

Peter and His Epistles

Lesson #1: An Introduction to the Man

I. Introduction

“Peter comes nearer to us than any of his fellow apostles. We revere James, the brother of our Lord, for his austere saintliness. We strain our eyes in the effort to follow John to the serene heights, where his eagle wing carried him in rapture and revelation. But Peter is so human, so like ourselves in his down moment and glorious moments, so entangled with weaknesses, that we are encouraged to hope that perhaps the Great Potter may be able to make something even of our common clay.” (The Life of Peter, preface)

A. Like so many other Biblical figures, Peter was a flawed human being.

Consider Abraham who lied about who his wife was (Gen. 20)

Consider Jacob who manipulates his father in order to steal the blessing (Gen. 27)

Consider David who murdered Uriah and took his wife (2 Sam. 11 and 12)

1. The gospel writer Mark notes three low points in Peter’s life:

8:32-33 He rebukes Christ as He foretells His death

14:37 He couldn’t watch even one hour in prayer

14:68-71 He denies he even knows Christ

2. Luke and John set his denial of Christ as Peter’s greatest failure (Luke 22 and John 18)

3. Matthew sees two major lows in Peter’s ministry:

16:22-23 Peter rebukes the Lord for predicting His death

26:69-74 Peter denies the Lord three times

4. Paul would no doubt list Peter’s inconsistencies regarding the keeping of the ceremonial law as a major low (as noted in Gal. 2:11-14).

B. However, Peter was realistic about himself. He was honest, contrite and authentic in his relationship with Christ.

I Peter 5:5 “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

He describes himself two ways in the book of II Peter 1:1

A servant: “doulos” a bondservant See Ex. 21:1-6

An apostle: The early church leader (until Acts 16) and one who literally saw the Lord in His resurrected form

- C. He was a complex human being. He was not the one dimensional character that we often hear him described as. Note that he is the “only other fully formed character in the gospels, besides Jesus Christ.”

He is a learned man; he was obviously a student of the Old Testament. And, there are a number of picturesque similes in I Peter that demonstrate how he could take a common place object or event and teach a vivid truth about God. (Consider I Peter 1:14; 2:2, 5, 11, 16, 25; 4:10)

- D. He is worthy of being carefully studied. Eusebius (early church historian) remarked that “Simon was chosen for his merits.”

II. Peter’s first Meeting with Jesus

- A. Peter was a disciple of John the Baptist. However, he wasn’t at the Jordan River (30 miles south east of the Sea of Galilee at Bethabara) the day Jesus arrived for His own baptism (See John 1:29-34). He did come the next day and had his first encounter with the Lord.
- B. Peter first met the Lord because of his brother, Andrew. They worked in the family’s fishing business near their home in Capernaum.

A word about Peter’s personal family:

He is the son of Jonas (Matt. 16:17 and John 1:42). He was married and apparently his wife accompanied him in his ministry (Mark 1:29-31 and I Cor. 9:5)

- C. Consider the “look” that Jesus gave Peter in John 1:42. It is the same “gaze” as in Luke 22:61.
- D. Notice the name change:

In the Bible, when the Lord has a significant plan for someone’s life, he often renamed the person. Jacob was renamed Israel and Saul became Paul. Here Jesus renames Peter. From Simon, the most popular Hebrew name of the day to Cephas which is really an Aramaic prophetic title meaning “stone” or “rock”. The Greek translation of which is Peter.

His name is a designation of strength, not a nickname like the “Sons of thunder” for James and John.

Peter and the other disciples began their “ministry by wandering around with Jesus” as they traveled to Cana to see His first miracle (John 2).

III. Jesus clearly establishes who is in supreme control (Luke 5:1-11)

Apparently about 9 months have passed and now Jesus arrives in His home town of Capernaum. Peter and the others had been fishing in the Sea of Galilee all night and caught nothing. When Jesus gave them an astonishing catch, notice Peter’s reaction.

“But when Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees saying; depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (See also Job 27:5-6)

IV. Peter gets his calling and “absorbing purpose in life” He is to be a Fisher of Men (Matt. 4:18-22) Look at his “catch” in Acts 2:14-41.

V. Peter is clearly the “first” among the other disciples. Note the order of the names listed. In Matt. 10:2. He is their spokesman and he is often singled out for “special lessons.”

Look at Matt. 16:13-21 (his great confession that Jesus is the Messiah); 17:1-9 (the transfiguration); and 26:31-33 (the prediction that he would deny Jesus).

VI. Peter’s future is foretold (John 21:17-19)

“According to tradition, Peter had to watch as his wife was crucified, but encouraged her with the words, “remember the Lord.” When it came time for him to be crucified, Peter reportedly pled that he was not worthy to be crucified like his Lord, but rather should be crucified upside down, which tradition says he was in AD 67-68”.

VII. So What? There are several steps to Peter’s calling. They might be outlined by carefully watching the phrases Jesus used... “You will be...” and “You will be...”

In much the same way, the Lord speaks to each of us. We are.....flawed, inconsistent, sinful creatures who are “worried about many things.” But, as a result of God’s call on our lives, “...He who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will HIMSELF restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (I Peter 5:10)

In the same way that Christ “saw” some significant potential in the life of this rough fisherman, He sees potential in us. We MUST surrender and allow Him to use us!

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think God changed Peter’s name? Why do you think God singled him out? What do you think some of his “merits” were?
2. In the lesson, we called Peter “complex.” As you consider his character, what do you think some of his “complexities” were?
3. Why do you think the church tends to exalt Paul but minimize the impact of Peter? Is it a fair assumption?