

## Peter, the Apostle of Hope

## I Peter 1:1

Every letter you write conveys some information.  
 Every email you send provides some message.  
 Every twitter expresses some truth.  
 Every note communicates some news.

We talk about the weather, our health, the kids or grandkids, business ventures, advice, financial concerns, invitations and the list goes on and on.

My great grandmother lived in an era when communicating by letter was the norm. She would at times creatively write in poetic fashion about various events. Before she passed away, her children collected many of those letters they had received and put them together in a spiral bound book. They have been preserved for posterity.

Historians have collected the letters of political leaders and military personnel from which they gain a better understanding of the era in which they lived or the conditions of an event that help piece together an accurate portrayal of history.

Our Bible is such a collection. Some of them are letters written by church leaders to congregations to encourage, admonish, warn, or advise. Peter has given us two of those letters. Over the next number of months we are going to uncover what he had to say in his writings to believers during the time in which he lived and then discover how his words can encourage us today.

This morning I want us to take a look at verse 1 of his first letter and gain a general understanding of why he wrote. There are four points this morning. Three are about the letter and the fourth is for us.

The author

The authority

The audience

The application

Turn to I Peter 1:1 and let's read our verse.

## I. THE AUTHOR

## A. Peter The Inspired

Right away we are introduced to the author. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ."

Some scholars who have studied the letter of I Peter conclude that based on its style and on the vocabulary use of the Greek language that Peter couldn't have been the author, but that someone else wrote using Peter's name to give it credibility. Up until the last century there was little dispute about the authorship being credited to Peter.

They argue that such a letter with command of the Greek language couldn't have been written by a Galilean fisherman. They make two erroneous assumptions about Peter. That he was a fisherman they make him to be illiterate basing their claim on the statement made by the religious leaders in Acts 4:13 where he along with John was "unschooled" and "ordinary". This does not mean that they were uneducated as some critics claim, but that he and John were not professionally trained in rabbinical schools.

The same critics believe Noah couldn't have built such a large ship because they just didn't have the technology to build something of that scale and be sea worthy. The fact is they were incredibly skilled and competent craftsmen.

The second erroneous assumption is that he was only fluent in one language. But Peter probably spoke more than one language. Just because we are not bilingual doesn't mean they were. Peter grew up in an area that was multi-cultural. He was born in Bethsaida on the upper northeast tip of the Sea of Galilee and then moved to Capernaum on the upper northwest tip of the sea where he and his brother Andrew joined with James and John in a fishing partnership. Capernaum was a bustling seaport town on a major trade route. People of different

nationalities would pass through including Roman soldiers, so it's very possible even probable that he could also at least speak Greek if not some other languages in order to do business.

Let's also keep in mind as we will discover in 5:12 that Silas helped in writing this letter. Some believe that he only carried the letter to these recipients. Others, and I put myself in this camp also, believe that he helped in dictating the letter and providing some phrasing for Peter's thoughts. Silas was fluent in Greek and since this letter was going to a predominantly Greek speaking area, a good use of the Greek language would have been necessary to convey Peter's message.

Other critics who deny Peter's authorship claim that if Peter had written the letter he would have drawn more from His experience as a disciple of Christ. But we will find in the letter that Peter does speak about the sufferings of Christ.

Perhaps the most convincing argument that Peter is the author is the belief that God's Word is both inspired and infallible. Because God's Word says it we should believe it. Peter is the author.

Now the timing of his writing remains a bit of a mystery to some. Most scholars hold to a date around AD 64 a couple years before the death of Nero as well as the death of Peter himself. Critics who don't believe in the authorship of Peter date it around AD 96. They believe the persecution spoken about in the letter refer to the persecution under Trajan and not Nero.

The next controversy is the origin of the letter. Where was Peter when he wrote it? Most believe he wrote it from Rome because of the suffering he writes about. They believe even though he makes a reference to Babylon in his conclusion that he had never traveled that far east and if he had been in Babylon when persecution broke out in Rome it wouldn't have reached Babylon by the time the

letter was purportedly written.

The when and the where aren't as important as the who and the why. Peter is an inspired writer by the work of the Holy Spirit to bring this letter to a group of people in need of encouragement either for the suffering that has begun or will be coming.

