

Upon This Rock

By George Davis

Many round rocks, like ball bearings, do not make a good foundation. Little stones like a man, a doctrine, an institution, are like the sand men build unstable and uneven structures on. In the words of an old hymn, "On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." Jesus is the Rock--the only suitable foundation for the church.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

Then he asked them, "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." (Matthew 16:13-18)

"I will build my church"

As is the case with all God's dealings with man, the conversation between Jesus and Peter is profoundly deeper than it appears on the surface. It is replete with purpose and multidimensional in scope. One dear friend would often say to me, "God, unlike us, is able to move on all fronts simultaneously." He is the master multitasker, while man is a linear thinker and prone to seek a single, one-dimensional conclusion. For this reason, man often misses the larger picture. Like children forcing the pieces of a puzzle, he often come up with a fractured picture all his own. Such, has been the case here. In the attempt to arrive at a single linear answer, we have failed to see the breadth, and length, and depth, and height. In our lust to prematurely press that single definitive conclusion, we have fenced ourselves in by our own narrowness. So while peeking through our favorite knothole in that fence affords us something of a view, we yet fail to see the panoramic grandeur.

Alexander Pope writes,

"Some people will never learn anything for this reason: because they understand everything too soon."

So for the next few moments let us search the question, who or what is the rock? Searching together, as though for the first time, putting aside our forgone conclusions, as though climbing up on Father's shoulders that we might see over our limiting perspectives and see as He sees. We are seated together with Him in heavenly places, which affords us an eternal view of His eternal purpose. So from that eternal position or vantage let us consider the subject at hand.

"Upon this Rock"

Let us consider the "Rock" or "Foundation" of Christ's *ekklesia* three-dimensionally.

- 1.) The Rock (Jesus) *petra*--a massive rock, a large stone, the foundation, the revelation of Jesus.
- 2.) The "rock" (Peter) *petros*--a stone, lively stone, the building material.
- 3.) The "rock" as the principle embodied in the names Simon/Peter, i.e., the quarrying and building process.

In this one discourse Jesus alludes to the Church (*ekklesia*), its foundation, its builder, its substance, its construction and its architecture. Christ's Church is not built with brick and mortar but is made of lively stones aligned to the Chief Cornerstone who is also the capstone.

Jesus the "Rock" and Foundation

The words "upon this rock" imply foundation. Upon this rock, upon this foundation, I will build my church. So rather than ask, "is Peter the rock in reference here?" Let us instead ask, "is Peter the foundation of the church?" Puts a different twist on it doesn't it?

Let us ask ourselves, if Peter were the foundation-rock referred to here why are there no supporting scriptures to confirm this? Something so important should be born out throughout scripture. If Peter were the rock, the foundation, surely someone else would have thought to document it. Surely the rest of the apostles would have hailed him so.

Surely such an all-important point would have been included, as fundamental, in the gospel message.

What is the foundation of the church?

It is important to note here that the foundation term Petra (a massive stone) used here by Jesus has a different meaning than does Petros (Peter-a stone). "You are Petros, and upon this Petra I will build. . ."

Jesus said of the man that hears His teachings and acts on them, "He is like a man, which, built a house, and dug deep, and laid the foundation on a rock [Petra--a massive stone]. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock [Petra]" (Luke 6:48). In Jesus' day, when people built their houses they tried to build them upon a massive and immovable rock (petra), not upon a small stone (petros). Here Jesus illustrates a foundational principle, using what was the common manner of building at the time. He used an example that would have been common knowledge. Peter (petros) was evidently not a foundational term. It's a pretty small house that can be built upon a pebble. The ideal foundation was the Rock (petra-a massive stone). Clearly the church would have a Rock more substantial, more massive than Peter as its foundation.

Many round rocks, like ball bearings, do not make a good foundation either. Little stones like a man, a doctrine, an institution, are like the sand men build unstable and uneven structures on. In the words of an old hymn, "On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." Jesus is the Rock--the only suitable foundation for the church.

To this Paul would agree.

[For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. \(1 Corinthians 3: 9-11\)](#)

Perhaps you are asking, "But isn't the church built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20)? Yes it is! However this scripture is not describing the apostles and prophets as the foundation, but speaks of the foundation they laid--aligning it to Jesus Christ--the chief cornerstone. They themselves are not the foundation any more than a carpenter is a building. No, the foundation is not the

apostles and prophets but Jesus whom they preached. There is only one foundation-- Jesus Christ.

