

Upon this Rock Week 1 | Downtown

As you saw, we're doing a new series called Upon this Rock. And what you heard in that video is 1 Peter 5:6-11, which we'll be studying for the next seven weeks. Verse by verse. But before we get into it this morning, I wanted to spend a little bit of time explaining why we chose this series and why I think it's gonna be so good for our church family to do this together. This is an appe-teaser.

So something we've noticed, and I'm sure you've noticed, is that generally speaking in terms of wellness, and wholeness, and spiritual, emotional, mental health - overall, as a culture, we're not doing great. It seems like four years ago - mental health wasn't something most people talked about, and now, it has, rightfully so, become a main topic of conversation. It seems like most people would agree; again, generally speaking, we're not doing awesome. So what do we do with that? Now, based on that question, you'll get wildly different answers as to how to deal with that problem. If overall wholeness and wellness are the problems, what's the solution?

- Some say the answer lies in self-care
- Others might say you need to cut out toxic people in your life
- Others will say you need to find your truth and live by that, whatever it is
- Others will suggest you need a hobby that's life-giving to you or you just need to drink more water and go outside more
- Still others might say you need to change the circumstances in your life and if you do that, then you will find happiness and wholeness on the other side

The point is, while we all would probably agree we're not doing in terms of our spiritual, emotional, and mental health, we all wildly disagree on what the ultimate solution is. It's like we're all drowning, but we're not sure what will keep us afloat.

Now, as Christians, there are lots of ways we might answer the question as to what the solution is when it comes to overall wellness. The Bible gives multiple answers using a variety of explanations and images. But let me show you one that stands out to me...it's the image of a rock. Now, bare with me. We're not talking about Dwayne Johnson. But let me show you what I mean because this is a repeated pattern in Scripture.

Let me show you a verse Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7:24-27

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **25** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. **26** And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

So Jesus here is saying something about the nature of life - he says there is a way to live and build your life where it's like standing on a rock, and there's a way to live and build your life as though you're drowning. There's a way to build your life to where the outcome is security, safety, refuge, and stability - and there's a way to build your life that leads to danger and insecurity and the like. And keep in mind, this was well before covid, and the news cycle, and smartphones were a thing.

Now let me show a picture.



Now this looks like a random cave, but what you're looking at is a giant rock face in Caesarea Philippi. It's in northern Israel and it's the location where Jesus makes a pretty radical statement in **Matthew 16**. You'll also notice in the photo that there's a massive cave opening, and according to theologian Michael Heiser in their culture, they thought this was a prominent opening to the underworld, the place of the dead, or Hades in Greek. So keep that in your mind and read this with me:

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?"

14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

So at that time, Jesus was doing a lot of things that echoed what prophets in the Old Testament did. So there was this assumption that maybe Jesus was a resurrected version of Elijah or Jeremiah. But either way, notice, they don't actually give him a straightforward answer, which sorta clues me on the idea that they don't really know who he is exactly. So he pokes at them a bit and says in v.15:

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" **16** Simon Peter

probably the oldest in the group, the de facto leader

replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Peter makes this radical confession that none of his disciples prior to this have said out loud. Peter says that Jesus is the Christ - the Messiah - the Son of God prophesied so long ago who will come and bring the Kingdom of God in once and for all.

17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Alright hang tight with me for a sec here, because vv.17-18 get super-meta. Here's what I mean, its here standing on this rock, that Jesus gives him his new name Peter. Before that he was called Simon. Peter's name in the Greek - *Petros* - sounds an awful lot like the Greek word for rock, *petras*. So Jesus is making a play on words. AND, they are also standing at an awfully large rock that was thought to be a sort of gate to hell, or the spiritual underworld. Like I said, meta.

Now some people get caught up and ask, “Ok, so what did Jesus mean? What is the rock he’s talking about? Is he saying Peter is the rock? Is he saying that his faith confession is the rock? Or is he talking about the literal rock right in front of them?”

