

2 Peter
Understanding Peter
2 Peter 1:1

July 28, 2024

HDBC

Most first century Christians never met Jesus personally. They were introduced to Him through the witness of the apostles and those who served with them. Men like Peter, James, John, Andrew, Thomas and the others. The chief leaders among that group were clearly Peter and Paul. In fact the book of Acts, which is the continuing story of the gospel, can be roughly divided into two parts with Peter being the lead character in the first and Paul being the lead character in the second.

Both men were martyred for their faith. Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified upside down. Both men wrote their final inspired letters toward the end of their lives, while anticipating martyrdom. For Paul it was 2 Timothy. For Peter it is 2 Peter. The aging apostles wanted to leave some final instructions for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Peter was almost certainly in Rome when he penned these final words about a year before his execution. He was well-aware of what was happening to his brothers and sisters in Christ. They were being torn apart by wild beasts, crucified, burned alive and experiencing other unspeakable things simply for the entertainment of the emperor and others.

I can only imagine how often Peter remembered the words of Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection: *Truly, truly I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but then you grow old, you will stretch out your hands & someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.* (John 21:18)

Knowing that the end must surely be soon, he sat down and penned his last letter. In it he dealt with important themes that would be helpful to believers then and now. Here are a few of things to note:

First, this letter is more difficult to interpret than 1 Peter. Though it is short, it has some depth, as well as some language that is difficult to translate and some statements that are difficult to fully understand.

Second, the primary theme is different from 1 Peter. In his first letter, Peter dealt with the difficulties of external persecution. In this letter he deals with dangers from within . . . like false teachers and moral corruption.

As was typical in that time, Peter opens his letter with his name and a couple of descriptions. In order to fully understand and appreciate this well-known NT leader, let's look carefully at how he introduces himself.

1. Simon Peter

On the surface, we might simply see a name. But there is more. He uses two names. The first is his given name, the name of his birth. The second, Peter, was the name given to him by Jesus. It means **rock**. It was Jesus' way of calling him to become a courageous and valiant leader in the early church.

In using both names Peter was reminding his readers of two stages of his life. Who he was before he was saved and who he became after he was saved. By using both names he wants us to know that he is a real person with real flaws, but also one who had been transformed by his relationship with Jesus. He was just an average guy who heard and responded to the call of Jesus, and it changed his life, forever. That still happens today. Jesus changes lives . . . for the better.

The fisherman became the rock. He was not always rock-like. He had flaws. He failed. But he was **forever forgiven and forever a part of God's family**. The same can be true for you. The two names speak of the two primary eras of his life. Before and after he met Jesus. When you get saved you don't become some superhero living above the temptations to sin, or the possibility of failure, or the presence of pain and difficulties. But you have Jesus to forgive, guide, encourage.

He then describes himself in two ways.

2. **Bondservant**

Speaks of his commitment to Jesus as Lord. The focus is on his relationship with Jesus, which was rocky at times. Think about the ups and downs of his walk with Jesus.

Called to follow Jesus as a blue-collar fisherman. Just a common man, making a living for his family, doing the best he could. Then Jesus entered his life and called him to discipleship. He said yes. Left the nets and boats and began to learn at the feet of the master teacher. When he made his decision to follow Jesus, he was all in.

He quickly became recognized as one of the primary leaders among the twelve. In most lists his name is **listed first**. He was often seen as the **spokesman** for the others. If there had been an executive team among the twelve, he would have been on it. He was one of three who were often invited to experience things with Jesus without the others.

He showed great faith and courage. When Jesus **walked on water**, Peter was willing to step out in faith and attempt to walk on water to Jesus. He made the insightful **declaration of who Jesus was**, declaring Him to be the Christ. When Jesus was being arrested, Peter was the first to step out and **defend Jesus with a sword**, risking his own life. He had some big victories, spiritually.

But he also had some big misses. After stepping out of the boat and taking a few steps on the water he took his eyes off of Jesus and sank. After making the powerful declaration that Jesus was the Christ, he tried to tell Jesus that He was not going to die. Jesus had to rebuke him in front of all the other disciples. After drawing a sword to defend Jesus at his arrest, he later denied even knowing who Jesus was.

I love this about Peter. I love that he was not perfect. Even after he had walked with Jesus for a long time, he still failed. But he also shows us with his actions how to respond to our own sins and failures. He was broken over his sins. He confessed and repented, then moved forward.

I get it if you think you can't be like Paul, or Moses, or Joshua. But Peter is a different story. He's a person we can all identify with. When you fail or fall, don't let the enemy use it to discourage you. Seek to reduce the failures, and seek to increase the wins. As Peter was a bondservant of Jesus, we are also called to be bondservants of Jesus. That mean's acknowledging that He is Lord.

