

Feed My Sheep, 1 & 2 Peter: Lesson 1

The Person Of Peter

Memory Text: “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ “ (Matthew 14:30, 31)

Setting The Stage: Before we go to the two letters written by Peter that have been included in the sacred canon, we want to first take a look at who Peter was for the purpose of becoming acquainted with his story. This is so we can better appreciate the letters he wrote that were sent out to the Christians scattered throughout the region of his day.

Before you read a news article or a book, you like to know a little about the person who authored the words you’re about to read. Knowing something about the person can give you a perspective on their perspective that will enhance or help you in your reading.

Now, the experts disagree on how important it is to get to know an author. One group says that because no author writes in a vacuum it would be silly not to become acquainted with the author and his/her surroundings to get the most out of their writings. Another group says that reading about an author's life is a waste of time because it can detract from the meaning of the text by becoming preoccupied with thoughts of the author's life and the influence of that life on the text.

Of course, there’s a happy medium between these two camps. Understanding who Peter was and what he became in Christ adds a special flavor to the reading of his letters. However, we know what Peter wrote was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and knowing this allows us to read his letters as the Holy Spirit intended for them to be read, thus helping us arrive at a truthful understanding of the text. But knowing something about the author and the culture surrounding Peter during his life can enhance our reading, just as long as we don’t use this knowledge to warp Peter’s original intent, or the Holy Spirit’s intended sentiment.

What do we know about Peter? Peter’s occupation was that of fisherman. Shortly after the baptism of Jesus, Andrew brought his brother, Peter, to Jesus, essentially making Peter the first Christian convert (John 1:40-42). Peter responded to the call to accept Jesus as Messiah and associated with Him intermittently. Nearly two years later Jesus called him to permanent discipleship (Matt 4:12), along with his brother Andrew, and his work partners, James and John.

Peter appears first in all four NT lists of the twelve disciples. We know he often took upon himself the role of spokesman for the entire group (Matt. 14:28; 16:16; 17:24; 26:35, etc.).

The SDA Bible Commentary authors have this to say about Peter: *“His ardor, eagerness, earnestness, courage, loyalty, vigor, and organizing ability no doubt marked him for leadership among the disciples from the very beginning. Peter was pre-eminently a man of action; his enthusiastic disposition was his strongest personal character trait. He was a man of pronounced extremes, and his strong personality was the source of marked virtues and serious defects.”* (SDA BC, vol. 5, p. 594, 595)

Peter was eventually given authority (not supremacy) from Christ to feed the flock of God (John 21:15-17). He became the first apostle to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. From the Jewish perspective, Gentiles were often seen as pagans who didn't know the true God. During Jesus' time, many Jews took such pride in their cultural and religious heritage that they considered Gentiles “unclean,” calling them “dogs” and “the uncircumcised.” Gentiles and the half-Gentile Samaritans were viewed as enemies to be shunned (see John 4:9; 18:28; Acts 10:28).

Although he struggled at times with his bigotry (Gal. 2:11-14), but was eventually victorious over it, he helped the early church, along with Paul, to understand the need to proclaim the gospel to all nations and peoples. He also helped guide the church through issues that threatened to divide it (Acts 15).

There's a lot we can learn about in the conversion of Peter and his willingness to be used of God. One lesson stands out immediately; a changed person in the hands of God can be a powerful instrument in bringing others to Christ.

Sunday / Depart From Me!

Luke 5:1-11

Luke 5:1-11. Day had broken over the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had come to spend a quiet hour by the waterside hoping to get some rest from the multitude that followed Him day by day. But soon the people began to gather about Him. Their numbers increased rapidly and so Jesus stepped into Peter's boat to escape the pressure of the crowd. Here Jesus could be better seen and heard by all, and from the boat He taught the multitude on the beach.

This is about two years since Peter started following Jesus intermittently. He was likely invited to accept the Messiah by his brother Andrew, who was a disciple of John the Baptist. Since then, John had been beheaded, and the religious leadership had opposed Jesus' ministry.

The discourse ended, Jesus turned to Peter, and encouraged him to launch out into the sea and let down his nets for a little while (vs. 4). But Peter was disheartened. All night he hadn't caught anything. He was thinking about the fate of John and the

seeming lack of success of Jesus' ministry. Now his own occupation had failed him; and as he watched by the empty nets, the future had seemed dark with discouragement. Peter's response was to be expected under the circumstances (see v. 5). But Jesus had something very important to teach Peter.