As to who is the foundation Stone, Peter removes all doubt.

For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. " (1 Peter 2:6-7 NIV)

Here we see Jesus referred to as both the cornerstone and the capstone. He is not only the foundation but also the cornerstone and the capstone. This covers the whole spectrum of the building process. He is the beginning and the end, the foundation and the capstone. But more, He is the cornerstone--everything in between. Although God elects to use vessels of clay, there is absolutely nothing that is built upon man. Furthermore, there is nothing left to man's desecration--all must align to the cornerstone. As the body of Christ, all must adhere and conform to the likeness of God's son. It is the fullness of the stature of Christ that sets the standard. He alone is the single standard of measurement--the cornerstone.

Jesus is the Cornerstone

In ancient architecture the cornerstone was the most critically important stone in the entire building. It had to be geometrically perfect. Once perfect it had to be laid perfectly. As a point of constant reference it was critical that the cornerstone should be laid perfectly level, plum, true and square. For all of the rest of the stones in the building must be aligned to this one all-important Stone. Every stone, every angle, every line must line up perfectly to the cornerstone.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied regarding the placing of this tried, precious and true Stone.

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily. (Isaiah 28:16)

So critical is the placement of this cornerstone that no one but the master builder (God) can lay it. If any man thinks he alone is laying the foundation he is mistaken. For God says "I lay. . . a stone." Sorry! There was no mention of us anywhere here. Perhaps man's part is so insignificant that it didn't merit a mention. Paul saw himself as God's helper, or fellow workers, and the Church as God's field and God's building. All semantics aside, it is God who plants and builds. Paul preached the gospel and God built. It was God who gave the increase. It was God who added to the church. When it comes to ownership, the building/vineyard belongs to God not those working on and in it. God does not transfer ownership. It remains forever His heritage. Paul was not building anything in the name of Paul. Peter built nothing in the name of Peter. John built nothing in the name of John. They had no sense of ownership.

The fact that Paul was not threatened by others building on the foundation that God by His grace had enabled him to lay, seems strange as we consider the situation as it is today. In the same way a proud artist would sign his painting, men today are quick to label what they build. They see it as their construction and it becomes their pride and joy. Their work reflects primarily on them, so pride takes priority over the interests and glory of God. Ambitiously they erect an institution to their own glory, and thereby, in effect, attempt to draw Christ's Church to their bosom as their own peculiar possession.

Jesus had just revealed to the Pharisees the fate of their religious institution. He had used a parable, which has come to be called the Parable of the Vineyard. (See Luke 20:9-17) In it He exposed their ambition to possess the vineyard (the heritage of God) and their desire to kill the heir (Jesus) in order to do so. "This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours." Jesus concluded by prophesying their fate. "He (God) shall come and destroy these husbandmen [Scribes and Pharisees], and shall give the vineyard to others." Perhaps shocked and dismayed, they replied "God forbid" (verse 16). Then Jesus asked them a question that reveals the crux of the problem, both then and now. "What is this then that is written, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?'"

Here we have the reoccurring problem. Jesus is still the rejected Stone! It seems religious man is obsessed with an ambition to build on anything and everything but Christ. In His place is a system that bears an uncanny resemblance to the institution of the Pharisees, where counsel replaces prayer. The voice of the Holy Spirit is usurped,

and in its place is the voice and government of man. The praise of God is replaced by the praise of men. The builders still reject the Stone. And as sure as the religious voices cried, "Crucify him, crucify him," is the reality that men today still kill the heir to possess the vineyard. In fear of losing their place they cry, "God forbid." So it is that many build upon the sandy soil of man rather than upon the sure Foundation, and in doing so they reject the true Cornerstone and kill the heir.

God has laid in Zion A stone, A foundation, A tried stone, A precious cornerstone, A sure foundation. There is only A, one foundation, and attempting to build on anything other than this sure Foundation is to reject Him. All that is not built on this foundation is built on sinking sand and the ruin of that house shall be great.

Clearly, it is upon this rock (Jesus) the tried and precious cornerstone--the sure foundation--that the true Church is built. There is no other Foundation!

We have considered Jesus as the foundation and the cornerstone, now let us consider Him as the capstone.

Jesus the Capstone

The capstone was the stone placed on the apex of the building, upon its completion, which by virtue of its weight and placement held the entire structure together. By this we see Jesus as the finisher, but also as the one in whom all things are held together.

