

Peter, the Apostle – a Man Transformed

Introduction

Last week, we sketched the life of Peter in the Gospels: “Peter, the Apostle – the Unlikely ‘Rock.’” We ended with that powerful scene on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus restores Peter after his failure, and commissions him as a shepherd and a leader in His church.

Of course, we have to assume the answer to this question, but let’s ask it anyway: Is it really safe, yet, to be calling *Peter* to feed and shepherd the sheep? Has Peter really been transformed from the rather unstable man that he was into the “man of rock” that his name implies? In other words, is he still just Simon? Or is he really and truly, now, Simon *Peter*? Is he really ready for the job? The answer to this question is truly an amazing one. The Peter that we see in the book of Acts is the same Peter that we see in the Gospels – and yet at the same time he also seems to be a completely different man.

I. Acts 1

Before Jesus ascended into heaven (forty days after His resurrection from the dead), He commanded the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:3-5) Altogether, there were about 120 people, men and women, gathered together in an upper room in Jerusalem – waiting. (A.D. 30; Acts 1:13-15) And it was while they were waiting that we have our first introduction to the “new” Peter – Peter, the “rock.”

- Acts 1:15–17, 21–22 — In those days Peter stood up among the brothers... and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry... So [to fulfill the Scriptures] one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

Maybe it’s no big change to see Peter emerging again as a spokesperson and leader among the disciples. But what *is* a massive, huge change is how we see Peter now reading and interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures. **Before, there was no room in Peter’s understanding of the Scriptures for suffering and servanthood in the Messiah’s kingdom; but now Peter actually sees those Scriptures fulfilled in the events surrounding the suffering and the death of the Messiah Himself.** This is a reversal so massive and so complete that it can’t possibly be explained in merely human ways. Peter understands that the death and suffering of Jesus wasn’t just an unfortunate event that was “fixed” and remedied by His resurrection, but rather a *necessary* event that *fulfilled* the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter’s whole understanding of the Scriptures that he’s known and loved since childhood has been revolutionized in just a matter of weeks as now he looks back and sees that **before** his resurrection to glory, the Messiah’s whole mission was to serve, and to suffer, and to die. **This** has changed **everything** for Peter – EVERYTHING. And now he’ll never, ever, be the same man that he once was.

By the way, why does Peter see that Judas must be replaced with a different “12th Apostle”? Because Peter already understands that this tiny gathering of 120 Jewish believers in Jesus, the Messiah, is to become the true “twelve tribes” of Israel – the true fulfillment of God’s chosen people. Truly, this isn’t the Peter that we once knew. But if we already feel that way in chapter one, what happens when we come to Acts chapter two?

II. Acts 2

Ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, on the day of the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the infant church, and they all began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit was giving them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4) There were people in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost from all over the known world, and they were all hearing the disciples speaking of God’s mighty deeds in their own languages. (Acts 2:5-11) Some of the people were perplexed and amazed, but others were mocking the disciples and saying they were drunk. (Acts 2:12-13) And so we read:

- Acts 2:14 — But Peter, standing with the eleven, **lifted up his voice** and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, **let this be known to you, and give ear to my words...**”

Who is this man lifting up his voice with such boldness and preaching so fearlessly to a mocking crowd? It’s Peter! And what is Peter’s message? It’s a message almost completely made up of quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures which he *now* sees *fulfilled* in the sufferings and death, and burial, and resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Messiah. (Acts 2:14-40) And so Peter concludes his sermon with these words:

- Acts 2:36 — Let **all the house of Israel** *therefore know for certain* that God has made him both Lord and Christ, *this Jesus whom you crucified.*”

What before would have been utterly incomprehensible for Peter (a crucified and resurrected Messiah) is now the very heart and soul of the message that he preaches so boldly and fearlessly to the people. And then there’s Acts chapters three and four.

III. Acts 3-4

After healing a lame beggar at the temple gate, the people were all running together to Peter and John, full of amazement, and this gave Peter his opportunity to preach his second sermon. Once again, this sermon is *steeped* in the Old Testament Scriptures. After fearlessly showing that the Jewish people were guilty of putting their own Messiah to death (Acts 3:12-16), Peter says:

- Acts 3:17-21 — And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But **what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ [Messiah] would suffer, he thus fulfilled.** Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Who is this man, and where did he come from?!? This is *not* the same Peter that we saw in the Gospels.

