

Matthew 14:22-33, et al

Through Life's Ups and Downs, Jesus Is There

The Summit Church, COVID-19

MPS: Peter's life shows us how Jesus is prayerfully, patiently, powerfully, and passionately pursuing you.

CONTEXT

Summit Family, I hope this message finds you well. Wherever you are joining from grab your Bible and turn to the **book of Matthew**. While you're already fidgeting around, go ahead and buckle your seatbelt, put your tray tables in the upright and locked position, and prepare for immediate takeoff, because we're going to cover a *lot* of ground in Matthew in the next 20 minutes, okay?

The last few weekends we've been in a series going through 1 Peter — well today we're going to pause that *series* but continue looking at the author, Peter himself. PJD said this during week one, but most people, when they start reading the Bible, develop a real affection for Peter, because **there's just something about him we feel like we can relate to**.

And the more I started looking at the early days of Peter's walk with Jesus, I just felt like it perfectly encapsulated the **emotional** and **spiritual** range I know so many of us are going through right now. So I'm not exactly sure who this message is for, but I *do know* I need to hear it as much as anyone. In fact, in a lot of ways this is gonna be less of a sermon and hopefully more of an encouragement to you this week.

Here's why I think this is gonna resonate with so many of you today: When Peter was first called as a disciple (he goes on to do great things for Jesus obviously, most of which is found in the book of Acts), reading about his early walk with Jesus feels a bit like being on a roller-coaster — constant ups and downs, highs and lows. One second he's on a mountaintop and, quite literally, seconds later he's in the deepest of valleys. The emotional range he experienced *daily* was insane.

Peter was a guy with **tremendously high-highs** and **profoundly low-lows**...and he'd often experience both of those *in the same hour*. This is not Peter at his 'best and worst,' this is Peter at his normal day-to-day, which is what makes his story **wonderfully human**, and I think it's why it makes him so **relatable** and **relevant** for us this weekend...because I think this is where so many of us are right now — up one minute and down the next.

In fact, I asked a question on Instagram this week: *"What are some of the emotions you've been feeling over the last few weeks—good and bad?"* And it completely affirmed this reality. Listen to some of these answers:

- "Grateful for a slower life and thankful for the extra time with family . . . but also I've experienced anger and times I want to strangle some ppl in my family."
- "Time with family—good. Too much time with family—bad."
- Anger...gratitude and joy
- Anxiety, fear, exhaustion...Victory, joy, excitement.
- Confusion, loneliness...gratitude
- Lonely ... yet never felt so close to my bros and sisters in Christ
- Anxiety...peace
- Frustrated, lonely, annoyed...grateful, reflective, and full of peace

I mean that's a LOT of ups and downs, right?! Anybody resonate with this? If this is you, can you just testify and let some of your brothers and sisters know **they're not alone**?

Even as a pastor, I'm experiencing this as much as anybody:

- At this very moment, I'm as **exhausted** as I've been in a long time — physically, emotionally, spiritually (we already have 3 kids 5 and under, and #4 is due in like 3 weeks, so it's not getting easier!) — yet I'm also incredibly **energized** cuz of the word I believe God has for you and the work he has for me in my job and my family.
- Pastoral confession: I am fully **confident** about this sermon because I know God's Word doesn't return void...but I'm also a little **anxious** cuz what if this is the worst sermon I ever preach?!
- All I'm trying to say is this: If you feel this tension...if you feel this roller-coaster of emotions right now, you are not alone!

You may be up one second and down the next, but listen, here's the good news: God is okay with both. God is not **intimidated** by your **ups** and **downs**. God is on your mountaintop and God is in your valley. I mean that figuratively *and* literally. David even said:

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!¹

And here's where we get rolling, because the word of encouragement I want to give you from the Bible today, is that if you love God and are called according to his purpose, then you can cling to this promise: even in all of your ups and downs, Jesus is prayerfully, patiently, powerfully, and passionately pursuing you, and he will never let Satan destroy your faith and bring you to ruin.

There are three words I want you to remember today : **JESUS IS THERE.**

¹ Psalm 139:7-8

When you're full of **peace** — Jesus is there.

When you're racked with **anxiety** — Jesus is there.

When you're full of joy and **gratitude** — Jesus is there.

When you're overwhelmed with **confusion** and **loneliness** — Jesus is there.

When you **love your neighbor** well during quarantine — Jesus is there.

And when you **snap at your spouse** in quarantine — Jesus is there.

Somebody give me a digital 'amen' right now and say "**JESUS IS THERE.**" Jesus is with you. Those of you who feel like you're in *heaven* right now, enjoying this quarantine — **Jesus is there**. Those of you who feel like you're in *Sheol* — **Jesus is there**.

Now I know you didn't come to hear a spiritual TED Talk; you came to get fed by the Word of God, so let me show you why this is true from Scripture.

FULL GRAPH: In fact, **take a look at this...**this is what we're about to march through event-by-event. These are all events in Peter's life defined as "ups" and "downs." But the one thing that remained constant for Peter was how **Jesus was there for Peter when he was up, and he was there for Peter when he was down...**and how ultimately he promises the same for you.

