



HELLO CHURCH, THIS IS PETER

I Peter 1:1-2

Pastor Al Detter

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On Channel 12, they have this weekly feature called Behind the Kitchen Door. They give a report on restaurants that get busted for some kind of violation. Well, I want to take you behind another kitchen door but from a different angle. In some respects, I look at my office as a kitchen. That's where I prepare my sermons. People don't come to hear sermons, they come to be fed. So each week in my office, I gather all my ingredients and cook a spiritual meal.

But I do my menu planning well in advance. I'm working on the menu into August already. Last fall the Spirit of God directed me to the book of I Peter. There are so many practical spiritual truths and gems for living life in it. So we're going to spend the next three months in I Peter.

Let's turn to the first two verses of the book. I promise you, we're not going to take two verses per week. I'd be an old man till we finished at that rate. (READ the verses.) Actually, I'm going to concentrate on the first six words today—Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. And here's the reason. From time to time outside guests come to minister at Grace. Nobody preaches or ministers at Grace if I don't know who they are and what they stand for. It's part of my role as Senior Pastor to protect the church.

When they come to Grace, I take great pleasure in introducing them to the church before they minister. So if we're going to spend three months listening to Peter, I thought it might be good to get acquainted with him first.

When it comes to material about people in the New Testament, Peter comes in third. There's more material about Jesus Christ in the New Testament than anyone else. Next in line is the Apostle Paul. Then comes Peter. It thins out quite a bit from there.

There's much more than I can handle in one sermon about Peter. He's such a colorful and active man. So today, I'm going to capture some of the key features of his life. I'm going to talk about Peter in a way that's memory-friendly. We're going to look at 10 words that will help us get to know Peter better. Each word will begin with the letter "C". Here's the first word:

1. Credentials.

The ancients began letters differently than we do. We start with the name of the person we're writing to. Twenty centuries ago, it was common to put the name of the person writing the letter first. For instance, the first word of every one of Paul's letters is "Paul." Peter does the same thing in his two letters. And he puts his credentials right behind his name—Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

It was important to know that what Peter wrote had authority. An apostle was a hand-picked leader by Jesus Christ in the early church with unusual authority to lead the church. There were only 13 of this kind ever in the church. When they died off, that kind of authority died with them. They had power to direct the affairs of the church as if Jesus were on earth. When they wrote a letter to a church, it carried the weight of the voice of Jesus. Not all the apostolic letters have survived. But we have two letters that Peter wrote. They command the same authority as the words of Jesus to us.

So in the weeks to come, we should not look at what Peter has to say as primarily informational. We shouldn't say, "He wrote some interesting stuff. I learned some things. If I like something, I might try it." What Peter

has to say is meant to be transformational. He's telling us things that we're to obey and apply to our lives. The expectation in Peter's mind is that what he tells us to do, we will do. He's an apostle and he writes with authority. But I must tell you right at the outset, our stubborn selves and our culture won't like everything he has to say.

Well, let's move to the second "C" and meet Peter a little more up close and personal. All the churches he addresses in verse 1 knew all that I'm going to say and so much more about him. I hope you'll find this interesting and inspiring.

2. Capernaum.

I'm using this word to represent Peter's early and later background. Capernaum was a bustling commerce town on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. It was the town in which Peter lived when we meet him in the Gospels (Mk. 1:29). We're not sure where he was born. But his birth name was Simeon (Acts 15: 14) bar Jonah (Matt. 16:17). Simeon was a common Hebrew name most likely derived from one of the twelve tribes of Israel by that name. In the first century, many Jews adopted the Greek version of the name, Simon, which Peter did. "Bar" means "son" and "Jonah" is a form of the name "John". Jesus changed his first name to "Peter". So if you put it all together and translate his name to 21st century America, his name would be Peter Johnson.

Peter was a fisherman by trade along with his brother Andrew. Peter was married (Mk 1:30; I Cor. 9:5) although we know more about his mother-in-law than we do his wife. It's likely that Peter was affected by John the Baptist's ministry because his brother Andrew was a disciple of John (Jn. 1:40). By the time Peter meets Jesus, I think his heart was prepared for the encounter.

Soon after Peter met Christ, Capernaum fades into the background. He probably moved to Jerusalem and became the early leader of the Jerusalem church. After the Apostle Paul's conversion, little is said about Peter in the New Testament. We think he became an itinerant minister and spent the last years of his life living in Rome.

3. Call.

The day after John the Baptist baptized Jesus, Andrew was with John when Jesus walked up to them. John introduced Jesus to Andrew, "Behold the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:35-36)!" Andrew recognized Jesus as the Messiah (Jn.1:41) and I believe that's when Andrew was converted to Christ. Immediately Andrew became a follower of Christ (Jn. 1:40).