But then the Jewish leaders came and arrested Peter and John for their preaching and put them in the jail until the next day because it was already evening. (Acts 4:1-3) On the next day, they all gathered together and sent for Peter and John, and asked them by what power, or in what name they had healed the lame beggar. (Acts 4:5-7) So now, after his first two sermons, Peter has a chance for a third sermon – but this time as a prisoner under arrest. Does this alarm Peter in the slightest? Does he suddenly become fearful and timid (as he did in the courtyard of Caiaphas), or does he suddenly turn violent and aggressive (as he did in the garden of Gethsemane)? Not at all! Peter simply continues to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ; and once again, he sees in the Messiah's **suffering, and death, and resurrection**, the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. **He quotes Psalm 118 when he says that Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone,” and then he concludes: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** (Acts 4:11-12) When Peter and John were threatened and warned not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus, they answered:

- Acts 4:19–20 — Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Don't we just *have* to ask again, “Who is this man, and where did he come from?!?”

IV. Acts 5

In chapter five, Peter is the leader and spokesperson in the episode involving Ananias and Saphira and their lying to the Holy Spirit (5:1-11), and he's also the primary one through whom God was working miraculous signs and wonders among the people. (5:12-16) But as the church grew and spread, the Jewish leaders became more and more jealous and hostile. So now they arrest a majority, if not all of the Apostles, and put them in the public jail. (Acts 5:17-18)

- Acts 5:19–21 — But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

When the Apostles had been “corralled” for the second time, and were questioned about their preaching in the name of Jesus against strict orders, it's Peter who responds as the spokesperson for all the Apostles:

- Acts 5:29–32 — Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Is Peter fearful and afraid? Far from it! Is Peter belligerent and aggressive? Not at all! Peter is simply boldly and confidently proclaiming the Gospel that has so completely and totally changed *him* from the inside out. After all that we saw in the Gospels, this is a Peter that simply can't be explained in merely human ways. After first planning to kill the Apostles, the council settled for having them flogged. And how do the Apostles—and Peter—respond to this suffering and persecution?

- Acts 5:41–42 — They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ [the Messiah] is Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, we believe the truth of the Gospel by faith in the authority of God's Word. But among the many different encouragements and confirmations of this faith we have the case of Peter. Only the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead can explain how the Peter in the Gospels becomes the transformed Peter that we see before us in the book of Acts.

V. Acts 8

After five chapters in which Peter is prominent, chapters 6-8 tell the stories of the martyrdom of Steven, and the evangelism of Philip. So far, all of Peter's work seems to have been in or around Jerusalem, but Philip had gone and preached the good news about Jesus in Samaria. So:

- Acts 8:14–15 — When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

It was while he was in Samaria that we see Peter so severely rebuking another Simon for thinking he could purchase with money the power to bestow the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:18-24) After solemnly testifying and speaking the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John started back to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans along the way. (Acts 8:25)

VI. Acts 9

The next time we hear about Peter in the book of Acts he's traveling throughout Judea [MAP] visiting Christians who had most likely fled from Jerusalem because of Saul's persecution.¹ (Acts 9:32) **And so we see Peter feeding and tending the sheep – just as Jesus had said.**

Eventually, he came down to the saints who lived at Lydda [MAP] where we hear of a man who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years being healed in Jesus' name, and then many people believing and turning to the Lord. (Acts 9:33-35) From Lydda, Peter then went on to

¹ In Galatians, we hear of one intervening event. It was some three years after his conversion that Paul returned to Jerusalem and met Peter for the first time, staying with him for fifteen days (Acts 9:26-28; Gal. 1:18) We can only imagine all that Peter and Paul must have talked about in that short time together. (A.D. 38; eight years after the ascension of Jesus and Pentecost)

Joppa [MAP] where we see a disciple named Tabitha being raised from the dead. This became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. (Acts 9:36-42) **And so we see Christ building His church upon the rock of this changed and transformed Peter – just as He had said.**

VII. Acts 10

In Acts chapter ten Peter receiving a vision in Joppa, and then travels to Caesarea [MAP] to bring the Gospel to a Gentile centurion named Cornelius, along with all his household. Listen to what Peter says! By now, it should be very familiar.

- Acts 10:37–39a — You yourselves know... how God anointed **Jesus of Nazareth** with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.”

This is the *fourth* time in Acts that Peter refers to Jesus as “Jesus *of Nazareth*” (Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10). Now that’s basically the same thing as saying, “Jesus, the one who was scorned and despised and rejected by the people. (cf. Mat. 2:23; Isa. 53:1-3) But in Acts, we see Peter apparently “*boasting*” in this title for Jesus that seems so full of foolishness and weakness and shame! That’s because for Peter, this name “Jesus of Nazareth” is no longer a badge of disgrace, but a badge of honor; it’s no longer a symbol of defeat, but a symbol of the triumph and victory that comes *through* suffering and even death. So listen to what Peter goes on to say:

- Acts 10:39b–43 — “They put [Jesus of Nazareth] to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he [the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth!!!] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Peter sees, now, that all the Scriptures of all the prophets which he had known since childhood are fulfilled—all of them!—in a suffering, crucified, and resurrected Messiah – **Jesus**. And seeing this, now, can only mean one thing for Peter – He will gladly suffer and die himself if this is what it will mean to follow Jesus. Remember what Jesus said to Peter – and what Peter can never have forgotten in all the days of his life and ministry:

- John 21:18–19 — “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

VIII. Acts 11-12

In Acts 11, we see Peter arriving back in Jerusalem [MAP] and defending and explaining his new ministry to the Gentiles.² (Acts 11:1-18) And then in Acts 12, we see James the brother of John arrested by Herod and put to death with the sword. (A.D. 42-43; Acts 12:1-2)

- Acts 12:3-4 — When [Herod] saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also... And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

Remember the Peter that we met in the Gospels – the Peter who rebuked Jesus for saying that He would suffer and die; the Peter who said it was good that Jesus should stay on the mount of transfiguration forever revealed in all of His glory; the Peter who drew his sword and attacked those who came to arrest Jesus, the Peter who denied that he knew Jesus when Jesus was being tried and falsely accused. What is it that causes *this same* Peter to be *himself* willing now to suffer imprisonment and even death for the sake of a suffering and crucified Jesus of Nazareth? Once again, we see a man so completely changed and transformed that it can't possibly be explained in merely human ways. Peter is clearly not insane or out of his mind. Therefore, we must believe that Peter has simply seen Jesus, resurrected from the dead—the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Scriptures—and now he will never, ever be the same again.

Well, Jesus said that Peter would be taken to his death when he was “old,” so we shouldn't be surprised when an angel is sent to release Peter from his chains and his guards and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. (Acts 12:6-11) He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the church was gathered together praying for him, and after describing to them how the Lord had let him out of the prison, we're told only that Peter “left and went to another place.” (Acts 12:12-17) Where did he go? We'll come back and talk about that next week. But in the Bible, for the next five or six years we hear nothing at all about Peter.

IX. Acts 15

The next time, and the very last time in Acts that we do hear about Peter, he's back in Jerusalem for a special church counsel – now twenty years after Jesus' ascension and the day of Pentecost. (A.D. 49-50) Whether he had been in Jerusalem already, or whether he was only recently arrived in Jerusalem for the counsel we don't know, but once again, we see Peter playing a leading role. The church was debating the place of the Mosaic law (the Old Covenant) in the church and what this would mean for the Gospel and the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, so this was a really huge deal.

- Acts 15:6-11 — After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. [Cornelius!] And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and

² Acts 11:27-30 tell how Barnabas and Saul traveled to Jerusalem from Antioch with a contribution for the relief of the saints. It's this trip to Jerusalem (A.D. 44) that Paul is most likely referring to in Galatians chapter 2 when he mentions meeting with “James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars.” (Gal. 2:1-10)

he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Part of Peter’s role as a “rock” in Christ’s church was to lead the way in welcoming Gentiles into the Messiah’s church on equal terms with Jews. This was the whole point of Peter’s vision in Joppa and his call to preach the Gospel to the Gentile household of Cornelius in Caesarea. And this was *really* important because Christ died so that *both* Jews **and** Gentiles could have **equal** access to God the Father through **faith alone** in **Christ alone**. This was a big—huge—deal. And Peter shows that he clearly understands all this not only in Caesarea at Cornelius’ house, but now also here in Jerusalem at this church counsel. So in light of all this, and in light of the changed and transformed Peter that we’ve been seeing all through the book of Acts we might find it shocking to hear of one other event in Peter’s life – an event that happened far away from Jerusalem in the city of Antioch. [MAP]

X. Galatians 2

We don’t know exactly when this happened, but it was almost certainly sometime during the five years leading up to, and *before*, the Jerusalem Counsel. The Apostle Paul tells us about it in Galatians chapter two.

- Galatians 2:11–14 — But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came **he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party**. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

So, have we just lost all our respect and admiration for Peter? Well, maybe in a sense that’s good. Because it’s never been, ultimately, Peter that we’re meant to see, but Peter’s Savior and Peter’s Lord. Here’s a bit of the old Peter come back again – the Peter who can be fearful and timid even to the point of denying by his actions the Gospel itself. But we know that the same Jesus who prayed for Peter before he failed in the courtyard of Caiaphas still prays for him now, and so we can also know that Peter will turn again.³ In Antioch, Peter “separated” himself from the Gentiles. But later, in Jerusalem, it’s Peter who fearlessly, boldly proclaims against all opposition: “God, who knows the heart, bore witness to [the Gentiles], by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made **no distinction between us and them**, having cleansed their hearts by faith.” Peter isn’t perfect. We see that’s *far* from the truth. He’s still a sinner in need of God’s mercy and grace. But one thing is for sure – he has been miraculously transformed, also by God’s mercy and grace.

³ We see from Peter’s words in 2 Peter 3:15-16 that to the very end of his life Peter continued to recognize Paul as a “beloved brother” and authoritative Apostle.

XI. 2 Peter 1:13-15

After Acts 15 and the counsel at Jerusalem, we don't hear anything more about Peter's activities other than what we can guess at from his two letters preserved in our New Testament, and from other early writings and traditions from the "church fathers." Next week, we'll come back and make what will hopefully be some "educated guesses," but for now, we'll skip ahead from the Jerusalem counsel probably about 15 years to the distant city of Rome. [MAP] It seems very likely that it was *from* the city of Rome just before or during the horrible persecutions of the Emperor Nero that Peter wrote these words about 35 years after Jesus first spoke of his death on the shore of the Sea of Galilee:

- 2 Peter 1:13-15 — I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

And so we see Peter, all the way to the very end, feeding and tending the sheep. And we see Peter, all the way to the very end, willing to suffer imprisonment and death by martyrdom for the sake of his Messiah, Jesus – who also suffered, and died, and rose again from the dead *for his sake*, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. *This* is the Peter that God used to write the letters that we'll be studying in the coming year.

Conclusion

So where did this Peter come from? The fear and timidity that we saw on the Sea of Galilee, and in the Garden of Gethsemane, and in the courtyard of Caiaphas has been replaced with a boldness and a fearlessness that can't possibly be explained in merely human ways. The aversion to servanthood and to willing suffering that we saw in Caesarea, and on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in the Upper Room has been replaced not only with a willingness to serve and to suffer meekly, but even a **joy** at being counted **worthy** to suffer for the sake of Christ's name. Where did this Peter come from?

There's only one rational answer, and it's a simple one. He has seen Jesus, risen from the dead, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Scriptures that he's known and believed since childhood, and it's transformed him – now he won't ever, and he can't ever, be the same again.

Is our faith in Jesus the kind that transforms – the kind that causes us to never be the same again?—Which is really just the same thing as saying, "Is our faith a true, saving faith in the Messiah who suffered and died, and rose again from the dead, for us and in our place?" A "faith" in Jesus Christ that doesn't change and transform, and that isn't changing and transforming is no true faith at all. Is our faith in Jesus and our love for Him the kind that makes us *gladly willing* to take up our own cross—to suffer and ultimately even to die—if this is what it means to follow Jesus? What a wonderful, encouraging example we have in the Apostle Peter, who though he was never perfect, was never the same either. "Peter, the Apostle – a Man Transformed." May we also be men and women and children *transformed* by the power of saving faith in Jesus Christ.