Love for Jesus moved Peter to obey. Peter and his brother together let down the net. As they attempted to bring it back in, they called their companions to help them because the catch was too big to be hauled in by just two men. The catch was so big that the net began to break. When the catch was secured, both boats were at risk of sinking.

Peter was unmindful now of the boats. He was in the presence of the Divine. Love for his master, shame for his own unbelief, gratitude for the condescension of Christ, above all, the sense of His uncleanness in the presence of infinite purity, overwhelmed him. While his friends were securing the contents of the catch, Peter fell at the Savior feet in true humility saying something incredibly significant:

Luke 5:8: "Depart from me, for I am sinful man, O Lord." In the presence of a police officer a thief naturally feels uncomfortable, even though the police officer may not be aware of his criminal act. How much more then should a sinner feel shame and unworthiness in the presence of the perfect Savior?

This sense of unworthiness is the first reaction in the human heart when God, through His Spirit, begins His work of transforming the life and character. God can do nothing for a person who doesn't first sense their need of salvation. This was the same response given by Daniel when he fell before the angel. This was the same response given by Isaiah when he witnessed the radiant glory of God in His temple.

Peter's response to Jesus in this situation tells us that although Peter was impetuous at times and had a vacillating character before he was thoroughly converted, he was susceptible to the gentle pleadings of the Holy Spirit. More than that, he was willing to give up everything to follow Jesus (v. 11). How about you?

Monday / Confessing The Christ

Matthew 16:13-17; 1 Peter 4:12

Around the middle of A.D. 30, about 2 ½ years into Christ's ministry, Jesus withdrew from public ministry to Caesarea Philippi (about 25 miles from the north of the Sea of Galilee) for about half a year where He devoted His time to instructing His disciples.

Matthew 16:13, 14. After revealing His authority over nature (Luke 8:22-25), His power over demons (vv. 26-35), His strength over diseases (Luke 5:12-15; 8:43-48), His ability to feed 5,000 (Luke 9:13-17), and His power over the death (Luke 8:51-56), Jesus confronted His disciples with two questions, the last of which is all-important.

What was the problem with the answers people gave regarding who they thought Jesus was? All of them agreed that Christ was a good man and even a prophet. But none of them declared Him to be God in human flesh.

Matthew 16:15. “Who do you say I am?” As the spokesman for the group, Peter declares, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” This was a turning point for Peter and the disciples, and for Jesus ministry. Since their declaration of faith, Jesus began to speak to them about His inevitable suffering and death. What He taught them was contrary to their own wants and wishes. It became a hard lesson to learn, but Peter eventually understood as revealed in his writings:

1 Peter 4:12: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”

Will how a person answers the question about Christ make a difference in where they spend eternity? Every person must answer the question: Is Jesus’ claim to deity true or false? Either He is Lord, liar or lunatic. If Jesus was a liar, or He was seriously mistaken, even a lunatic, how can we explain the fact that He left us with the most profound moral instruction and powerful moral example that anyone has ever left? Could a deceiver or an ignoramus teach such unselfish ethical truths and live such an exemplary life as Jesus did? The title “Son of God” given to Jesus speaks forcibly to His divinity and preeminence. Does He have pre-eminence in your life?

Tuesday / Walking On Water

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus had just fed the 5,000. The crowd was more than impressed with His ability to work such a miracle. Thoughts of future glory and a conquering Messiah prompted the crowd to crown Jesus king right there and then (John 6:15). Sensing the crowd’s ambition, Jesus found it necessary to speak to the disciples with authority and force, telling them to get into a boat and that He would catch up with them later. After sending the multitude away, Jesus went up into a mountain to pray. From that vantage point He could still see His disciples, who eventually found themselves striving to keep their boat and themselves above water (Matt. 14:22-24).

Matthew 14:25-27. If the disciples had set out across the lake when Jesus had told them to go, it’s likely they may have avoided the storm. They dragged their feet because they were having a hard time accepting the fact that Jesus avoided being crowned king. Their own ambitions had been crushed. Now it was about eight hours later and they were struggling for their lives.

You can imagine the emotions they were struggling with: humiliation, disappointment, resentment, and impatience. The wind was contrary and so was their hearts; but in the providence of God the raging sea became the means of quieting the raging storm in their souls. God often deals with us as He dealt the disciples that night.

