

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(March 10, 2013)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Role Players in the Spotlight

#### **Second Chances (Simon Peter)**

Study #2

#### Introduction: To induct or not to induct, that is the question...

Baseball has never been my game. I was cut from a baseball team when I was a kid and I never forgave the game.

See, baseball requires a skill set that I never acquired, so I never paid much attention to the game, the players, or to the statistics that baseball fans love to quote.

Some stats, though, do merit attention, even from a non-fan like me. Consider the following collection of stats, all from one player:

- 150 games played in each of 17 seasons.
- 500 games at each of 5 different positions.
- 44 consecutive games safely landing on base.
- 24 consecutive seasons played
- the most ever **hits** (4,256), **singles** (3,312), **at bats** (14,053), **games played** (3,562), **safe on base** (5,929)
- 1963 - Rookie of the Year
- 1969 - winner of the Golden Glove Award.
- 1973 - League's Most Valuable Player
- 1975 - World Series Most Valuable Player.
- 17 times named to the National League's All-Star team.
- 3 times played on World Series winning teams.
- .303 lifetime batting average.

Those of you who know baseball already know that I'm talking about Pete Rose, aka "Charlie Hustle." He was, without a doubt, one of the greatest baseball players ever.

Major League baseball has a way to honor its great ones. They are inducted into the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, Ohio. But Pete Rose isn't in the Hall of Fame. Other players with far less impressive stats ARE in the Hall, but not Pete. Why not Pete?

Well, Pete Rose is not in the Hall of Fame because he committed one of baseball's cardinal sins. While he was still an active player, he bet on the game.

Major league baseball has a penalty for those who violate that rule, and it is a stiff penalty. They are banned from the game for life. They are forever banned from even being considered for induction into the Hall of Fame.

So, now Pete Rose sits UN-inducted on a stack of statistics that would merit induction, all because he gambled and lost by betting on the game.

Among baseball fans, a debate rages as to whether or not Pete Rose should be allowed in the Hall of Fame, despite clearly being guilty. Some say he should be kept out. Others say he should be let in.<sup>1</sup>

As the debate continues to rage about what to do with Pete Rose, you and I are going to think this morning about another "Pete" - this one, from the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

His given name is Simon, but like Pete Rose, he had a nickname. This "Pete" and Pete Rose share a few other traits, too.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some time ago ESPN, held a mock trial at the Harvard Law School in which they weighed the pros and cons of allowing Pete Rose back into baseball, making him eligible to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. The defense attorney (Johnny Cochran) and the prosecutor (Alan Dershiwitz) argued the fors and againsts for three hours and then sent the jury out for deliberation. Ninety minutes later, they jury came back with a decision: Let Pete Rose in. He deserves to be in the Hall of Fame, despite his gambling, on the basis of merit alone. He's still not in.

<sup>2</sup> More is said about this "Pete" (the Apostle Peter) than about any other disciple, and more of his speech is recorded than that of any other. - E.F. Harrison.

## First Steps

### Fun Facts to Know and Tell About Simon Peter

Peter's father was John. He had a brother named Andrew.

They lived in the small community of Bethsaida, located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, where they worked as fishermen.

One day, while Simon was minding his own fishing business, Andrew came running up to him, announcing, *[John 1:41] "We have found the Messiah!"*

Now the Jews had been looking forward to the arrival of the Messiah for centuries. The Messiah would bring salvation! So, Andrew's announcement was no trivial matter and he dragged Simon to meet Jesus.

### "Simon, Meet Jesus"

*Renamed by Jesus (John 1)*

The initial encounter between Jesus and Simon was brief, but memorable.

Seeing what no one else who looked at Simon would have ever seen, Jesus saw the possibility of strength and stability, so He nicknamed him, "**Peter**" (or "**Rocky**").<sup>3</sup>

*[42] "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (or Peter)."*<sup>4</sup>

That was their initial meeting and their relationship grew from there. Over the next few weeks Peter and Jesus got to know each other a bit better. And some time after that first encounter, Jesus gave Peter an offer that he really didn't want to refuse.

---

<sup>3</sup> At the first meeting of disciple and Master, Peter does not seem to be wholly in character, judging from later disclosures. Here, he says nothing. ☺

<sup>4</sup> To make rock out of water-like Simon was a miracle. Yet that is precisely the kind of miracle which is the greatest continuous evidence of Christianity—transformed lives. The shell is the same, but that there is a new core.

*Called to follow Jesus (Matthew 4)*

*[18] Now as Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. [19] And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." [20] Immediately they left their nets, and followed Him.*

From that day forward Peter listened to Jesus' teaching, witnessed Jesus' miracles, watched Jesus' interactions with the Jewish leadership, and more.