And he (Jesus) is before all things, and by him all things consist. (Colossians 1:17)

Consist: 4921 *sunistao*

1) to place together, to set in the same place, to bring or band together

1a) to stand with (or near)

2) to set one with another

2a) by way of presenting or introducing him

2b) to comprehend

3) to put together by way of composition or combination, to teach by combining and comparing

3a) to show, prove, establish, exhibit

4) to put together, unite parts into one whole 4a) to be composed of, consist (Strong)

Christ is the capstone, and by way of composition is the one who brings and bands us all together. He is the one who sets us one with another. He is the capstone, the one who unites all the parts into one whole. Zerubbabel, who was commissioned to build the second temple, received this incredible promise: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts. 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" "' Does this sound familiar? "I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." Jesus will bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, Grace."

Peter the Stone (Living Stone)

Peter was a stone (*petros*), not the foundation. Furthermore, Peter never mentions himself in any way as being foundational. Nor did anyone else. He, like the rest of the believers was just a stone--a living stone, aligned to the cornerstone. It is Peter who sets forth most vividly the building process, and nowhere can we see Peter depicted as anything other than a living stone.

"As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.'" (1 Peter 2:4-7 NIV)

Peter was not the foundation as some teach, but the name Peter is representative of the kind of building materials (living stones) Christ has chosen and still chooses to use in His building, and also of the principle for quarrying such stones. The Old Testament temple was the manifest type of both Christ's church and of the heavenly Jerusalem. We see in its building the quarrying of the individual stones before the silent construction began. This is greatly significant.

And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building. (1 Kings 6:7)

The quarrying process represents our conformity to Christ. The quarry is typical of the means and ways that God forms His Son in us. It is representative of our being shaped to the cornerstone. It speaks of the circumstances that knock off our rough, protruding and non-conforming edges. All that is done in the quarry is done with design--with the cornerstone in mind. There we take on His shape, His likeness. Each stone is cut to join to Him and each other--joint to joint, seam to seam, fitting, joining, and lapping together.

In the quarry the focus is not so much on the individual stone, but on the overall fitting, conformity and relatedness of each stone to the cornerstone, and the interrelation or arrangement of each stone in the complex and unique architecture of the building. There is something of a loss of identity that occurs. For example, when you look at a beautiful building, you do not see the individual stones but its overall magnificence. You see the grandeur of its awe-inspiring arches and columns but you do not see the individual stones. We are left breathless at its overall splendor and impressiveness, but the individual stone--much like Peter--appears rather lackluster. However if a single stone is missing, an unsightly hole is left that greatly detracts from the beauty and strength of the building.

All cutting and shaping of the individual stones took place in the quarry. Neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built. It quietly and mysteriously appeared on Moriah's crest (See 2 Chronicles 3:1). This is also relevant. When it comes to the *ekklesia*, the clamor of the axe and hammer of men hinders the true work of the Spirit. In fact it was the axes and hammers of man that eventually brought down those very temple walls.

Your enemies roar in the midst of your meeting place; they set up their banners for signs (a distinguishing mark). They seem like men who lift up Axes among the thick trees. And now they break down its carved work, all at once, with axes and hammers. (Psalm 74:4-6)

Even well intentioned men who employ the hammer and the axe in the name of building Christ's church cannot help but break it down. They seem to have little respect for God's sovereign workmanship in the individual stones and break them down to suit their own designs. They unwittingly shape those around them into the image of men--themselves. As a result, they turn out disciples reflecting their own likeness rather than

disciples of Jesus, bearing His likeness and image. When a man becomes the cornerstone and the builder, both the disciple and the building take on the likeness and image of a man, not Christ. So we see that the true Church must be founded on and built by Christ. What then of Simon Peter?

The "Rock," the Principle Embodied in the Names Simon/Peter

In choosing the stone for his famous statue of David, Michelangelo settled upon a flawed stone, one that had been passed over and set aside--that the previous sculptures had rejected. When asked why he had chosen an inferior stone his reply was "I have chosen this one, because this one is the one with David in it!" He saw the finished work in the stone.