I would make a strong case for the bulk of the point, being he will build his church on the foundation of salvation by faith. Peter will later go on and preach the first gospel message in **Acts 2** and the church will be built, but the message that builds the church is the same faith statement that Peter makes in v.16: “Jesus, you are the Christ. You are the Son of the living God.”

You are the promised One. You are the true King. You are the Messiah who’s come to take away the sins of the world. You are the light in the darkness. You are the hope for the world. You are all I have and all I need. You Jesus are the Christ.

And this becomes a defining moment not only for Peter’s life from here on it but it’s a defining moment for the rest of the disciples too. These disciples varied from all different ages, backgrounds, life styles, and previous careers, and Jesus says this is going to unite them all together. This is what will draw them into being a family together: faith in Jesus as the Lord of all. Trusting in Him as the Son of God.

Jesus looks at Peter’s simple confession of trust and faith in him, and he says “That’s it, Peter. You’re different now because of that. I have set you apart because of your faith in me. That is the rock. And I will build my church upon, and the gates of hell won’t prevail against it.”

And just so we don’t miss exactly the punch Jesus is getting at here - this place they were in had huge implications back then. This literal rock they were standing on was an object lesson for how they were to live there lives. Here’s what I mean by that, pull that picture up again.

Back then, to stand upon or live upon a rock meant enormous safety and security.



Imagine for a moment you lived back in Bible times. So back then life expectancy was much shorter, I looked it up. It was 35. I’m 35 - so back then I would be considered veeery old. Wars happened all the time. And you’re living in a town and a foreign army is on its way to fight you and your town. So you need to fend for yourselves and you see this big rock face in the distance. Now the logic was, if an enemy is coming your way - you want to be on top of that rock. That way, you can see them coming from a long distance away. You can tell others in your town how big the enemy’s army is. You can set up defenses there and it would be much harder for your enemy to get you from that vantage point because you have the high ground.

High ground was a place of safety. In the same way, like, when it rains in Columbia, you wanna seek high ground - you wanna avoid Five Points altogether. Because when there's high ground, there's safety and protection.

Throughout Scripture says God is a rock we can stand on. He is the place we can go to for safety and protection. There is a famous line from **Psalm 61** where David says this:

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

- God, I don't wanna be left down here. On the ground. Down here I can't see clearly what's going on. I can't see the enemy. I'm left helpless and on my own if I don't stand on the rock.
- Lead me...up there, God. Up to where I'm safe from any enemies. Up where I can see with clarity. Lead me to something that is bigger than me, something solid to stand on—something that helps me see what you see.

I would argue that sometimes in the hectic pace of life **we often operate from the ground**. I hope I'm not the only one who feels this way, but sometimes life feels like survival mode or just shuttling from one place to the next. You're dealing with all of the **immediate, pressing concerns and questions** like,

- “Did I remember to move the laundry? Pay my bills? Did I finish that project and send it in? Did I reply to that email? Who's picking up the kids? Sometimes even...what day even is it?”

And then if you manage to get past all of the day-to-day questions, maybe as you're drifting off to sleep, worn out by the day, you find yourself eventually asking the bigger questions like,

- “Is this what life is supposed to feel like? Am I the right kind of tired? Am I a good enough parent? Am I a good spouse? Why do I feel so sad sometimes? Is my life fulfilling? When is the last time I talked to God about some of these things? Why am I having more doubts than I used to? How in the world do I think clearly about the confounding issues in our culture around every corner?”

But by the time these questions finally surface, you finally fall asleep, then you wake up and all of those immediate day-to-day questions pop right back up.

My point is, life on the ground can feel chaotic and directionless. And when that happens you can end up wasting a lot of time over things that don't really matter. Maybe over time you find that God seems distant when in actuality it's you who has grown distant from God.