Andrew was so excited about meeting Jesus he only had one thought on his mind—for his brother Peter to meet Jesus. So Andrew found and brought him to meet Jesus (Jn. 1:41-42). I'm sure He was thronged by crowds but Jesus found time to have a conversation with Peter. In their first-ever meeting, Jesus saw what Peter was to become and said to him, "You are Simon son of Jonah. Your new name will be Peter (Jn. 1:42)." I believe this is when Peter was converted to Christ. Now at this point, even though Andrew and Peter were followers of Jesus, they had not yet become disciples and apostles of Jesus.

Soon Jesus would call them into ministry. Apparently Jesus called the twelve in stages. First He called them to be disciples—learners and apprentices. Then He called them to be apostles—His commissioned representatives. Peter was the first disciple to be called (Mk. 1:16-18). There was no hesitation; Peter accepted the call immediately. Later, he was the first to be named an apostle (Mk. 3:14-16).

With the exception of Peter's denial of Christ the night before the crucifixion, Peter never wavered from the call of Jesus to follow and serve Him. He gave himself without reserve to the cause of Christ and His church for the rest of his life.

4. Catch.

This is a word that takes us to where Jesus called Peter into ministry. Mark 1:16 says that Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee when He saw Simon and Andrew casting a net into the sea. The extended story is found in Luke 5:2-11. Peter had been fishing all night and caught nothing. Jesus kind of insulted Peter by telling him to make an adjustment. After all, Peter was the expert fisherman.

They caught so many fish that the boat began to sink. Peter was broken before the Lord. And Jesus said, "From now on you'll be catching people and not fish." Verse 11 says he left everything to follow Jesus. From now on, Peter would be casting nets to catch people instead of fish. And Peter became proficient at catching people. Thousands were converted after his first sermon (Acts 2).

Even though Peter left the sea to catch souls instead of fish, his love for the sea never left him. There are several sea episodes in his life with Jesus in the Gospels. In one of them, the disciples encountered turbulent waves that threatened their safety. Jesus came walking on the water to them. They became even more frightened thinking it was a ghost. They were relieved to see it was Jesus. Incredibly, Peter challenged Jesus to command him to come to Jesus on the troubled waters. Peter got out of the boat and actually walked on the water. Until he panicked and Jesus rescued him (Matt. 14:24-33).

The last sea episode about Peter is in John 21. It was after the resurrection of Christ. Peter wasn't sure which direction things were headed so he said, "I'm going fishing." Fishing was his natural love. Jesus appeared and recommissioned Peter not just to the great task of catching people, but caring for the people who he caught. You see, Jesus is not just concerned about a person's salvation but a person's life after salvation. Jesus told Peter to shepherd the people he caught.

5. Character.

Peter was the most interesting of all the apostles. He was an impulsive extrovert who tended to speak before he thought. His personal rule was, "When in doubt, speak." And when it came to action, he would assess a situation and act decisively without hesitation. Alexander Whyte says that Peter was "hasty, headlong, speaking impertinently and unadvisedly, ready to repent, ever wading into waters too deep for him, and ever turning to his Master again like a little child."

Yet Peter was a man of devotion and commitment to Christ, full of enthusiasm and boldness worth copying. He had a readiness of spiritual insight and zeal for the Lord. J. Oswald Sanders says, "Peter's vivid personality, forthright utterances and deep devotion combine with the greatness of his strength and the magnitude of his mistakes to make him an ideal test-case for the methods of the Master."

If Jesus could take the strengths of Peter and use them mightily for the cause of the gospel and take the weaknesses of Peter and help him bring discernment, patience, and restraint to impulse, there's hope for all of us.

By the time Peter writes his two little letters to the church, it's clear that he was a transformed man. He was a man of God with stellar character forged through the fires of suffering. He was strong and forceful about being holy. But he was no longer the person who tried to control everything. He realized that the only thing he could control, by the grace of God, was himself. Over the course of thirty or so years, a pretty rough character became very Christ-like.

6. Captain.

Peter was the first captain or first top leader of the Christian movement. His dominant personality made him the leader of the apostles. His name heads every list of the 12 in the New Testament. He was their recognized leader and frequently their spokesman. He was the one who took most of the risks. He was a leader through and through.

An inner circle of three apostles existed—Peter, James, and John. Peter was the leader of that group as well. During the last week of Jesus' life, Peter along with John led the responsibility for the preparations of their last meal together.

