wonderful victory! The world’s *greatest tragedy* became its *ultimate triumph*.

And this is why we need to live in the shadow of the cross...

God’s blessings are so real and abundant we often fall into the trap of thinking we’re immune to hardship. The cross teaches us otherwise. If the world hammered spikes into the hands and feet of our Lord Jesus - what makes us think that those who follow Him will be treated any

better.

We're calling our series through 1 Peter - "It's Only a Test."

Peter saw life as a test of our faith. Peter was tested in life – and he learned that to follow Jesus you've got to embrace some suffering.

To follow Jesus we take up our cross. We endure hardship, for the glory that rises from the ashes. The cross is all about God turning tragedy into triumph – transforming pain into pleasure – wounds into healing. This is what changes Simon into Rocky – *at the cross Peter got perspective.*

After the resurrection... Peter learned God doesn't hold grudges...

And He could have... Peter denied the Lord. He broke the heart of God. There's a single line that speaks volumes. It's Luke 22:61. Peter is in the courtyard of the High Priest, while Jesus is on trial. He's warming his hands by the fire when someone recognizes him as Jesus' disciple.

He barks back, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" We're told immediately the rooster crowed. Then the line I mentioned. Luke writes, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter." What kind of look did Jesus give: a scolding look - an I-told-you-so look - a look of disappointment?

I believe it was the grimace of a broken heart.

In the same passage Luke goes on to write, “Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So Peter went out and wept bitterly.”

There’s a tradition that says, “Peter’s eyes were black, and flecked with red due to frequent weeping.” He must’ve cried three inches in three days.

During the long weekend between Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection Peter’s tears of remorse and repentance could’ve filled up a milk jug.

But Peter learned that Jesus forgives. He pardons sin. Jesus gives His people second chances and multiple chances. He stands up fallen saints.

This is the lesson we need to embrace once and for all!

For three days Peter had wrestled with his guilt and failure. He felt so condemned. How could Jesus possibly forgive him? It was a restless, sleepless weekend – filled with pacing and tossing and turning...

Yet when the living Lord appeared to Peter the first words out of His mouth were, “Peace to you.” Instantly all his guilt vanished into thin air.

This is what you need today. There’s nothing you’ve done that Jesus *can’t* or *won’t* forgive. He died on the cross with your sins in sight.

Jesus took all our evil on His shoulders and paid its penalty.

Now the worse sin you can commit is to grovel in your guilt and fail to lay claim to the mercy He's shown us. What a picks a man up from the ashes – and sets him free from guilt - and puts his feet again on solid ground – is the sweet grace and mercy of the living Lord Jesus.

After the resurrection Peter received a pardon from His Lord.

And on Pentecost... Peter was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit...

Peter learned the hard way, self-confidence leads to defeat and failure - but when the Holy Spirit was poured out at the Feast of Pentecost, Peter experienced a rush of spiritual strength he had never known before. The power came from outside himself - now his strength was not his own.

At the feast the Holy Spirit came upon Peter in an empowering way.

The fear that caused him to deny Jesus days earlier was overwhelmed. The hatred he felt toward the people who killed Jesus melted into love.

Peter stood up and addressed the very same people who had called for Jesus to be crucified – *and he pulled no punches*. His message was bold, and brave, and cut straight to the heart. They were responsible for their bloodthirsty actions, but through Jesus' blood they could be saved.

In Acts 2 Peter spoke, **“Let all the house of Israel know**

assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

This is the empowerment we need... Not a course in how to build self-confidence, or how to think positively, or how to boost our self-esteem.

When will we realize the power we need is not within ourselves?

How many failures does it take to get us to the end of our rope? How many times do we have to fall flat on our face - or cower away - or yield to a weakness... until we put all our trust in the power of God's Spirit!

I believe the same three change agents that transformed a *Simon* into a *Peter* are the catalysts that'll revolutionize your life and my life.

Perspective from the cross – that God uses even our suffering...

Pardon from the Lord – tell Peter I've risen and want to forgive him...

Power from the Spirit – look outside yourself for the power of God...

The letter of First Peter is all about this **perspective**, and **pardon**, and **power**. And it's all summed up in the very first word, **“Peter...”**

When I think of the **“little rock, Peter”** it causes me to praise **“the big rock, Jesus”** – and the transformation Jesus can bring to any person.

You could say “Simon became *bolder* because of the *boulder* in his life.” The same can happen in your life if you learn to lean on Jesus.

I love the story of the little boy who built elaborate sandcastles on the beach. One day bullies came along and kicked over his masterpiece.

The next day he was back at it building sandcastles - *but this time when the bullies arrived to destroy his creation they were in for a painful surprise.*

On this particular day the little boy had built his sand sculptures on top of sharp rocks and hard stones – so when the bullies went to kick them down the rocks under the sandcastles bruised their toes and feet.

The bullies hobbled all the way home.

And this is what happens when we build our lives on the grace of Jesus.

Granted, on the outside we don't look like much – we seem shifty, and flimsy, and fragile – yet when the devil tries to bully us around... and the world comes to kick us in – it's in for a *shock*... for under the surface of our lives we're built on *the Solid Rock!* The big rock is our strength!

This is why the *first word* of *First Peter* captures my imagination...

The writer of this letter introduces himself not as “Simon,” but he uses the new, hopeful name Jesus gave him, “Peter.” And he spells his name, P-E-T-E-R, but I

think it could just as easily be spelled, *G-R-A-C-E!*