Matthew 14:28-31. Peter's natural mood of leadership, now as upon many other occasions, led him to overconfidence and to an impulsive and injudicious course of action. Peter's imperfect faith inspired him to ask Jesus to call him to walk on water and Jesus was willing to accept it in that spirit. Peter stepped out of the boat in faith, and it was by faith that he walked on the water. But faith was only alive as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus.

Apparently, Peter had momentarily forgotten the about the wind and the waves. As his feet became accustomed to walking on the surface of the water he evidently thought of his friends back on the boat and wondered what they thought of his newfound skill. But turning his eyes for an instance back to the boat, he lost sight of Jesus. At that moment, according to *The Desire of Ages*, Peter was in middle of two waves, and when he turned to find Jesus, He was nowhere to be found. All he could see was the wind and the waves. In that brief moment instant self-satisfaction had diluted faith with pride, and faith lost its sustaining power.

Although being a good swimmer (as fishermen probably were), Peter was no match for this storm and he began to sink. In his desperation, he cried out for Jesus to save him. Immediately, Jesus reached out to save him. In love, Jesus first rescued Peter, then He rebuked him for his lack of trust. Jesus didn't censure Peter for wanting to walk on the water, but for letting go of faith.

Have there been times when self-confidence sank you? What is needed in order for us to not hesitate at God's promises? Can confidence in God's ability to do what He says enough? How do we gain confidence in His promises?

Wednesday / Denying His Lord

Luke 22:31-34, 54-62

Luke 22:31-34, 54-62. What lessons can we learn from Peter's failures?

On that fateful evening when Peter denied Jesus three times, and with bitter shame he looked into the compassionate, disappointed eyes of Jesus, his life would never be the same again. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound (Rom. 5:20). Peter became a changed man.

"Before his fall, Peter was always speaking unadvisedly, from the impulse of the moment. He was always ready to correct others, and to express his mind, before he had a clear comprehension of himself or of what he had to say. But the converted Peter was very different. He retained his former fervor, but the grace of Christ regulated his zeal. He was no longer impetuous, self-confident, and self-exalted, but calm, self-possessed, and teachable." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 815)

Peter's denial of Jesus teaches us several things:

1. Good intentions aren't always enough

2. Proper preparation is necessary to succeed – Peter failed to pray with Jesus in Gethsemane
3. Compromise can lead to spiritual ruin
4. Jesus' forgiveness knows no limits when a person comes to Him with genuine remorse and regret
5. God desires to and will restore us after having fallen away we return to Him with genuine repentance and faith

Thursday / Peter As Church Leader

Galatians 1:18, 19; 2:9-14

“During the ministry of Jesus, Peter often acted in the role of leader of the 12 disciples. He was their usual spokesman. When Matthew lists the disciples, he says “first...Peter.” (Matt. 10:2) Peter also took a prominent role in the early church. It was Peter who took the initiative to appoint a disciple to replace Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus (Acts 1:15-25). On the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who explained to the multitude that they were seeing the promised gift of the Spirit, poured out by God upon His people (Acts 2:14-36). It was Peter who, when arrested for speaking about the resurrection of the dead, spoke to the high priest and the assembled Jewish leaders (Acts 4:1-12). It was Peter who was led to Cornelius, the first Gentile to be accepted as a follower of Jesus (Acts 10:1-48). It was Peter whom Paul visited for 15 days when Paul first came to Jerusalem after his conversion (Gal. 1:18). Indeed, describing the circle of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem at the time, Paul identifies three “pillars” of the church: Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and John the beloved disciple (Gal. 2:9).” (*Feed My Sheep*, Sabbath School Bible study Guide, p. 10)

Galatians 1:18, 19; 2:9-14. What do these verses tell us about Peter, even while he functioned so prominently in the early church? Even as a church leader, even as someone who was clearly called by Jesus to “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17), even as one who received the vision about not calling any man “common or unclean” (Acts 10:28), Peter still had some growing to do. Though called of God, Peter had some blind spots that needed correcting. How do we respond when others seek to point out our own “blind spots”?

Appeal: Peter's life was dramatically transformed when he realized his true condition as a sinner in the presence of Christ. Peter gave willing obedience to Jesus' commands and witnessed the power of Christ to accomplish His mission independently of his skills as a professional fisherman. Peter learned, although bitterly, that he must trust Christ's sufficiency alone. Are you trusting everything to Christ today?