When the church was born in the book of Acts, it was Peter who was the leader of the early band of believers. It was Peter who took the lead role when the Holy Spirit fell in Acts 2 when the church was born. It was Peter who preached and 3000 people came to Christ. That's a pretty big catch!

Peter is the one who led the church in the early days. He was the one who first opened the door for the church to reach the Gentiles (Acts 10:1ff.; 15:7). Eventually Paul took the baton from Peter, but Peter was the first great leader of the church.

This brings up an interesting point. There are millions in the world who believe that Peter was the first Pope, that the first great leader of the church began a chain of leaders that has continued down to the current day. This doctrine is called apostolic succession. I think we can all agree that Peter was the first leader of the church and that he was a great man. But there's no teaching in the New Testament to substantiate that Peter was the first Pope and that there's an unbroken line of successors from him.

I'm not an expert in church history, but as the church transitioned from the apostles to the church fathers and bishops of the late first and second centuries and as the Catholic Church developed in the early centuries, the doctrine of apostolic succession was born along with the authority the Popes now possess. My point is that there's nothing about this in the New Testament and that developments and doctrines that have emerged beyond the New Testament are not on a par with the New Testament and therefore not to be embraced as such. That leads me to the next "C".

7. Chip.

How can you talk about Peter without mentioning his great confession in Matthew 16? On one occasion the disciples were at Caesarea Philippi and Jesus asked them a question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" A few disciples ventured some answers and then Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" Guess who answered? Peter exclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said, "You didn't come up with that one on your own. My Father in heaven gave you that insight (Matt. 16:13-17)."

Then Jesus said these words to Peter that have confused the church ever since, "You are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it (vs. 18)." I wish you could see the place where this happened. It was by one of the largest single rock cliffs in the world. I've seen it several times. It was the perfect place to bring Peter's name up. You see, this was not the time Jesus gave Simon his new name Peter. Jesus named him Peter the first time they ever met. But it was now the time for the lesson behind the name.

There's a definite play on words going on in verse 17. Jesus said to Peter, "You are 'petros.'" That form of the word means "a stone chipped from the rock face." That's why I used the word "chip" for this point. Peter is a piece or chip of a larger rock. Many have said that Peter's nickname could be "Rocky". I think it could just as easily be "Chip".

Now the next thing Jesus says is, "Upon this rock I will build my church." But Jesus changes the form of the word to "petra", which means "a huge rock or mountainside". Why the change in word form? What is Jesus teaching here? Obviously it has something to do with Peter's name. But there has been no unanimity in interpreting the meaning. Briefly, I'm going to give you the three usual interpretations and then I'll tell you what I think.

Interpretation #1—Peter, you're a little rock. I am the big rock upon which the church will be built. Standing in front of the big cliff in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus points to Himself as the big rock and means that the church will be built upon Jesus Christ as its foundation. Peter was to be a living stone to be placed on that foundation. (Peter's words in I Peter 2:4-9 may be a reference to this interpretation).

Interpretation #2—Peter, you're the rock upon which the church will be built. The form of the words here becomes insignificant. The point is that Peter is rocklike and will be the key person from which the church will come like Abraham was the key person from which Israel came.

Interpretation #3—Peter, what you've just said about Me is the rock upon which the church will be built. Jesus was saying, "I'll build My church on the truth of what you just stated, that I'm the Messiah, the Son of the living God because there's no greater foundation for the church than the revelation just given to you by the Father."

Friends, elements of all three positions may be true. But there's one thing for sure. We know that ultimately the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord (1 Pet. 2:4-8; Eph. 2:20). And no matter what the interpretation, we live in the reality that the church is built on an undefeatable foundation. The church will emerge triumphant. Peter was used to convey that truth.

8. Cloud.

This word stands for a very special and impacting spiritual moment for Peter. One day Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain. Jesus began to glow brilliantly like the sun before them. Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus (Matt. 17:1-3). Wouldn't you like to know what they were chatting about?

They were amazed and overwhelmed. Peter offered to build special sacred tents for each of them. Then a cloud lowered and a voice spoke from the cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him (Matt. 17:4-6)." This was unlike anything they had ever experienced before. Even though it was a moment of high and unusual spiritual privilege, it scared Peter, James, and John to death. Jesus had to calm them down (Matt. 17:6-7).

Peter had seen a lot of miracles performed by Jesus. But this experience was probably the most life-impacting one of all. Peter refers to this experience in his second letter (II Pet. 1:16-19) as the basis for his certainty in the truth of the Scriptures.

There are a few moments in our lives in which we experience a very unusual encounter with Jesus. Because He broke through in some special way, we're changed. We often go back to that moment as a spiritual turning point. That special moment for Peter was the cloud when Jesus showed Himself to him in a spectacular way.