Like Peter, the ones God calls are not chosen because they are great, noble or wise. No! As the Father looks on our rough exteriors, there is nothing there to commend us to Him. But it is in such rough and uncut stones that he sees His Son. He sees what no one else can see--beyond the rough fisherman, beyond the faults, beyond the earthly habits and propensities. He sees a diamond in the rough. He can see the finished product. He sees an extraordinary image in the unlikeliest of stones. He sees the image of His Son. For in these flawed and rejected stones He sees the "Rock," the model for their conformity. And so this divine sculptor sets His hands to chip away the excess stone to free that image--to form Christ.

We see a principle of faith at work here--the substance of things not seen on the surface. In the same way that God saw Abraham in Abram, Sarah in Sarai, Israel in Jacob, Paul in Saul, Jesus here sees Peter in Simon. This is the principle of the kingdom--a principle by which Christ builds His church. He calls those things that are not as if they were. I in no way ascribe to the hyper-faith, name-it-and-claim-it selfishness that applies this to getting wealth--consuming it upon their lusts. But I do subscribe to a seeing with God in His purposes that would allow us to, in faith, evidence those things which are not seen. To see the Peter in the Simons around us--even in ourselves. The principle involved in Christ giving Simon, which means a reed the name Peter (a stone) is the principle by which Christ builds His Church. I use the word principle here for lack of a better one, for this truly has nothing to do with method, but is descriptive of the prophetic nature, of our calling and destiny. It is the principle seen in the Divine transformation of a reed into a rock.

The rocklike qualities would, in time, replace the reed-like. As Christ is formed in us, He in us and us in Him, what is reed-like, blown in the wind, is exchanged for the stability of the Rock. We must decrease, He must increase.

Peter was a common uneducated fisherman. Not many noble are called. He was impetuous, the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth. Some of the other disciples were by disposition quieter and consequently low profile. Not Peter. He was constantly in the fray. All his faults were documented for the world to see. Special precautions were taken to insure that none of them were missed. Even Paul got in on the action (See Galatians 2:11-21). So if Peter were here today and were to attend one of the modern churches, he would either be promptly thrown out, or tucked away in a corner somewhere, well out of view. He would be an embarrassment. Sadly though, there are many like Peter today who are being devalued, and all because we cannot see the Rock in them. They are unsightly, uneducated, and common. These are the lively stones, the material for God's Holy Temple, a royal priesthood--chosen and destined. Peter would never be ordained in the contemporary church.

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, "You are Simon, the son of John--but you will be called Cephas" (Peter--which is by interpretation, a stone) (John 1:42). Anything seem out of the ordinary about this? Try this sometime--walk up to a total stranger on the street, change their name, and see what happens. Although this is unusual for man, it is normal for God. In fact, this is God's *modus operandi*.

In Hebrew culture, name, character, purpose, and position were synonymous. The changing of the name implied a change of character and position. It spoke of destiny and promise. Therefore names were given prayerfully and carefully often at the behest of God Himself. This is why Hebrew children were not named Chuck or Barb. As was the case with Jesus, 'His name shall be called Jesus (Yashua-savior) for He shall save. ..."

When God spoke to Abraham regarding the barrenness of Sarai, in changing her name to Sarah there was the promise of fertility (Genesis 17:15). If Abraham was to be the father of many nations, Sarah must be the mother. The reference to Simon as Peter--a stone in the context of Christ building His church--is clearly a reference to Peter's place as a lively stone in the building. The recounting of the earthly flesh and blood

name Simon with the immediate mention of God's prophetic name Peter draws our attention to the process more than the man--the principle more than the person. "You are blessed, Simon son of John...I say to you that you are Peter. . ." The name Peter represented the call and destiny of the man Simon. The name Simon represents the ideal choice for God's lively stones. I personally believe that Michelangelo chose a flawed stone that the excellence of the work might reflect on his true talent. Likewise God chooses the weak and flawed stone so that the glory of the finished product might reflect Him, not us (1 Corinthians 4:7).

The meaning of the name Simon is very significant. Throughout the scriptures the reed is associated with lack of dependability, weakness and frailty (1Kings 14:15). It is used to describe the fickleness of any object of trust other than God. "Now look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt" (2Kings 18:21). The reed was also used for measuring (Ezekiel 41:8). Jesus asked the people concerning John the Baptist, "What did you go out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind" (Luke 7:24)? No! They had not gone out to see a reed but a prophet, and as Jesus qualified, ". . .much more than a prophet" (Luke 7:26). Unlike Simon, there were no reed-like qualities in John the Baptist.

A blown reed speaks of instability and vacillation, of swinging indecisively from one course of action or opinion to another, while the name Peter denotes sureness and steadfastness. So we see in Simon Peter not the foundation but the process by which all believers are purged from their reed-like qualities and are founded upon the Rock, Jesus. They take on His character--His stability--and are imbued with His life, strength and power. It's a process--the process of a reed becoming a stone, followed by the cutting and shaping of the individual stone into the likeness of the precious Stone, made without hands in what to us seems an eternity in the darkness of the quarry.

In many ways we all identify with the ignobility and inability of Simon, but there was one particular reed-like characteristic that was the last to go. How often have we heard the well-intentioned cries of those (including ourselves) basking in Christ's presence saying, "I will serve you, Lord! I will lay down my life for you," only to, with just the passing of a few hours, in some way deny Him? How quickly our bold declaration fades into a bemoaning of our inconsistencies and failures. Retreating in shame, we close ourselves off in silent self-disgust--to lick our wounds and muster enough courage to make another stab at it. This is what happens we trust in our own reedness. Even when

drawing upon all the strength and resolve we have, we are still easily bowled over by a small force.

So it was with Simon. Oh, he loved the Lord, but little did Simon know that just before him was a testing that would shake him to the core of his being. The Lord had been preparing His disciples for His death on Calvary. Jesus said, "Where I go, you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow me afterwards." As usual Simon spoke up, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake" (John 13:37).

Sound familiar? Have you ever dared to say this? Sadly, I have. It seemed like the right thing to say at the time. But as it is with so many things, it is much easier to say than to do. Simon was about to find this out!

Jesus answered Simon first with a question and then an answer. "Will you lay down your life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto you, The cock shall not crow, till you have denied me three times" (John 13:38).

Matthew records Peter's response.

"No!" Peter insisted. "Not even if I have to die with you! I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples vowed the same. (Matthew 26:35 NLT)

Before we judge Peter too harshly, note that all the other disciples made the same promise. But as usual no one did it with Peter's pizzazz. We know the story. It happened just as the Lord had foretold. Peter openly denied the Savior--not once, not twice, but three times.

Luke's records the warning that Jesus gave Simon, just before he made his bold and heroic declaration.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren. (Luke 22:31,32)

Jesus warned Peter, admonishing him regarding the true nature of the crisis before him--a sifting designed to bring conversion and strength. We should pay close attention to the use of the name Simon here, as it was repeated twice for emphasis, "Simon, Simon." Simon must be sifted before Peter could emerge. For the barrier between

Simon and the reality of all that the name Peter implied, was a wilderness of temptation--a sifting, that the reed-like character in Peter might be winnowed, like the chaff blown away at the summer threshing-floor. And in this sifting, his natural strength would be broken. Simon's self-confidence would be shaken. In passing through this stripping he would learn the utter futility of attempting to follow Jesus in the strength of his own soul.

The flesh will flee the cross every time. Oh it may follow, for awhile, at a distance, but rest assured, when put to the test it will always elect to save itself. Although bragging of its self-denial, and making bold declarations to follow at all costs, as the cross draws near, confidence wanes, and then drawing back to a safe distance, it warms at the world's fire--openly denies Christ.

In this crisis, Simon learned to have no confidence in his flesh. He learned to distrust his Simonly resolve and tenacity. He was converted from one life-source to another--from his natural strength to the life and recourses of Jesus.

In his book *The Normal Christian Life*, Watchman Nee shares a story that I feel to be fitting.

"Once I met a young brother -- young, that is to say, in years, but who had learned a good deal of the Lord. The Lord had brought him through much tribulation to gain that knowledge of Himself. As I was talking to him I said, 'Brother, what has the Lord really been teaching you these days?' He said, 'Only one thing: that I can do nothing apart from him.' 'Do you really mean', I said, 'that you can do nothing?' 'Well, no', he replied. 'I can do many things! In fact that has been just my trouble. Oh, you know, I have always been so confident in myself. I know I am well able to do lots of things.' So I asked, 'What then do you mean when you say you can do nothing apart from Him?' He answered, 'The Lord has shown me that I can do anything, but that He has said, "Apart from me ye can do nothing". So it comes to this, that everything I have done and can do apart from Him is nothing!'"

Likewise, Simon had to learn that in his flesh he could do nothing. And that in his Simon-nature, his reed-likeness, he was destined to fail. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "And when you are converted, strengthen your brethren." This speaks of the conversion of Simon from one life-source to another. From the Simon-source, drinking from his own cistern, to the water that flows from the Rock.

