

Text: 1 Peter 1:1, 5:1, 12-14

Title: "Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: The first word of this Epistle is *Peter*, identifying for us its author. We know who Peter was. We know him as one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, an identity Peter confirms for us in this verse. Who Peter was is all about Jesus Christ for him. *Peter* is the Greek version of the Aramaic name *Cephas*, which the Lord gave to Simon in John 1:42, "And he [Andrew, Simon's brother] brought him [Simon] to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, 'Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas.'" Meeting Jesus that day not only changed Simon's name, but also his life.

Peter and his brother Andrew were plying their trade as fishermen, when Jesus called them to be His apostles (Matt. 4:18). Peter's home was in Capernaum, next to the Sea of Galilee. He was married to a believing wife, who would later accompany him in gospel ministry (1 Cor. 9:5). On one occasion, Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, and Jesus healed her. The healed mother immediately began serving as a welcoming hostess (Matt. 8:14-15). She had undoubtedly trained her daughter well. Peter was blessed with a godly marriage. Church fathers of antiquity refer to Peter's children in their writings, although we do not read about them in the Bible. Even Roman Catholic dogma will admit that Peter was married, although they conjecture that Peter left his wife for celibate ministry.

Peter was clearly the leader of the apostles. He is called the "first" apostle in Matt. 10:2. As the leader, Peter was the apostle who managed to walk a few steps on water with the Lord (Matt. 14:29), the one who spoke up when Jesus's parable needed further explanation (Matt. 15:15), and the one who received special revelation from heaven to declare forcibly his faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). Jesus

said on that occasion that He would build His church on the revelation that Peter received from heaven.

Peter was the apostle who, with only two others, saw the Lord transfigured in glory (Matt. 17:4). He was the one who boldly confessed his allegiance to the Lord at the Last Supper, "Though all me shall be offended of thee, yet I will never be offended." "Though I should die with thee, yet I will not deny thee" (Matt. 26:33, 35). The other disciples followed his lead that night, repeating his resolve. Peter was one of only three apostles whom the Lord led apart to pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane on that fateful night of His arrest (Matt. 26:37).

But Peter was also the apostle who sank in the Sea of Galilee in fear and unbelief, needing to be pulled up by the Lord. It was he who heard the Lord's rebuke for his failure to understand a parable. Even after his great confession in Matthew 16, the Lord had to say to Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (v. 23).

It was Peter's suggestion about three tabernacles on the Mount of Transfiguration that brought the glory of that experience to an end. Sleeping Peter likely snored the loudest in the Garden, when the Lord had asked for his prayers, and Peter infamously and tragically denied that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ three times during the Lord's trial and crucifixion. Only Peter went out and wept bitterly that night (Matt. 26:75).

We know from Luke that Peter met the resurrected Jesus, finding forgiveness and restoration. And we know from John that Jesus recommissioned Peter to feed His sheep and tend His lambs. It was then that Jesus told Peter he would someday have his hands stretched out for crucifixion as a martyr for his Lord.

After the promise of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached with power at Pentecost and in the temple, and thousands were saved from sin and baptized as the first local church was born in Jerusalem.

He refused to yield to the threats of Jerusalem's authorities, who told him to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. When he disobeyed they tried to keep him in jail for execution, but Peter walked out with an angel and continued to preach.

Peter saw the vision from heaven of unclean animals, in which the Lord Jesus taught him never to consider any man unclean, but to welcome Gentiles like Cornelius into the family of Jesus's sister churches. That was a hard lesson for Peter to learn, for the Apostle Paul had to oppose him to the face over this same issue in Antioch, but learn it he did. Our last reference to the life of Peter in the Book of Acts finds him at the Jerusalem Council, where he helped to make the welcome of uncircumcised Gentiles official.