But the Peter we know about comes mostly from our reading the gospels. There we find a somewhat different person, someone who was imperfect and impulsive.

## B. Peter The Imperfect and Impulsive

We meet up with Peter in John 1 when his brother, Andrew, brings him to meet Jesus. Peter and Andrew first followed John the Baptist. When John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Andrew found his brother and brought him to Jesus. In verse 42 of John 1 we see Jesus changing his name from Simon to Peter, which means rock or stone. This first meeting doesn't seem to have left much impact on the life of this fisherman as he returned to his fishing. Peter would be called two more times. The first came when he along with his business partners were on the shore mending nets and Jesus called them to become fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). The second occurrence was the confirming call when Jesus selected the 12 who would become His disciples. It was at that point when Peter really left all to follow Christ.

We don't know this for certain, but it seems that he assumed the position of leader among the disciples and became their unofficial spokesman. This may have come because of his bold, take charge character and personality. He seems at time to launch into places and situations where even angels fear to tread. Probably because of his bold character he was naturally impulsive. He seems to do things at times without much forethought.

In Matthew 14:28 we see him casting off all restraint and venturing out onto the tumultuous sea to walk toward Jesus, but then in fear sinking.

In Matthew 16:16 he makes the impulsive, yet accurate declaration of who Jesus is.

In Matthew 16:21-23 he is rebuked by Jesus for speaking about the suffering He would endure in Jerusalem.

In John 18:10 he brandishes a sword lopping off the ear of Malchus, servant to the High Priest.

In Matthew 17:1-8 at the transfiguration of Jesus, he didn't know what else to say except to ask Jesus if they should build some shelters so they could all hang out together a little longer, maybe sing Kumbiya.

In John 17:18, 25, 27 we find him denying Christ.

At times it served him well and at others times it got him into trouble. Peter was impulsive. But, let's not be too hard on him, because, after all, we are also imperfect. We also have faults. Given the same situations I would have failed at the whole walking on water thing. But give him a bit of credit there because he was the only disciple to get out of the boat. He was not afraid to speak out about the true identity of Christ when the crowds were either ignorant or indifferent or like the other disciples who may have been a bit insecure in answering.

Inspired – yes

Impulsive – yes

Indwelt – yes

#### C. Peter The Indwelt – Acts 2:1-4

In obedience to the command given by Jesus to the disciples they went to Jerusalem as instructed and waited and prayed and waited and prayed for the coming the Spirit of God whom Jesus said would

come to empower them. On the Day of Pentecost it says, when they were all gathered together the Holy Spirit descended upon them and they were all indwelt by God's Spirit and moved to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Peter was there.

On at least two other occasions we find Peter with great spiritual insight.

The first occasion is in Matthew 16:16 when he rightly confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus responded that such comprehension came from God the Father.

The second occasion is in Matthew 6:68. In that passage Jesus had just spoken some very strong words for those who would follow Him. As a result we read that many no longer followed Him. Turning to the disciples Jesus asked if they would leave too. Peter responded with amazing insight. They didn't have any other place to go because Jesus had the words of eternal life.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes it possible to comprehend who Jesus is. As Peter yielded more of his life to the work of God's indwelling Spirit we see a tremendous transformation. He had been impulsive on a number of occasions. But Jesus was shaping Peter to become the leader He needed for the church to move forward in His absence. In the book of Acts we see one more character trait of Peter. He has learned to yield his impulsive nature to the Holy Spirit who in turn would take that character trait and make him into Peter the impassioned.

#### D. Peter The Impassioned – Acts 2:14-41

Following the indwelling of God's Spirit in Peter on the Day of Pentecost Peter boldly spoke for Christ. In this passage Peter gave an impassioned sermon to the Jews gathered in the Temple on the Day of Pentecost. He boldly proclaimed the risen Christ and pleaded with them to repent. 3,000 were saved.

In chapter 3 he spoke to and healed the beggar.

In chapter 3 he spoke to the crowd boldly preaching Christ. Even more were saved.

In chapter 4 he and John were imprisoned for preaching. We read in verse 8 that Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit preached to the religious leaders who noted his boldness, even though he had no formal religious training.

In chapter 5 he boldly confronted Ananias and Sapphira about lying to the Holy Spirit regarding the gift they had given to the church.

In chapter 5 when told to stop preaching Jesus, Peter told the religious leaders they must obey God rather than men and proclaimed again to them the risen Christ whom they had killed.

He was an impassioned and loyal follower, willing to lay down his life for his Lord, denying Christ no more.

Peter is no different than us before his encounter with Christ.

Before Christ he was imperfect and impulsive. Christ began a life changing transformation in Him, the same life changing transformation that can happen in us when we have an encounter with Christ. Yielded to the Lord he was inspired, indwelt and impassioned. He wasn't super spiritual, but he was super yielded.

He was fearless and faithful.

He was courageous and confident.

He is someone whose character we can aspire to and emulate.

Herbert Lockyer in his book *All the Men of the Bible* sums up Peter's life. "He was a man of many facets of character. His life can be approached from many angles. He was naturally impulsive; tenderhearted and affectionate; gifted with spiritual insight, yet sometimes slow to apprehend deeper

truths; courageous in his confession of faith in Christ, yet guilty of a most cowardly denial; self-sacrificing yet inclined towards self-seeking, and presumption; immovable in his convictions."

Peter is the author of this letter.

## II. THE AUTHORITY

Back to the opening verse of I Peter we once again read "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ."

Peter did not speak on his own. Perhaps as he writes these opening words he reflects on an important scene in his life more than 30 years earlier. We read about it in John 21. Unsure about what to do after the resurrection and before the command to go to Jerusalem and wait, he announced to the group that he was going fishing. That was familiar. It was a place to think, to be busy doing something. At the break of dawn nearing the time they would haul in their nets and call it a day, someone called to them from the shore. "Did you catch anything?"

I've done that passing someone out fishing. We want to know what the prospects are for the day.

The question was probably met with a disheartened response. No one likes to admit they've been skunked, especially when it was your livelihood. But they hadn't caught anything. Maybe the one who created the fish, kept their nets empty to teach them a lesson in faith. The call came back to cast the net on the other side of the boat. To their amazement they caught so many fish they couldn't haul it in. Someone recognized the Lord and Peter immediately threw on his coat, jumped into the water and swam to shore. When the rest of the disciples arrived on shore fish were frying on an open flame. (Blue gills roasting on an open flame.)

Following breakfast, Jesus and Peter fell into a discussion. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he

loved Him. Three times Peter said yes. Three times Jesus told Peter to feed and care for the sheep.

Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Him with all his heart and soul. Was his whole personality and will involved? Did he love Him with everything? His earlier denial had humbled and broken him. Now Christ was restoring him and giving him a position of responsibility and authority.

It is here that Peter is restored and reinstated.

It is here that Peter receives a personal commission.

That same authority was given to him again with the group in Matthew 28:18-20 “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

Jesus gave them His authority to go and make disciples. Peter claimed that authority here writing as an apostle. The word apostle literally means someone who has been sent by another person with a special message or commission. It was to his disciples that Jesus entrusted the proclamation of the gospel and the organization and ministry of the early church.

An apostle had to have travelled and ministered with the Lord while He was alive, watching Him perform miracles and hearing Him teach.

They had to have been a witness of the resurrected Christ.

They sometimes performed miracles.

They recognized Jesus as the Christ.

They saw His ascension.

Peter met all the credentials of an apostle and therefore was given authority to act and speak on behalf of Christ.

At weddings you will sometimes here the minister say at the end of the ceremony “by the power or authority vested in me by the State of Michigan, I

now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Peter has been given authority by Christ to bring this message. He is unashamed and unafraid in his proclamation of risen Christ. He is the spokesman for the living Savior and such authority is compelling reason for his audience to listen up and take heed. It is as if Christ were delivering the message Himself to this audience.

This authority gave him confidence in speaking.

This authority gave him clarity about the origin of his message.

This authority gave him commitment to the One who sent him.

This authority gave him conviction about the message he proclaimed.

His message was delivered with power and passion. He has authority from Christ.

Now let’s discuss for a moment, the audience. To whom is Peter writing?

### III. THE AUDIENCE

Checking back with our verse we find the answer. “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”

First, let’s consider the people.

#### A. The People

There are two things that Peter says about these people.

##### 1. They were strangers

Your translation may have the word sojourner or alien or pilgrim. It’s a word that means to live in a strange place, away from one’s own people. It is a compound word in the Greek that means a temporary living condition. We might think of foreigners or refugees. This was not their permanent home or place of origin.

The word is used metaphorically in Hebrews 11:13-14 speaking of the Old Testament saints “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.”

We sometimes sing that old spiritual “This world is not my home I'm just a passing through My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue The angels beckon me from heaven's open door And I can't feel at home in this world anymore” They were strangers. We are strangers. This isn't our permanent home. We're just passing through. They were scattered.

## 2. They were scattered

It's the Greek word *dispora*. It was often used to describe the Jews who had been uprooted by Assyria and Babylon and dispersed throughout the Babylonian kingdom. They became known as the *dispora*, people who had been displaced to other nations. Consequently many Jews remained scattered throughout the world. They had lived there so long they had chosen to remain there rather than return to Israel when they had the opportunity.

Two times when the word *dispora* is used there is a definite article along with it and is a direct reference to the Jews scattered as a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests and dispersion. As Peter writes here the definite article is missing so it is best to understand that Peter is not specifically talking about the Jewish people who were displaced by the earlier scattering, but is instead speaking generally to believers who are scattered throughout the region to whom he is writing.

That helps us understand the audience a bit more clearly and not only the people, but the places.

## B. The Places

Peter is writing to both Jews and Gentiles who are scattered in what is modern day Turkey. They are listed as if someone was traveling from one to the next in a circle back to the starting point.

Some scholars believe Peter is writing primarily to Jews because we read in Galatians 2:8ff that Peter was the apostle to the Jews and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, claiming that there was no overlap of ministry by the two church leaders.

This region was a pagan land in which Christians, both Gentile and Jewish Christians, lived alongside non-Christians. That's the way it is today. We rub shoulders with other Christians and non-Christians no matter where we go. Peter's words are relevant for us as well.

This letter was timely for the believers living in that region. Why did he need to write? What was his purpose?

## C. The Purpose

Throughout this letter you will see the word *suffer* or *suffering* used repeatedly. He was encouraging them as they endured persecution. If this letter was in fact written around AD64, Rome had just been burned, Christians were blamed and were beginning to experience persecution there and it was spreading. But Peter wanted them to be reassured that in the midst of suffering there could be joy. He reminded his readers to also remember the great suffering that Christ experienced on the cross for them to their righteousness. He is our hope in trial. This letter also speaks of the grace of God. This letter also speaks of suffering and the second coming.

It is a letter of great encouragement to Christians who are going through times of persecution.

Peter knew something of persecution and would



himself be nailed to a cross as a martyr. He is a great example for us both in life and in death.

In his commentary on I Peter, Bruce Barton writes “Peter’s life provides strong testimony to the reality of the Resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit. Consider the great contrast between his earlier pattern as leader of the disciples and his later actions as leader of the early church.”

May that be our prayer, our goal, our ambition, our desire in 2017.

So what can we take home today to encourage us?

#### IV. THE APPLICATION

I leave you with two thoughts.

##### A. Our Authority

We too have been left as ambassadors of Christ to boldly proclaim the eternal life giving message of Christ to others who need to know the Savior. He has given us His authority to make disciples. He has given us the gospel message to unashamedly proclaim because it is the power of God for salvation to all who will believe.

His authority gives us confidence, commitment, clarity, and conviction. We have our commission.

##### B. Our Audience

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest sums it up nicely for us when he writes that these believers were “Providentially sown by the great sower to be missionaries. The application can be made to all Christians. We, who are saved, are providentially placed by God in the midst of the world system, to win those among whom we have been placed, to the Lord Jesus.”

Where we live or work or go to school or shop are

the places where we are to proclaim the gospel. I sometimes hear people say that there’s a neighbor or co-worker they think is a Christian by how they talk. Don’t assume, ask. A religious person can talk about God and prayer but still not be saved.

We sang it earlier:

We’ve a story to tell to the nations  
That shall turn their hearts to the right,  
A story of truth and mercy,  
A story of peace and light,  
A story of peace and light.

Peter’s letter of hope was for then.

Peter’s letter of hope is for now.

Let’s journey together and be encouraged and emboldened to proclaim the gospel of Christ.

(Communion)