But there is another option—life up there, on the rock. Where you can see more clearly. Where you have perspective. Where you have purpose and vision for your life that comes from God, and his truth is the orienting principle of your life. So you go to bed tired, but you feel more at peace because you faithfully fulfilled the roles he gave you that day. You are still sad sometimes, but you process that openly and honestly with him. You still have doubts, but you go to him and trusted community.

You are operating from a higher place here. God is leading you to a rock that is higher than you, and you take the invitation. Life is still busy and full, but you have spiritual vitality and perspective that you don't down on the ground.

I have to be honest though, I think there is a lot working against us. A lot that is hindering us from being people who consistently operate from a place of clarity and overall wellness in our lives, and it makes it difficult to live life on this rock.

One of our pastors while listening to a sermon on Psalm 61, and the preacher said, after reading that verse, “lead me to the rock that is higher than I,” the next line was: “Modern man believes in no such rock.”

Basically saying that modern people see the world, all of existence itself, as just...this. This is it. What you feel and what you see is all there is. There is nothing higher than us. As far as a bigger meaning or purpose in life...well there isn't any, so you gotta make it up for yourself. As far as an identity to ground your life in, well there is no higher reality so that's on you to figure out too. This is what Charles Taylor would call

the “immanent frame,” that culturally we live as though there is no transcendent reality. What you have right in front of you is all there is.

And so for us as Christians we now live in this odd tension, we exist in this world and we know there is a rock higher than us, that gives us perspective and hope and clarity. But at the same time, we also live in a context that for all practical purposes doesn't believe that higher rock even exists. And now you have problems all over the place....

- Said one psychologist, “The average high school kid today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the early 1950s.”
- at the end of 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General declared a “devastating” national mental health crisis.
- Americans are getting lonelier and lonelier with one report saying 1 in 7 men and 1 in 10 women don't have a single friend.

And in this context we live in where many don't believe a higher rock exists, **people come up with their own theories and solutions as to how to make life meaningful**, what you should chase, orient your life around.

- You might chase, I don't know, status or sex or self-fulfillment or money. Enjoy it while it lasts, because there is nothing higher, there is no rock higher than you that can give you identity and meaning and purpose big enough to last beyond your life.
- Eat and drink and watch Netflix, for tomorrow we die.
- In such a place, meaning and morality would be hard to define and hard to come by, so people might, turn **to politics as a pseudo-religion**. Because if there is no transcendent meaning, you can at least locate yourself in a story and convince yourself that your side is good and the other evil, and that might help you sleep at night.

And as it turns out, when you have these problems in life and you believe there is no rock higher than you, it creates all this unhealth inside of us - spiritually, mentally, emotionally, or relationally. And all of the solutions the world offers only further highlights and at times even worsens the problem inside of us.

But as followers of Jesus, we know a great secret. We know that there is in fact a rock higher than us, that there is meaning and purpose and reality beyond what we see right in front of us.

We know the one who leads us up to that rock, where we can see the enemies arrayed against us, where we can see clearly what our lives are for—*who* they are to be lived for. What a stabilizing thing that is, and what an opportunity to invite others into.

And this is what Jesus would invite Peter and the disciples into as well. That no matter what happens in the world, that no matter what others say about who Jesus is - is He a good teacher? Is he just a nice idea to follow? No, he is the rock, the Son of the living God. He is the resurrected King and He is the stabilizing presence, that refuge, that source of truth, and you know what? The gates of hell will never overcome it. And when you ground your life in that higher reality, you can have a peace and a security in your life that no one and no thing can ever take away from you.

Even if circumstantially your life feels the same, or even if your life circumstantially gets worse, you have a rock available to you. And this is what Peter and the disciples would grow to realize and embrace. They would spend the rest of their lives preaching Jesus and living a life grounded in Jesus no matter what happened to them. In fact, most of these men would, according to church history and tradition, almost all of these disciples standing on this rock face were martyred for their faith, including Peter.