From that point on, Peter's ministry was focused likely on Gentile churches in a similar fashion to the Apostle Paul. From Paul's letters, we understand that Peter was well known in Galatia and in Corinth, and the reference to Babylon at the end of this Epistle likely refers to his gospel ministry in the Roman local church. By the time Peter picks up his pen to write this Epistle, he has spent the last twenty-five years or so obeying Jesus's command that he feed Jesus's sheep and tend His lambs. It is this Peter who writes that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

He does so sometime prior to A.D. 68, the year of Nero's death, for it was this wicked Roman Emperor who fulfilled the prophecy that Jesus had made decades earlier about his servant's martyrdom. The Neronian persecution of Christians began in the fall of A.D. 64. That persecution brought about the death of both Paul and Peter. This Epistle seems at least to anticipate this time of persecution, although its focus is not Rome, but Paul's churches in northern Asia.

Paul came to Rome as a prisoner around A.D. 60. I believe that Mark had come to Rome to reconcile with the Apostle Paul. Mark is mentioned as sending a greeting at the end of this Epistle. You may remember that Mark had deserted Paul's first

missions trip years prior, and so Paul determined not to work with Mark after that disappointment (Acts 15:38-41). But Paul writes his Prison Epistles from Rome, and in Col. 4:10 (one of these letters) he sends the church at Colossae a greeting from Mark. Once Paul was released, he left for Spain, and it was likely then that Peter came to Rome to minister in the church in this pagan city, which he metaphorically calls *Babylon* in 1 Pet. 5:13. He may have hoped to fill the gap there left by Paul's absence.

In addition to this first verse, Peter refers to himself in the last chapter of his Epistle. From that chapter I want us to see three more things about our author — Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ.

I. Peter was a fellow-elder and witness for Christ (5:1).

Illustration: The 101st Army Airborne Division is known today as "The Band of Brothers." That label comes from a speech in Shakespeare's play, *Henry V*, called St. Crispin's Day Speech. The king readies his men for battle and says in part:

"The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more. . . .

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother."

Application: Peter is an apostle rallying the Lord's troupes for spiritual battle. He writes to exhort or encourage the elders among his readers. The word *elder* comes from the Greek word from which we get the word *Presbyterian*. It refers to someone who is mature in the Lord, whose life and testimony conforms to the qualifications set down in 1 Timothy 3, as perceived by a local church. An elder is someone whom the Lord has called to serve as pastor of the church (v. 2, "Feed" = "Shepherd").

This means the believers to whom Peter has addressed his letter were gathered as local churches, God's many flocks, not merely

sheep, of northern Asia minor (v. 2). It is difficult to find a believer in the New Testament who was not connected to his local church. Perhaps the Ephesians, who had known only the baptism of John the Baptist in Acts 19, are the rare example, but their churchless condition was immediately corrected. In sad contrast, it is not hard to find in today's Christianity believers who want to live their lives independently from a local church .

Peter speaks of himself as the fellow-elder of these elders of local churches ("who am also"). He views them as his "band of brothers." He notes the mission that this band of brothers must complete – bear witness to the sufferings of Christ. By the word *witness*, Peter does not mean that he saw Christ suffer and these fellow-elders did not. When Peter wanted to say that, he used the word *eyewitness*, as in 2 Pet. 1:16, where he was one of three eyewitnesses of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Instead, *witness* here speaks of *testifying*. Peter testified of the sufferings of Christ as a fellow-elder, and so that is what all of his band of brothers must do as well. We preach Christ crucified. Today, none of us can see the sufferings of our Lord with the eyes of our body (popular movies and TV shows notwithstanding), but we can see His suffering with the eyes of faith: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8-9). In that chapter, Peter is not just talking to pastors, but to the entire church. Each one of us must witness, must testify, that Jesus Christ suffered as God's sacrifice on the cross for our sins. Our mission is to share this good news.

II. Peter was a partaker of Christ's suffering and glory (5:1).

Illustration: The churches addressed by Peter's letter were Pauline in origin. They knew Paul's companion Silas. Asia is one of the provinces Peter writes to, and it was also home to the church at Ephesus. While in prison in Rome, Paul wrote to that Asian church the Epistle of Ephesians in our New Testament,

where he explains that part of his purpose in writing was that they might be encouraged in spite of his imprisonment:

“Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory” (Eph. 3:13). When God’s leaders are removed from ministry for whatever reason, churches are in danger of becoming fearful and faint. Pray for pastorless churches.