9. Comeback.

It's amazing. No matter how close we might be to Jesus, no matter how much He shows us of His power and glory, we're very vulnerable people. We can make a mistake or commit a sin at any time, even when we're positive we'd never do such a thing.

Here's Peter. After three incredible years with Christ, being in the inner circle, having seen dozens of miracles, he commits his greatest sin. Peter is well-known for this blunder. Jesus told His disciples that He would be struck down and His flock scattered. But Peter said, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." Jesus told him that before the night was over, Peter would deny Him three times. But Peter was adamant: "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You! (Matt. 26:31-35)."

This turned out to be the most deeply disappointing moment in Peter's life for him. The "stone" was crushed in spirit. He failed in a way he never expected to fail. When he realized what he had done, his heart was broken and he wept uncontrollably. He was in the depths of despair yet at the doorway of repentance. This was a definite attempt by Satan to destroy Peter's faith. I think Peter came dreadfully close to believing there was nothing worth living for after this, especially when Jesus died. I think he was really rocked. I'm not sure he could forgive himself.

But slowly, he got his legs under him. He was the first one to see the empty tomb. He was the first apostle to see the risen Lord. What grace to one who seemed not to deserve it. Then comes the episode on the seashore when

Jesus reinstated Peter (Jn. 21). Peter passionately reaffirmed His love for the Lord and Jesus recommissioned him to ministry. From that point on, Peter was a changed man. Just days before, he was as close as possible to leaving the ministry. Now he was back, in full force, to help spearhead the most profound movement that humanity has ever known!

10. Christ.

Even though Peter had a major failure in denying His Lord, Jesus Christ was the center of his life. In the opening verse of his second letter, Peter says that he was a bondservant of the Lord. Christ was his Master. Everything that Peter did was devoted to Christ, from his ministry to his personal life. Jesus was everything to him.

At the breakfast on the seashore with Jesus and his disciples following His resurrection, a very interesting piece of information surfaced. Jesus told Peter how he was going to die. Peter was to be crucified (Jn.21:18-19). Jesus must have known Peter could handle that. Tell me that I have to go for blood work and I'm in crisis.

So we know how Peter died. Tradition says, and we must take tradition with a grain of salt, that Peter was living in Rome during the persecutions by Nero and that sometime in the mid 60's AD, he was crucified. But because of his love for Christ, he felt unworthy to be crucified as Jesus was and insisted on being crucified upside down. From what we know of Peter, it wouldn't surprise me. Because of his love for Christ and his refusal to deny Him again, he gave up his life. Jesus meant more to Peter than anything.

Conclusion

My friends, that's the kind of man who wrote the letter we'll be studying over the next few months. Just knowing more about the messenger makes me even more interested in listening to his message.

As we close today, let's look at the ten "C's" one more time. But this time, let each "C" say something personal to us.

- 1. Credentials**—None of us are apostles these days. But if you're a Christian, God has given you a powerful spiritual gift or ability to minister to other people. Minister!
- 2. Capernaum**—Jesus finds us right where we live and He has some incredible things in mind for us. Open the door!
- 3. Call**—Jesus calls each of us to follow Him without reserve and to invest our lives in expanding the Kingdom of God. Be a fully devoted follower of Christ!
- 4. Catch**—Jesus calls each of us to join Peter in helping the church grow—to find the lost and bring them to Christ. Be a witness to those around you!
- 5. Character**—Regardless of our personality, Jesus wants to maximize our strengths and minimize our weaknesses so we reflect the character of Christ. Be holy!
- 6. Captain**—Maybe we're not called upon to be the person in charge. But I can guarantee you that every single one of us is in a position of influence to someone else. Use that influence in a positive way!
- 7. Chip**—Peter tells us that we're all little chips—living stones—being built up as a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ who is the choice and precious cornerstone (I Pet. 2:4-6). What's more, Jesus will also give each of us a new name written on a stone when we see Him someday (Rev. 2:17). Ask Jesus what He sees in you before you get there!
- 8. Cloud**—Jesus wants each of us to have an occasional special mountaintop experience with Him in which He reveals Himself to us in ways that will impact us for a lifetime. Expect the Lord to surprise you with His presence!
- 9. Comeback**—I hope none of us intend to fail Jesus. But when we fall, isn't it great news to know that there's pardon and forgiveness to turn things around! Start over again!
- 10. Christ**—What's at the center of your life? Job? Family? Money? Fame? Even church? Not good enough. The only life of balance and the only life worth living is when Jesus Christ is above all else. Make Him Lord of your life!