He was Jesus' disciple, His follower. Literally. Peter followed Jesus around. Wherever Jesus went, Peter went.

Then, over a year into His three year ministry, Jesus shifted His focus from the large crowds of hundreds and thousands who were always tagging after Him, and narrowed that focus down to an even dozen.

### Called to be an Apostle!

For the last year and a half to two years of Jesus' life, He poured Himself into the twelve apostles. He trained them, loved them, rebuked them, and gave them insight into His heart that no one else got.

And at the start of every listing of the apostles in the Gospels is Simon Peter.<sup>5</sup> He was first among the Twelve. To be an "apostle" was to be one whom Jesus sent out to act in His name. Peter was chief among the Twelve.

Jesus spoke more directly to Peter than to the others. He challenged Peter in ways that He didn't challenge the others. And He rebuked Peter in ways that He didn't rebuke the others.

So, what kind of a man was Simon Peter? Well, for one thing, he was a great question asker.

---

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14

We should never downplay the importance of good, honest questions. After all, Jesus never did! He welcomed questions and some of Peter's questions opened the door for some of Jesus' best answers.

## Giant Steps

### Jesus' Best Ever "Straight Man"

*How many times must I forgive? (Matthew 18:21)*

Once, Peter asked Jesus, **[21] "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"**

The question launched Jesus into one of our favorite parables - the story of the guy who had been forgiven a ten million dollar debt, but who wouldn't forgive one of his own debtors a one hundred dollar debt.

The point being that if God has forgiven me my sin, surely I can forgive others their wrongs against me. That's a parable worthy of our consideration...

*Help us know the future! (Mark 13:3ff)*

Another time, after Jesus had been talking about future events, Peter casually asked, **[13:4] "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"**

Jesus took that ball and ran with it, giving the most detailed and explicit teaching about end times events ever.<sup>6</sup>

No doubt about it. Peter's natural curiosity and question-asking ways have served us well.

In addition to being a great question-asker, Simon Peter was honored to be present at nearly every major event in Jesus' three year ministry.

## Private Moments

When Jesus was called to restore to life the young daughter of a prominent synagogue official who had died, He gladly agreed to do so. The only three apostles invited to witness the miracle were Peter, James, and John.<sup>7</sup>

On Easter Sunday morning, who should be the first among the apostles to see the empty tomb? Peter, along with John!<sup>8</sup>

And Peter's prominent role among the apostles carried on well after Jesus died and rose again. He continued to take leadership in the church that was formed out of those who placed their trust in Jesus.

## After the Resurrection

When it was time to get everybody to choose another apostle to round out the group to an even dozen again after Judas' death, who was the spokesman? Peter! (Acts 1:15)

When it was time to bring a Christian message to Jerusalem, who was the first one to deliver? Peter! (Acts 2:14ff)

When it was necessary to deliver a message of rebuke to a couple who lied to the Holy Spirit and to the church, who spoke? Peter! (Acts 5)

When it was time to welcome non-Jews into the church for the very first time - Samaritans and Gentiles - who extended that welcome? Peter! (Acts 8; 10)

That is Peter. Leader of the church, chief among the apostles, one of the three closest friends of Jesus. Writer of two New Testament letters. A giant among men.

But that is not ALL Peter was.

If we want to get a complete picture of Simon Peter, we need to look at his other side. And there was, truly, another side.

---

<sup>7</sup> See Matthew 9; Mark 5; Luke 8

<sup>8</sup> See John 20.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Matthew 24 and Mark 13.

While he was a remarkable man, he was by no means a perfect man. In his imperfections he reminds me a lot of the man I see in the mirror every day. He might remind you of somebody you know, too.

Peter's feet were solid clay, as we see, for instance, on the night after one of Jesus' most famous miracles.

### Missteps

#### **Out of Focus (Matthew 14)**

*Walks on water...*

The Lord had just multiplied a few fish and loaves of bread so that several thousand people could eat to their heart's content.

When the crowds left at the end of the day, Jesus sent the twelve apostles across the Sea of Galilee in the boat while He Himself climbed a nearby mountain to pray.

The disciples had been rowing against the wind all night long, and were exhausted, still in the middle of the sea, when they looked up from their rowing to see someone **WALKING** toward them - on the lake!

They all cried out, [26] ***"It is a ghost!"***

We understand their fear! If we were out fishing on Medina Lake (if it had water in it), minding our own business, and some guy walked up to us, we'd freak out, too.

Well, this "guy" was Jesus. And Jesus put their fears to rest, [27] ***"Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."***

When Peter recognized that it was Jesus who was standing out there, he spoke.

[28] ***"Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."***

Jesus encouraged Peter with the simple word, ***"Come!"***

And to that command, Peter responded by getting out of the boat and walking toward Jesus!