Jesus is prayerfully, patiently, powerfully, and passionately pursuing you.

Alright, this plane is taking off — you ready? Let's do this. Matthew 4:18-20

WALKTHROUGH TABLE

Matthew 4:18-20 (Called)

- This is the ultimate spiritual **HIGH** for Peter (and it should be!). He's **chosen, called** out, and given a **purpose** by Jesus himself.

- It's no wonder later on Peter opens his letter by saying, "**Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...**" He's been given a new identity right there on the spot.
- Peter is called and JESUS IS THERE. Salvation is the ultimate spiritual high.
- But his journey with Jesus has only begun...

Matthew 14:28-29 (Walks on Water)

- ****CONTEXT:** Jesus had just fed the 5k, he wanted some alone time, so he sends the disciples into a boat and tells them he'll meet them on the other side. They get halfway across the lake and a huge storm comes and they get stranded in a storm in the middle of the night . . . and it must've been really bad 'cuz half these guys are fishermen and they are terrified. So Jesus decides to walk out to them — on water, mind you — and they're like, "Ummm, is that you, Jesus?"
- Sometimes I think we gloss over miracles in the Bible way too quickly. We're too used to them. Let's slow down for a minute here and state the obvious: Humans don't walk on water!
- Regardless, this is shortly after Peter begins to follow Jesus, so he's just riding this **HIGH**, and guess what, JESUS IS THERE.. It's fantastic.
- Can you imagine how he's feeling? **Excited, faith-filled**, full of **awe**... but let's keep reading...

Matthew 14:30-32 (Sinks in Water)

- One verse later and Peter is sinking...
- **Doubt** creeps in. **Fear** begins to rear its head. Peter begins to sink. There's a dip in his faith that comes ONE VERSE after he's on the mountaintop.
- But, again, do you see it? This is the pattern we're gonna see: Jesus was there in his up, and now JESUS IS THERE in his DOWN.
- And not only is he there, Jesus is close enough to **reach out his hand and take hold of him** when he's down!

Matthew 16:13-18 (Confesses Jesus as the Christ)

- Peter is the first to confess Jesus as the Christ and Jesus is like, "**YES! You're right! Your eyes are being opened! In fact, I'm gonna use you as a ROCK in expansion of my church!..And not even HELL is going to be able to stop you!**"
- He's back on his **HIGH**! Star student...
- But here we go again...a few. verses. later.

Matthew 16:21-23 (Gets called 'Satan')

- Peter: *You are the Savior!* (UP)
- Jesus: *You are Satan!* (BACK DOWN)
- I imagine you've had some pretty crappy lows in your Christian life, but if Jesus were to show up in your living room right now and call you 'Satan,' that's rock bottom.
- However, Jesus hasn't given up...he's STILL THERE! And just six days later...

Matthew 17:1-4 (Transfiguration)

- HIGH

Matthew 17:5-8 (Falls Down in Fear)

- Moments later, falls on his face in terror (LOW).

Matthew 17:14-16 (Casting Out Demons)

- Been out doing God's work, casting out demons. Cool stuff.
- UP

Matthew 17:17-21 ("Little Faith")

- DOWN
- *Starting to look like your life yet? Am I talking to anybody?!*

Matthew 26:33, 35 (Bold: "I will never fall away.")

- UP — A moment of great faith

Matthew 26:34 (Reality: "You'll deny me 3x.")

- DOWN

Matthew 26:40 (Sleeping in Gethsemane)

A few things to note here:

- First, whoever you're watching with right now who has completely tuned out, I want you to nudge them real hard and give them the words of Jesus here in v40, "Could you not watch with me one hour?"
- Second, never in my life have I felt more vindicated than when I read about disciples falling asleep when they're supposed to be praying! I'm not even sure this is a 'down' for Peter, **it just made me feel better about myself**, so I included it.

Matthew 26:51 (Cuts Ear Off)

Matthew 26:52-53 ("Don't do that, Peter...")

- Jesus is like, "Man, I can handle my own. Besides, that's not how we conduct business in my kingdom."

Jesus gets arrested...

Matthew 26:56 (Flees After Arrest)

- Only 21 verses have passed since, "I'll die before I deny you!"

Matthew 26:58 (Follows Jesus...at a distance)

Matthew 26:69-75 (Denies Jesus 3x)

- Ultimate **LOW**.
- Peter is **ashamed, sad, angry** at himself. He's **weeping bitterly**.
- But Jesus is still **pursuing** him. Jesus still has a **plan** for him. Jesus still desires to show him, "Even when you're down, I'm there. I'm ready to pick you up. All you have to do is call out to me." . . . and that's exactly what he does in John 21...

John 21:15-17 (Restoration)

- Peter denied Jesus 3x...now Jesus gives him 3x to confess him as Savior.

John 21:18-19 ("Here's how you'll die.")

John 21:20-24 (Comparison)

Acts 2:14-41 (Preaches at Pentecost)

And Pentecost is just the beginning of what God is going to do through Peter.