Jesus invited them to come and follow him, to come and die, because he had a much higher place to lead them to, and none of them would regret the costs. Jesus built his church on the faith expressed on that ancient rock in **Matthew 16**.

Transition

And for the last 2,000 years the church of Jesus has gone forth, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and it has outlasted and weathered persecution of all kinds. The church has survived famine, and distress, and wars, ever taking the gospel to forward. It has not slowed down when meeting resistance, but strengthened and pushed through it, it has not cowered in the face of hardship, and on the occasions where it has slipped and faltered the church has repented, again and again, and been filled with God's Spirit anew and afresh.

And now...we find ourselves enlisted into this mission, entrusted with the precious gospel, the baton handed to us through time here in the year 2023.

Jesus said he would build his church, and the gates of hell indeed have not prevailed against her, and they never will.

And the reason we believe that lies in the fact that we follow a King who conquered the gates of hell itself. We believe in a man who climbed the rock of Calvary, who allowed sin and death to swallow him. Who for three days was buried in a cave, but would later walk out and put the powers of evil to open shame. The gates of hell will never overcome the church because the gates of hell could not overcome our king. And I can't help but think one of the most freeing and beautiful things about that - is that living your life on the rock means it's not on you to figure it all out. It's about resting in the finished work of Jesus.

Conclusion

And for what its worth, I don't know what your experience has been like for the last few years, or even what the holiday season has been for you.

- But I imagine many of you in the room have had **moments of struggle**, or maybe you're in one right now. Maybe you're experiencing this "life on the ground" for quite some time and it feels often disorienting or like you're just constantly shuffling from one thing to the next. Or perhaps things have especially difficult in your life recently and it's hard to get perspective and vision as to how to navigate all of this.
- On the other hand, I would imagine many of us in the room have also had seasons where you've experienced "**life on the rock.**" Where you've had seasons of close intimacy with Jesus. Where you're grounded in reading Scripture and prayer is just like breathing for you. It's just second nature. Where even though things weren't ideal - you felt safe and secure because you deeply abiding with Jesus and with community through it all and there was this inner peace you had.
- And I would guess to say for the rest of us, you can have those "life on the rock moments" for a while but **then life just sort of happens**. Things aren't objectively good or bad it's just...fine. And you find yourself going through the motions of life, mentally on auto-pilot. It's whatever. And after awhile you realize that you don't remember the last time you felt connected to the Lord or to others.

Wherever you are this morning, Jesus is calling us now, build your life upon Him. He's inviting you to climb up with Him on the rock of reality, to see things for what they really are. To build your life on His life and teachings and to experience a life of stability and peace that only He can offer.

Which - sounds great. But...what does that actually mean? What's it mean come Monday morning and your alarm goes off and you don't want to get out of bed? What's it mean to "build your life on Jesus" when your life is still the way that it is and your circumstances aren't changing?

Well the good news is, we have some huge insight on all of this when you look at the Scriptures. And that's why starting next week we're going to do look at - **1 Peter:5-6-11**, to pull some practical wisdom on what all of that actually means. Where pertinent we'll show you how Peter the disciple learned how to build his life on the foundation of Jesus. So as a church family we're actually gonna spend time in LifeGroups memorizing this passage together and working through some practices to help us together.

Our prayer is that over the next 7 weeks, God works this passage deep into our souls in a way that leads us up to the rock, that stabilizes any areas in us that might feel shaky, that firmly roots our feet on solid ground.

So I don't wanna spoil anything for you, but my hope and prayer is that you'll come back next week - as I imagine it's going to be immensely practical for us as we work through it together. But what I do wanna do is something a bit different to end our time.

So what I wanna do, since we'll be studying this passage for awhile starting next week - I'd invite you to stand with me, if you're able, as I read this passage over you all to end our time:

1 Peter 5:6-11

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, **7** casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. **8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. **10** And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. **11** To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.