We don't know how far he walked before he thought much about the surroundings into which his boldness and faith had placed him. I like to think that he walked more than a few feet. Maybe he took quite a few steps.

*...and sinks like a stone*

But, after walking some distance, Peter's attention turned from the Lord to the sea. His concentration broke. He lost focus. Fear gripped him and he sank like a stone.

He cried out, [30] ***"Lord, save me!"***

And of course, the Lord did save him. Jesus immediately reached out His hand, took hold of Peter, and pulled him back up to the surface with, [31] ***"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"***

Peter's sinking spell was caused by a failure of faith. The chief apostle sank because he stopped trusting Jesus and focused instead on the wind and the waves.

Or consider setting when Peter started out well and went splat.

#### **Out of Position (Mark 8)**

*From a GREAT CONFESSION...*

Mark records the time that Jesus had asked His twelve apostles what the crowds were saying about Him.

His question wasn't prompted because of personal insecurity. He just wanted to know what the scuttlebutt on the street was about Him.

The twelve reported that they had heard people say that He was a prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah, or even John the Baptist back from the dead.

Jesus then turned the question back to them and asked, [29] ***"But who do YOU say that I am?"***

Which one of the apostles do you think took that question? Right!

**[30]Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ”** (and as Matthew tells us, Peter added, “...**the Son of the living God.**”)

Man, what a great response! Way to go, Peter. But then, IMMEDIATELY after his “*great confession*” Peter suffered a “*great confusion.*”

...to a **GREAT CONFUSION**

Jesus went on to tell the disciples that He was going to go to Jerusalem, that he was going to suffer at the hands of the Jewish leadership, AND that He was then going to be scourged and crucified by the Romans.

Peter’s response was to pull Jesus aside - JESUS! - and rebuke Him.<sup>9</sup>

To which Jesus replied, **[33] “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”**

That is a sad story. The chief apostle addressed as Satan - whom he was representing - because he (Peter) so quickly forgot who it was with whom he was dealing (“**the Christ, the Son of the living God.**”).

And there is yet another great start followed by a less than sterling finish.

### **Out of Nowhere (Matthew 17)**

*A miraculous transfiguration...*

Jesus had taken Peter and James and John up on top of a high mountain, leaving the other apostles down at the bottom.

While they were all together, Jesus was transfigured. “**His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.**”

---

<sup>9</sup> Matthew tells us that Peter said, **[Matthew 16:32] “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.”**

While He was shining, two of the greatest heroes of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, showed up and began speaking with Jesus.

*...followed by a ridiculous suggestion*

Evidently overcome with exhaustion after the hard climb to the top of the mountain, Peter and James and John had somehow managed to fall asleep. They awoke to this other-worldly scene.

This would have been a good time for listening. Peter, though, decided to speak, instead. **[4] “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”**<sup>10</sup>

To which the Father replied, **[5] “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!”**

Out of focus. Out of position. Out of nowhere. Peter’s responses to life with Jesus were sometimes deeply flawed.

And Peter is famous for one more spectacular failure.

When the chips were down, on the night Jesus was betrayed, he denied three times that he was a follower of Jesus, that he even knew Jesus at all.

And it wasn’t as if he had not been warned...

### **Out of Bounds (Matthew 26)**

*An apostolic argument...*

Earlier that evening, during the Passover meal with Jesus and the other apostles, Jesus had told them, **[31] “You will all fall away because of Me this night.”**

Peter assured Jesus, **[33] “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.”**

---

<sup>10</sup> Mark adds, **[9:6] For he did not know what to answer.** Silence would have worked great, Peter.

Jesus looked straight at Peter and told him bluntly, **[34] Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.**”

Un-heeding and with completely un-warranted confidence, Peter replied, **[35] “Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny You!”**

Later than night, after the meal, and after Jesus’ betrayal by Judas, and after His arrest, and after all the apostles fled into the night, Peter found himself in the courtyard of the High Priest, near the place where Jesus was being tried by the Sanhedrin.

*...leads to an apostolic debacle*

While he was warming himself by the fire, he was asked by bystanders, not once, not twice, but three times, *“Don’t you know that Jesus fellow? Aren’t you one of those Galileans who used to follow Jesus? Aren’t you one of His disciples?”*

Peter was given three golden opportunities to stand up and declare to everyone who might listen, *“You bet I am His follower! I know Him and trust Him and will follow Him to the death.”*

But no. Not once, not twice, but three times, Peter replied, *“I don’t even know what you are talking about! I do NOT know this Jesus. I swear by all that is holy, He’s nothing to me.”*

As soon as the words left his mouth a rooster crowed, confirming his failure. Realizing what he had done, Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

And THAT’s Peter.<sup>11</sup>

He was the lead spokesman for the disciples and afflicted with terminal “foot-in-mouth” disease. He was the chief apostle and the lead bungler. Simon Peter was one very squishy “rock.”