3. Apostle of Jesus Christ

Reveals his calling to be a leader in the early church. **The focus is on his ministry for Jesus.** Peter was part of the original twelve. He spent three years with Jesus, watching, learning, growing, maturing in his faith. Those were his seminary years, preparing him to be a ministry leader during that first generation of Christianity. The fisherman was called to become a shepherd of people. And he was a great one. His faithfulness is seen in seven experiences. These are like a panoramic view of Peter's ministry. In surveying them, we'll get a better understanding of this man whose letter we are about to study.

1) His leadership in replacing Judas (Acts 1)

Peter was never hesitant to take charge. He would charge into any situation with a full head of steam. When something needed to be done, most often it was Peter who stepped up to the plate to make sure that it happened.

After the ascension of Jesus into Heaven, it was Peter who suggested the replacement of Judas Iscariot by quoting from the Old Testament which predicted the betrayal and indicated that another should take his place. He took charge and acted according to Scripture.

2) His preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

When the Holy Spirit fell on the believers at Pentecost and they were accused of being drunk, it was Peter who stood to confront and preach boldly to the crowd. 3,000 people become believers and were baptized. He had denied Christ out of fear. Now he boldly and courageously proclaimed Christ, with no fear.

3) His witness to Cornelius (Acts 10)

Peter was called to go and witness to Cornelius, a gentile. Peter was a Jew and it was clear that his primary calling was to witness to Jews. Paul would later be called to invest his life in ministry to the gentiles. But Peter as the leader of the apostles would be called of God to open the door of the Gospel to the gentiles.

In order to do this Peter had to lay aside his own prejudices against Gentiles. A man and his family needed to be saved. This man happened to be a Gentile. Peter was called to go. It took courage to step out of his comfort zone and go. But he did.

4) His humility in yielding the spotlight

Peter was clearly the leader of that early church. He is mentioned 55 times in the book of Acts, but all in the first 15 chapters. There is a clear shift in leadership focus after chapter 12. The focus shifts to Paul. Almost all the rest of the book focuses on Paul and his ministry. Peter seemed to slide into the shadows as Paul took the stage. Yet there was never even a hint of jealousy by Peter. **Ministry leaders today could benefit from his example.**

Just because he disappears in the last half of the book of Acts does not mean he stopped ministering and leading. NT hints and early church historians help us know. **He traveled throughout the northern Mediterranean, likely teaching in Antioch, Corinth, and Rome. His wife accompanied him on his travels.** Toward the end of his life he

settled in Rome where he ministered with Paul's early associate, Silvanus (Silas). Mark was also with him there. Early tradition informs us that Mark used Peter's eyewitness accounts of Jesus in writing his gospel.

5) His willingness to accept rebuke (Galatians 2)

Peter made a visit to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas were ministering. While there he spent time interacting with the gentile believers. But when some Jewish Christians came to town, Peter broke fellowship with the gentiles and only spend time with the Jews, for fear that he would be condemned for hanging out with the gentiles. His actions led Barnabas to do the same thing.

Paul confronted Peter publicly for this sin. Peter received it graciously and learned from it, showing no animosity toward Paul.

6) His perseverance in the face of threats

Multiple times in the book of Acts, Peter and other apostles were arrested, beaten, mistreated and threatened because of their public declarations about Jesus. They were told to stop. Peter's response? *Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.* (Acts 4:19) In other words, we are going to keep on sharing Jesus regardless of your threats. And they did.

7) His courage to die for Jesus

Ultimately, he was arrested for his faith and condemned to die. Tertullian of Carthage wrote around AD 200 that Peter was crucified in Rome. Early stories indicate that he asked to be crucified upside down, feeling unworthy to suffer the same death as Jesus.

This would have happened under the evil and bloody reign of Emperor Nero. The most likely location was the ***circus of Nero***, an arena where many Christians were tortured and killed in the first and

second centuries. Not long after his death a shrine was built to mark his grave. Later centuries saw a series of churches built on the site. Today St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican rests on the likely location of his death and burial.

Interestingly, in the 1950s excavations beneath the Basilica unearthed first-century remains of a sixty-seventy-year-old male near the traditional site of his burial. May have been the bones of the faithful apostle.

Before his death, he penned 2 Peter. These were his last words not only written to that first generation but to every generation of believers since, including us.

Takeaways:

1. Trusting Jesus changes the course of our lives.

Simon, the fisherman met and trusted Jesus. He became Peter, the disciple of Jesus and useful vessel in the mission of Christ. Have you met Jesus, personally? Have you trusted Him for the forgiveness of sins and to be brought into His forever family? You can . . . today.

2. Following Jesus is risky.

It will involve taking some human risks that may result in suffering. Peter suffered much during his life and ministry. Most of us will not face the same level, but following Jesus will cost us something.

3. Setbacks are normal, stay the course anyway.

Peter failed. We will, too. But he confessed, received forgiveness then charged ahead for Jesus. Be like Peter!