

Being a Disciple Alongside a Man Named Rock

How would you like to be a disciple alongside a man the Lord Jesus named ‘the Rock’? You’re James or John whom Jesus nicknamed, Sons of Thunder for your misplaced judgement. You’re Didymus, the twin, which wouldn’t be that bad. Or Simon the Zealot which would be better still and what would be wrong with ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’? Nothing except it pales in comparison to ‘the Rock.’

The Rock is on a roll in our text, isn’t he? Opinion polls agree that Jesus is a miraculous man, John the Baptist risen from the dead, a powerful man like Elijah, or a prophetic man, but in the words of Tammy Wynette, “after all he’s just a man.” Mormons, Muslims, even some Jews will say nice things about Jesus, but for all of them He is no more than a man. You don’t worship a man; you don’t pray to a man; you don’t trust in a man to save you from death, judgment, and hell. You don’t eat the body and drink the blood of just a man. But that’s all a 1st century Gallop poll said Jesus was.

Not the Rock. Jesus asks, according to Matthew, “Who do men say the Son of *Man* is?”, the Rock answers, “You are the Son of *God*.” Actually his full answer there is: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ‘Christ’ is Greek for the Hebrew ‘Messiah’. You’re the one foretold since Eden. You’re Eve’s Promised Seed, Abraham’s Reward, Isaac’s Shield, Jacob’s Lion from the tribe of Judah, David’s Shepherd. You’ve all been in a setting where a teacher asks a question. You feel you know the right answer; you can see that others may too, but who will speak first? To do so is to put yourself out there. Who else would speak first but the Rock?

It’s important we note what neither Mark’s account nor Luke’s account does. Mt. 16:17 says, “Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven.’” People, on their own, can reach no other conclusion about Jesus than Tammy did: “He’s just a man.” Men can only reach those conclusions that make sense to them: Sins are only what they consider sinful. Adultery not living together. Forgiveness only to the extent they think: hatred sure but not murder. And Baptism is plain water, even as Absolution is just words, and bread and wine in Communion are no more than that. To get beyond what men can reason takes nothing less than revelation by the Father in heaven. The Rock is given that, but then the Rock cracks.

Jesus tells them ‘plainly’ what it means to be the Christ. “Plainly” is the Greek for openly, frankly, unambiguously. Not, “The Son of Man will be lifted up.” Or, “Tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in 3 days.” I’ve heard doctors do this. They tell the elderly husband that his wife is sick, maybe sicker than we thought, but there are some treatments available. It’s hard to say what the outcome will be. But to the son down the hall he says, “She has Stage 4 cancer. There is not much that can be done. It’s only a matter of months.” Well, the Rock and the less than rock disciples get the son talk. It is necessary for the Son of Man, the Christ, to suffer many things, to be rejected after testing by the highest religious court in the OT church, to be killed, and O yeah, to rise after 3 days. Though all 3 Passion predictions have the part about Him rising again it never has any effect on the disciples. That’s because the suffering, rejecting, and killing overwhelm them as is plain from the Rock’s words here.

He takes Jesus aside; The Rock behaves like a big brother who knows better. He doesn’t just correct Jesus. He rebukes Him. This is the same Greek word the insert translates “warned” as in Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him. The word will be used again when Jesus responds to the Rock’s rebuke. “Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter [aka ‘the Rock’]. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’” This is a very strong word. It means to reprimand, to admonish strongly, to enjoin strictly. Let a child do that to a parent; let an employee do that to an employer; let a motorist do that to a cop, and that’s nothing compared to what the Rock does to the One the Father has revealed as the Christ. “You’re wrong Jesus. None of this will ever happen to you. No suffering, rejecting, killing, or rising.”

Well, doesn’t it seem the only bad part in the rebuke the Rock denies is the resurrection? No, skip ahead to Luke 24. There Jesus reveals to the Rock and other apostles what they should’ve known from the OT. “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?’” (25-26). Again, “‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (44-45). These are the things of God the Rock wasn’t minding while minding the things of men.

So, what does minding the things of men rather than the things of God look like for us? It’s me putting more stock in the upheaval going on in the world than in the Words of our Lord that He gives me peace in this world: “My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn.14:27-28). It’s me expecting the world to love me though the Lord promises it will hate me because it hated Him. It’s me expecting to see the bread basket full before I pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” It’s me expecting, contrary to the hymn, to be taken to heaven on flowery beds of ease rather than by the same cross that took my Lord.

So, the Rock cracks and in a big way. That’s why, we follow Christ the Rock and not Peter. In 1 Cor. 10, Paul refers to the OT Church all drinking from the Rock that followed them and then plainly says, “the Rock was

Christ.” Listen to how Scripture glories in this Rock: Ps. 18:2: “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Ps 18:31: “For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?” Ps. 18:46: “The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior!” Ps 19:14: “O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” And Deut. 32:18 tells us what we don’t want to do: “You deserted the Rock who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.”

Our Rock is a flesh and blood Man, but it’s not Peter, it’s the flesh and blood Man conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin named Mary. I wanted to put on the bulletin cover an image of Marvel Comics, the Thing. He’s part of the Fantastic Four. He’s a big man made of rock. I wanted him on the cover, but the images looked too scary. But think of a Man who is a Rock humbling Himself, giving up the full use of His superpowers, to live under the laws God gave humanity. Not only does He keep them, He suffers as if He broke every single one of them every day in every way. He suffers the guilt you sometimes feel; the shame you sometimes feel. The dread of being judged by almighty God you sometimes feel. Then picture the Thing nailed to the cross. This gigantic Rock man dies and in death is pale, weak, and soft.

That’s what really happened to Jesus, but right before He does suffer and pay the last full measure for the sins and guilts of the world, He says these words. The very last week of His life, which is right before Passover, He quotes Psalm 118, which was sung during Passover. Jesus says, “The Stone the builders rejected has become the capstone? Everyone who falls on that Stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom It falls will be crushed” (Lk. 20:17-18). Jesus is speaking to the people who get up early, go to the Temple, just to hear Him and to the OT church leaders who are overhearing it all. You know the saying about the anvil that has worn out many a hammer? Jesus is the Rock that wears out all that oppose Him, resist Him, reject Him. But He is also the Rock of Ages that clefts to safely keep Moses so he can see God’s Glory which can only toast sinners.

Read about it in Exodus 33 and 34: “Moses said, ‘Now show me Your glory.’ And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,’ He said, ‘you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live.’ Then the Lord said, ‘There is a place near Me where you may stand on a rock. When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.’” The cross is the point where the Rock clefts, where the open wounds of Jesus provide shelter for sinners, peace for guilty sinners, courage for frighten ones.

Where on earth does this Rock cleft for me today? Not in the Holy Land. The cleft Rock is not found in your own heart or even your believing. We see how not even Peter the Rock could hold on to Him there. No, the Rock clefts where Heaven’s waters flow; where Heaven’s Words are heard, and where Heaven Himself comes down to earth in His Body as Bread and His Blood as Wine. In these, I fall before the Rock and the Rock covers me rather than crushes me, and I hear what Moses did: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Ex. 34:6-7). And this Rock of compassion, grace, and forgiveness calls not just rocks but pebbles and even grains of sand. Amen

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