- Jesus reaffirms Peter as "the rock" who would be instrumental in the spread of the early church and particularly to those outside of the Jewish tradition.
- He goes on to heal lame beggars.
- He preaches boldly before government officials.
- He endures arrests, beatings, and threats and none of them could dampen Peter's resolve to preach the gospel because he now knew **whatever he was going through that JESUS IS THERE WITH HIM.**

If for nothing else, his 'lows' occurred to show him that Jesus would never leave him.

Track Peter's life — he's up and down. Only consistent element we see in Peter's life is **Jesus consistently coming to him**. Jesus consistently **loving** him. Jesus consistently **ready** to accept him. Just consistently **by his side**. At every crazy turn..every **high**...every low...every **up**...every **down**...**JESUS IS THERE.**

- Church, our emotions may be all over the place during this time, but God is also all over the place (in a good way!). There's nowhere **you**, your **emotions**, or your **circumstances** can run to that he isn't already there ready to sustain and uphold you.
- It's like the old hymn says: *Ain't no mountain high, ain't no valley low, ain't no river wide enough to keep JESUS from getting to you!*
- Even when we're foolish, God still shows himself faithful.
- Even when we're up and down, God remains the same.
- Even when life is unpredictable, the one thing you never have to wonder about is God's posture towards you.

- Even when your feelings are all over the map, you don't have to wonder where Jesus is--JESUS IS THERE, with you!
- He is there when you're **walking on water**, and he's there when you're **sinking**.
- He's there when you're **confessing** and he's there when you're **rebuking**.
- He's there when you're **betraying him in sin** and he'll be there when you're **ready to confess**, where *he'll be ready to restore*.

Now you say, "If Jesus is with me then why do I go through pits and valleys in the first place?" Great question.

Often Jesus doesn't remove the problems in our lives, but **he promises to be with us in them**. And that's how, as believers, we can live and exist in this tension of ups and downs...because we know, that with Jesus, he is using *everything* for his glory and for our good. Which means that even when you're going "up and down," we're always moving forward.

Originally I was going to call these "setbacks," but I realized "setback" is not indicative of what we actually experience when Jesus is with us.

See, with Jesus, even when life takes a downward turn, that turn is still on a **forward trajectory**, because it's going to **open your eyes** more fully to your need for Jesus. Which, Lord willing, makes you **lean more wholly** on Jesus. And what greater joy can be found in life than to have your eyes opened more to the beauty and majesty and sufficiency of Jesus, the Savior who is sovereign, capable, powerful, and caring enough to walk through the ups and downs with you?

See, if you don't know Jesus as Savior then the ups and downs in life are all there is for you. The **ups are temporary highs** and the **downs are devastating lows**...it's just the cruel cycle of life. But with Jesus there is meaning in times of glory and there's meaning in times of misery.

As you grow in your relationship with Jesus, it's not **that the lows disappear**, it's just that **your lows no longer define or defeat you**. **Your lows may still be low, but they don't feel as low because you know you're not alone. JESUS IS THERE.**

In life's ups, JESUS IS THERE, giving you a glimpse of the joy to come in eternity.

In life's downs, JESUS IS THERE, opening your eyes to your need for him.

This is what Peter came to understand throughout his life, that he has a hope beyond the ups and downs of this world. It's why he writes so much about 'hope.' It's why he was given the nickname "Apostle of Hope."

Peter is instrumental in teaching us that "hope" isn't just wishful thinking...biblical hope is the confidence God's people have that God *will* fulfill his promises toward us. For all of God's promises are 'yes and amen' *in Christ Jesus*, the one who is always with us! The one who told the disciples when they were stuck in the storm, "Take heart, it is I." —> You know how else that can be translated? "Take heart, I AM." Jesus is pointing back to Exodus 3 and declaring: "I AM WHO I AM! I am GOD – I've got this under control! My purpose never fails! Whatever you need today, I AM it!"

So today, are you:

Hurting? Jesus is with you. Hope in his promise to be your **comforter**.

Confused? Jesus is with you. Hope in his promise to be your **guide**.

Anxious? Jesus is with you. Hope in his promise to be your **peace**.

Weak? Jesus is with you. Hope in his promise to be your **strength**.

*You fearful saints fresh courage take
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head.²*

² "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" by William Cowper

Peter's failures did not define him. And ours will not define us. Sure, they're stumbles along the path of following Jesus, but we always stumble *forward*, toward our Savior who paid for all of our stumbles on the cross.

Peter's story isn't one of successes and failures; it's a story about Jesus who saves, restores, redeems, never leaves.... Not about great faith or great faults; but about great grace.

As my dude, Mike Georges, often says, "The gospel shows us we don't have to wonder what God's response will be when you admit your failure and run to him for help." Jesus always meets our **hurt** with **hope**.

- Do you have this eternal hope? Do you have the surety that Jesus is with you today?
- If you don't, you can just use the same three words Peter used when he was drowning, "*Lord, save me.*"

*I told the Lord, my journey's long,
He said, "I chose the length."
I told him, "But I'm faint and weak."
He said, "I'll give you strength."
No matter what my words — God heard,
while listening patiently.
But what has meant the most is this,
my Father walks with me.³*

Wherever you find yourself today — up or down — Jesus is there.

³ Anne Peterson, *He Is With Me*

Peter's Highs and Lows