Simon's denial of Christ is typical of what goes on in Christian circles today. It is largely a Christianity that has evaded the cross as Simon had, and not being converted, still draws from the reed-like, Simon-like strength of the flesh. It lacks the depth of spiritual strength required to truly strengthen the brethren. The logical outcome of man's Simon-like ambition to lay down his life for Jesus, even to die for Christ, is that somewhere in route he will betray. It is in the exposure of our utter spiritual barrenness that we learn to have no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).

Undoubtedly, Simon's faults have been put on display so that we likewise would have no confidence in our flesh. That when the enemy sifts us, our faith in Christ will not fail. Only our faith in ourselves will suffer. One look at Simon and we know there is hope. But we also see the method and the principle means by which God makes rocks out of reeds, and we endure. But most encouraging is the fact that we know, as He did for Peter, that our Savior is praying and interceding for us.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, no matter what you are going through right now, remember, He has prayed for you! No matter how painful your trial, remember, He is touched with the feelings of your infirmities. As you endure the painful quarrying process you will find strength. More than enough strength! Enough left over in fact, to strengthen the brethren.

Simon, in his own strength, had failed to embrace the cross. His bold declaration "even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" echoed in his mind, in condemning tones, as a haunting and constant reminder of his weakness. Simon did make the same mistake twice. He never again overstated his strength and resolve. However, on that faithful day Jesus asked him those three telling questions, Simon was sorely tempted. Jesus tested Simon, giving him every opportunity to repeat those fatal words--words that in effect are the equivalent of the modern revival cry, "I will lay down my life for you Jesus. I will serve you."

Let's listen in, shall we?

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you love (*agapao*) me more than these?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I love (*phileo*) you."

Jesus: "Then feed my lambs."

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you love (*agapao*) me?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I love (*phileo*) you."

Jesus: "Then take care of my sheep."

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you love (*phileo*) me?"

Simon: "Lord, you know everything. You know I love (*phileo*) you."

Jesus: "Then feed my sheep."

Here, once again, Jesus does not refer to Simon as Peter, but instead uses his flesh and blood name Simon son of John. In the conversation above there are two different Greek words translated love--agapao and phileo. Agapao is love in its highest expression--a sacrificial love, where the one loving gives his all for the one loved.

"Greater love (agape) has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Phileo is a word that is much cooler in intensity that means fondness, a friendship kind of affection. Considering these definitions let us listen in once again, amplifying accordingly.

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you *agapao* me? Do you love me with a sacrificial love, so intense that you would lay down your life for me? Do you love me more than the rest of these, your brothers?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I *phileo* you. I have a friendship fondness for you."

Jesus: "Then feed my lambs."

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you *agapao* me? Do you love me with a sacrificial love, so intense that you would lay down your life for me?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I *phileo* you. I have a friendship fondness for you."

Jesus: "Then take care of my sheep."

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you even *phileo* me? Do you even have a friendship fondness for me?"

Simon: "Lord, you know everything. You know I *phileo* you! You know I have a friendship fondness for you!"

Jesus: "Then feed my sheep."

Because of his previous failure, Simon dared not use the word agapao. He had already proven himself a failure here. Instead he used the lesser word phileo. There can be no doubt that Simon was Christ's friend. He was fond of Jesus, this no one can deny. But with an agape-love--a sacrificial love--a love expressed in laying down one's life for another? Not yet!

Then Jesus, looking into the future, assured Simon that there would come a time that he would, by His grace, glorify God in death.

"The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go." Jesus said this to let him know what kind of death he would die to glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me." (John 21: 15-19 NLT)

Yes, Simon did eventually lay down his life for his friend Jesus. Tradition has it that when he was old, he was indeed bound and taken where he had formerly been unable to go. After years of embracing the cross in his heart, it came to pass, that faithful day in Rome, that Peter hung upside down on a literal cross, all for the love of his friend Jesus. Peter asked that he should not be crucified upright, for he reasoned that he was not worthy to die in the same manner as had his Lord and Friend. So it is with the utmost respect that I now call him Peter. What devotion! What greater love is there than this? Was Peter a stone? Undoubtedly! Was He the Rock? No! But he looked an awful lot like Him. Jesus builds His church with such stones.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it." (Revelation 2:17)