<sup>11</sup> There is much of Peter’s story we haven’t touched on this morning. For further study, check out: Peter to Jesus after the feeding of the five thousands (John 6); Peter in the Upper Room (especially John 13); Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26; John 18); Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2); Peter acting hypocritically (Galatians 2).

So, what do you do with a Simon Peter? That’s quite a question.

It’s the same question baseball fans have asked about the other Pete, Pete Rose. Do we let Simon Peter into God’s “Hall of Fame”?

His stat sheet certainly contains some remarkable deeds. Unfortunately, his rap sheet is just about as long.

Did he, like Pete Rose, commit the unpardonable sin? Wouldn’t denying Jesus rank up there with betting on the game? Wouldn’t you think that this would result in a lifetime, maybe even an eternal, suspension?

Let’s see how the resurrected Jesus actually dealt with Peter after his failures.

### **Fresh Steps (John 21)**

The scene is back in familiar territory for the disciples. They were in Galilee, back fishing. Several of them were professional fishermen, but this night they had been fishing all night and had no fish to show for it.

Now, it is a miracle any time I do catch fish, so I understand getting skunked on a lake. But on this day, it was miraculous that the disciples caught fish. It had happened before that the fish only started biting when Jesus showed up, and here it happened again.

They were just finishing up a breakfast of fish tacos made from fish courtesy of Jesus, when Jesus spoke to Peter.

We know that Jesus and Peter have seen each other a couple of times since the resurrection. Yet to this point it is doubtful that they have spoken about the denials.

This scene at the beach might just be the first private moment they have had together since before Jesus died. Picture at least a certain amount of tension.

Jesus looked over at Peter and said, **[15] Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”**

Jesus had given Simon the new name - Peter - early in their time together. But here, he calls him by his old name, “Simon.” After all, he hadn’t exactly been acting much like “rocky” of late.

“Simon, would you claim to love Me more than these others love Me?” (After all, he had claimed that even if all the others fell away, he wouldn’t.)

Peter’s response? [15] **“Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”**

Jesus said, “Great, Simon, [15b] **“Tend My lambs.”**

After that weird, out of the blue question, Peter was probably ready to move on and talk about the weather or the Spurs or ANYTHING else. Not Jesus. He had a second question for Simon Peter.

[16] **“Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”**

The only difference between this and the first question is that here there is no comparison asked for. Just a simple question.

Simon gives another simple answer.

[16] **“Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”**

To which Jesus replied as He had before. [16b] **“Shepherd My sheep.”**

No doubt Peter was taken aback that Jesus had asked him the same question twice. When the same question came to him a third time, he was undone.

[17] **“Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”**

When Jesus spoke this last time, I’m betting Peter heard a rooster crowing in the background. He remembered his three denials of the night before Jesus died when he had said, “I don’t know Jesus” and “I don’t know Jesus” and “I don’t know Jesus.”

[17] **Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love you.”**

Then Jesus told Peter a third time, [17] **“Tend My sheep.”**

Fascinating. How does Jesus deal with people who have failed? With people who have shot themselves in the foot? With people who have sinned?

He guides them to take an honest look their failure, their shortcomings, their sin. And then He REDEEMS them.

### Conclusion:

The first redemption of Simon Peter came when Jesus saved him from his sins. That redemption came the moment Simon placed his trust in Jesus for salvation. That redemption was accomplished long before this breakfast by the lake.

But after his denials, Peter was in need of an additional redemption, a redemption to service. Without this second redemption, I suspect that Peter would have been tempted to spend the rest of his life sitting on the sidelines, feeling unfit for service.

But he has now heard Jesus say - three times - to take care of His people, to tend His sheep.

And then he also heard those two words that set the course for the rest of Peter’s life: [John 21:22] **“Follow Me.”**

Friends, Pete Rose may or may not ever be inducted into the baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, Ohio. He broke records which ought to merit induction, and he broke rules that ought to make induction impossible. I don’t know how it will end for Pete.

We do know how it ended for Simon Peter. Redeemed and restored, he finished well despite failure.

And your story with God can end the exact same way, because He does not deal with us on the basis of merit. He deals with us on the basis of grace.

He saved Simon Peter when he had nothing to commend him and He saved you when you had nothing to commend you to God.

God used Simon Peter after failure, and God is willing to use you, too, even after failure.

No matter what your failure might be, Jesus offers grace and forgiveness and restoration. Notice what Jesus didn't say to Peter. He didn't say, "*Sorry bub. You blew your chance.*" Nor did he ignore Peter. He held out the offer of grace, and Peter grabbed it.

He's holding out an offer of grace to you, too. Right now. Grab it.