Application: Peter has this same purpose for writing his letter. He wants to encourage believers to know that God’s grace can help them face difficult times with spiritual victory. In 5:12, he says he writes about this true or trustworthy grace: “I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God, wherein ye stand [or must stand].” In verse 10, he prays to the God of this strengthening grace for them.

Throughout the Epistle we find that this grace that strengthens us and makes us stand in times of suffering is grace that rests on two unchangeable truths. The second of those two truths is mentioned in our verse – Peter is a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. The word *partaker* refers to someone who shares, someone who has an ownership share, like a shareholder. Only this sharing is the ownership of a relationship, similar to parental rights. Peter has a share in this glory by virtue of His union with Christ, and this glory is the glory of Christ at His second coming. Peter, and every believer who suffers like he did, can take courage in that he has an ownership interest in the victory of Christ’s second coming. His victory will be ours.

But that truth is always coupled with a prior truth. The prior truth is the sufferings of Christ, which Peter mentions in our verse. In 4:13 Peter says that we are partakers of this truth also. The glory is connected to Christ’s suffering. We own both truths. They go together in the true grace of God to suffer.

So Peter, the man who suffered much for the Lord and would soon be martyred, faced the suffering the Lord allowed him to endure with a gracious ownership stake in these two truths – Christ has suffered and Christ is coming in glory. Our owner-

ship interest in the sufferings of Christ for us means that we must be ready to suffer for Him; and our ownership interest in the glory of Christ's second coming means that we must have hope to experience glory with Him. What a wonderful way to describe ourselves – we are partakers of Christ's sufferings and of His glory, which shall be revealed when He comes again. No wonder Peter can say in 4:14, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye." As those who have an ownership stake in these two truths, we can rejoice even when we suffer.

III. Peter considered himself a family member of other believers (5:12-14).

Application: Peter's final reference to himself is in the last three verses of this Epistle. If we look carefully, we can find three family-related terms used by Peter in reference to his fellow-believers. First, he calls Silas his faithful *brother*. Silas would deliver Peter's letter. Peter notes he would do so: "by Silvanus unto you . . . I have written." Silas was a Roman citizen, known to the churches of Paul's second missionary journey, but it was not these reasons that qualified him to deliver copies of Peter's letter to these churches. Silas was qualified for this important work because he was a faithful brother. Brothers and sisters in the Lord must be faithful. Faithful brothers are fellow-believers who are faithful the way a loving brother would be to his brother. We need to be faithful brothers and sisters.

The next family term is not explicit, but implied. We see the idea of *sister* in verse 13. You will notice that *church* is in italics in the KJV. Literally, the text simply reads "she that is in Babylon," but I believe that the KJV translators interpreted Peter's meaning correctly. The word *church* is feminine in Greek, and Peter was referring to the church at which he currently ministered in pagan Rome. Rome is called *Babylon* in Revelation and first-century Jewish literature. Peter's church was the sister church of all the churches in northern Asia Minor. We too have sister churches to care for, with whom we are elected together.

Finally, Peter uses the family term *son* for Mark, the evangelist whom he helped write the second of our four Gospels. *Son* was a term in that day used for the disciple of a mentor. Peter had mentored Mark, and Mark had willingly learned from Peter. Paul and Timothy had this relationship too. This is a blessing we must seek for our own lives, that the Lord will give us someone teachable whom we can mentor in the commands of Christ. This is our Great Commission from the Lord, and He is worthy to be obeyed by all the nations. That happens one son and daughter at a time.

Conclusion: We have looked at a few things Peter has told us about himself. He is a fellow-elder and witness for Christ, a partaker in both the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow, and a member of a local church who sees fellow believers as family in the Lord. He exhorts us as family members to greet one another with a kiss of love, and he prays for our peace.

And that love and that peace are ours only because we are in Christ (v. 14). Are you in Christ? Are you a witness of Christ's sufferings? Are you a partaker of Christ's sufferings and the glory to follow? If not yet, today you can make it so by faith.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching