

“Peter: Hope Beyond Life’s Failures”

1 Peter 1:1

I’ve heard that it has been said that pain is the universal human experience. Each one of us in this room have had our dance with it, and some of you in our midst know the dance better than others—whether through the pain of a broken heart, or the pain of chronic illness, the pain of loss, or the pain of depression. Pain comes in all shapes and sizes, each one tailor made for a different season of life. Each of us knows just what it means to hurt. Some of you are there now.

Pain is very much a part of life in our broken world, a world that has been severely marred by the fall. And yet as Christians, one of the ways that we grow beyond a general knowledge of God to more personal and intimate encounter with Him is often through the furnace of affliction.

C.S. Lewis—*“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain.”*

Here in the first epistle of Peter, we read that we have a ‘living hope’ that goes far beyond any crisis we experience in this life.

When it comes to the subject of hope, perhaps no one is better qualified to teach us than Peter. Hope is the major emphasis in what he writes. In fact, he has been referred to as “the apostle of hope” throughout the centuries of church history.

- Paul—the apostle of faith
- John—the apostle of love
- Peter—the apostle of hope

Hope is one of those virtues mentioned in a triad together with faith and love. God's people are characterized by with, hope, and love—regardless of their present troubles!

Over the next several weeks, I want us to spend some time walking through what Peter writes in these five chapters. Before we begin, I want to establish the context for 1 Peter where we will consider both the author and his audience.

1:1 — “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,”

- Authorship—Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
- Audience—To those who are elect exiles...

Peter wrote to believers who were scattered throughout Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. They were ‘elect exiles,’ which means that they were special to God, but harassed by the world. They were uncomfortable in the world because they were strangers and pilgrims, something that Peter will emphasize later. Peter wrote to encourage these hurting Christians in the midst of their pain. It is important to recognize that they were suffering, not simply from the everyday pressures of life, but because of their faith in Christ. They needed to be reminded of their hope.

We will get to them next week, but I want to zero in on Peter's personal example because it provides a helpful backdrop to better understand what he writes in his letter.

Peter was qualified to write about hope because it was something that he had come to possess in Christ.

There had been a time in his life when he was confronted with the pain of his own failure, perhaps wondering if there was any hope for someone who had dropped the ball like he had done. Here you have a man who began following Jesus, who became one of His closest disciples, a man full of ambition and prone to be overly confident in himself. And at the hour of Jesus' suffering, Peter denied that he even knew Him.

Do you think that Peter has something to say about hope beyond hurt? He has much to say. As one who knows what hopelessness feels like, Peter is a man with whom we can easily identify. By the time he writes his letter, it is an aged Peter who takes up the pen and writes to struggling Christians who were dazed and confused by the hurts they were experiencing in the world.

As one who had been there, the apostle encourages them by reminding of their hope—a living hope that transcends all of the hurts and pains we experience while living in a broken world. And so by way of introduction to this very practical and encouraging letter in the New Testament, I want us to consider Peter's life from three angles—his call to discipleship, crisis of belief, and comeback from failure.

1. Peter's CALL to discipleship

Most people easily recognize Peter as one of the original twelve disciples that Jesus called to follow Him. Yet three words come to my mind when I think of Peter's life as presented in the gospels—abandon, influence, confidence.

His immediate abandon

All four of the gospels record that Simon Peter and his brother Andrew are the first disciples that Jesus calls. Matthew and Mark record that while Jesus was

walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. His invitation was this:

Matthew 4:19—“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’”

We’re told that they both drop what they were doing and immediately begin to follow Jesus. They turn their backs on a lucrative fishing enterprise and become followers of Jesus. And so very early on, we are introduced to Peter’s somewhat impulsive nature, something that we will come to find out that is characteristic of his life.

You could say that he was a typical Galilean ‘rough neck.’

Josephus — *“[Galileans are] ever fond of innovations, and by nature disposed to changes, and delighting in seditions.”*

William Barclay — *“Quick-tempered, impulsive, emotional, easily roused by an appeal to adventure, loyal to the end—Peter was a typical man of Galilee.”*

Luke’s gospel account provides some additional depth of insight into Peter’s call to follow Jesus. Luke tells us that as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the Word of God. Jesus gets into one of the boats which just so happened to be Simon Peter’s. Jesus sat down and began to teach the crowds from the boat.

Luke 5:4-5—“And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.’”

Simon was in for the surprise of his life, for when he let down the nets, enclosed such a large number of fish that the nets began to break. It was an encounter with Deity!

This wasn't Peter's first exposure to Jesus. John 1:35-42 says that Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist. When he heard John refer to Jesus as the "Lamb of God," he followed Jesus. He then went and told Peter:

John 1:41 — "His first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah.'"

The next verse says that Andrew brought his brother to Jesus. Andrew is a testimony of someone who took his faith seriously at home. He desired for his brother to personally meet the One in whom he had placed his hope. Upon bringing him to Christ, notice what the text says:

John 1:42 — "Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter).'"

From that moment forward, Simon was known as Peter.

F.B. Meyer — *"This is our Lord's method of making saints. He speaks of things that are not as though they were."*

While you and I look at a block of stone and see nothing else, someone like a Michelangelo comes along and sees a masterpiece. I remember hearing about how someone once asked the famous Italian sculptor about his best known work — his sculpture of David that is located in Florence. The person asked, "How is it that you did such great work?" His reply: "I just chipped away anything that didn't look like David."

That is what God is going to do in Peter's life, as well as in our lives. With the skill and precision of an artist, the Lord will chip away everything in my life that is not in conformity with Christ. Though it will be a painful process that will involve learning from his failure, Peter will one day look back and give glory to God for His amazing grace.

His outspoken influence

Peter quickly becomes the spokesman for the other twelve disciples. He possessed the qualities and characteristics of a natural born leader. He was vocal and outspoken, a thing that could also get him into trouble.

Matthew 10:2—“The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter...”

Peter's boldness often led him to step up and ask difficult questions when no one else would. For instance, in Matthew 15, we read that Jesus was teaching His disciples through the use of parables. It was Peter who was quick to speak up and ask for an explanation.

On one occasion, Peter was curious about how often a person should forgive someone. Which is an interesting observation from Peter's life, especially when you consider the position he will one day find himself in.

Peter was the type of man who was 'all in.' Mark 1:29-34 indicates that he even opened up his home for Jesus. His mother-in-law was sick with fever, and Jesus healed her. Later, the crowds began to come and Mark says that the whole city was gathered at the door. Thus, Peter's home became a base of operations for Jesus' Galilean ministry.

His over confidence

As I mentioned a minute ago, Peter's outspoken nature often got him into trouble. His ambitious spirit easily gave way to cockiness at times. For an example of this, consider an exchange that happened in Matthew 16.

Though well-intentioned, Peter argued with Jesus as He was explaining His death and resurrection to the disciples.

Matthew 16:21 — “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Evidently, the plan that Jesus laid out for Himself didn't square with Peter's understanding of what Messiah should be and do. (How often do we insist on our plans for God!)

The next verse says:

Matthew 16:22 — “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’”

Peter rebukes Jesus! Listen to how Jesus responds:

Matthew 16:23 — “But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’”

Think about it. I wonder how often do we have an idea of what we want or what we expect out of life, and when something else happens, we blame God. We rebuke and chide the Master, maybe not with our words, but with our untrusting and non-submissive attitudes.

Peter is trying to prevent the one thing that would bring great blessing both to him and the rest of the world. He couldn't understand how the will of God involved suffering for God's chosen One.

Imagine if Peter got what he wanted. Imagine if Jesus had forgone the cross. Though Peter didn't understand it at the time, it would have meant no hope for him and us.

2. Peter's CRISIS of belief

There is one episode in Peter's life that I want to focus in on for a minute, and it happened on the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest. Mark 14:22-31 says that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. After supper, He and His disciples went out of the city, crossed the Kidron Valley, and ascended the Mount of Olives to a place called Gethsemane. He tells them in verse 27, "You will all fall away, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." It would be prophetic fulfillment of Zechariah 13:7. Once again, an impulsive, overly confident Peter speaks up:

14:29—“Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not.’”

Though he certainly didn't mean for them to be, his words were a backhanded insult to the rest of the group, said out loud in a way where they no doubt heard his proud boast.

14:30—“And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’”

“Deny” — *word means to disown or disavow*

But once again, Peter thinks he knows better than Jesus:

14:31 — “But he said emphatically, ‘If I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And they all said the same.”

Rather than denying Jesus, Peter claimed that he would die for Jesus. But it was a check he could not cash, a promise that he could not keep. It would only be a few hours later that Jesus would be arrested, the sheep would be scattered, and Peter would be found warming himself at a fire in the courtyard of the high priest—all while cursing and denying his association with Jesus. Just as Jesus had said, he denies knowing Him three times before the rooster crows.

Luke’s account adds a very piercing detail:

Luke 22:60-61 — “While he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered...”

What do you suppose must have been in that look?

- might it have been a look of hurt?
- was it a look of anger?
- perhaps it was a look of ‘I told you so?’

Had it been you or me that Peter had disowned, it would have no doubt been an ‘evil eye’ that we would have given him, as if to say, “How could you!” Yet none of these were the responses of Jesus.

The Greek word that is translated as ‘looked’ in the verse is a word that carries the idea of love or concern. It is the look of compassion and mercy. Jesus turns and looks at Peter with eyes of full of grace and truth.

How does Peter respond to such a crisis? How does he react to his own personal failure to live up to his promise?

Mark 14:72—“He broke down and wept.”

Luke 22:62—“He went out and wept bitterly.”

When confronted with the awful pain and anguish of failure, Peter—strong and overly confident man that he was—he breaks down and sobs like a baby. He had failed the One that he loved. That’s what failure can do in a person’s life. It can reduce a grown man to a weeping infant.

Have you ever tasted the bitter tears of your own failure?

- failed as a husband/wife
- failed as a father/mother
- failed as a leader
- failed as a Christian man or woman

Until you and I come to the place where we realize just how much of a ‘screw up’ we really are, true hope and joy will remain just beyond reach. Strange as it may sound, you’ll never experience the joy of knowing Christ until you come face to face with your own failure to live up to God’s perfect standard.

The gospel is for those who've made a mess of life, who well understand that they need the success of a Savior.

How we respond to the recognition of our failure matters; God will use the pain of failure to drive us to Jesus Christ!

Think of how Peter responds differently than Judas. Judas went out and hanged himself; Peter went out and wept. Judas found only despair; Peter is going to find grace. Or, perhaps even better, grace is going to come find him.

3. Peter's COMEBACK from failure

I'm so very thankful that the last picture we are given of Peter is not his failure. When Satan no doubt tempts him to call it quits, grace rescues him from a pit of despair and places his feet on a solid bedrock of gospel hope.

Two passages where we see this are Mark 16 & John 21.

Mark's gospel says that the women were the first to arrive at the tomb. Upon finding it empty, they are met by an angelic messenger who gives them the news that Jesus had risen. The angel gives them these instructions:

Mark 16:7—“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

Peter is singled out with the message of hope! He learns firsthand that Jesus is alive and He wants to see Peter. The One whom Peter had denied knowing, at the hour of His greatest trial, He is making the first move in pure grace to restore Peter. Rather than casting him aside in his failure, the resurrected Jesus is going to change his life. The Lord still has plenty for Peter to do.

In the last chapter of John's gospel, we read that sometime after the resurrection and initial appearance of Jesus to His disciples, Peter and a couple of the disciples decide to go fishing. Jesus appears on the shore and tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. The result is a huge catch, and they immediately recognize that the person on the beach is the Lord. I'm sure you're not surprised by the fact that Peter bails out of the boat and swims to shore.

After having breakfast together there on the beach, John records an interesting exchange between Jesus and Peter.

John 21:15a—“Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’”

The word ‘agape’ is used, which emphasizes the same superior kind of devotion that Peter was all too quick to claim for himself when he vowed to never abandon Jesus even if all the others did. Peter’s response:

John 21:15b—“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

But ‘agape’ is not the word that Peter uses. Instead, he uses the word ‘phileo’ which means brotherly love. This is not a minor detail, for it shows depth of humility in Peter’s life that is brought on by his failure. Never again would he claim superiority over others. His strength and ambition is now tempered with meekness.

Jesus asks him the same question three times. This is significant because Peter had denied Him three times. The third time He asks, Jesus uses the word ‘phileo’ rather than ‘agape.’

Chuck Swindoll says that it shows how Jesus meets Peter where he was in his chastened sense of devotion to Christ. It gives Peter the reassurance that he was completely forgiven, unconditionally loved, and freely accepted.

Jesus tells him three times:

- Feed My lambs
- Tend My sheep
- Feed My sheep

It will be Peter who becomes leader among the disciples and the early church. He stands up and demonstrates true leadership. It is Peter who boldly gives

witness about the death and resurrection of Jesus on the Day of Pentecost. It is Peter whom God uses to lead 3,000 people to Christ and thus the church is born. And it will be Peter who is the leader of the early church throughout the first half of Acts.

Conclusion:

I've learned three lessons from studying the life of Peter, and I want to share those with you in closing:

- *Failure isn't **final***

Peter's life bears witness to the hope that he writes about in his epistle. In grace, the Lord gave Peter a second chance at life. His legacy could have easily ended as the rooster welcomed the dawn, but God had other plans for him. Only the living Christ that can bring about such change in someone's life. Only gospel hope can provide us with such confidence in spite of our repeated failures.

Peter's ultimate success was not bound up in his performance for Jesus, but in Jesus' performance for him upon the cross. Jesus went all the way to Calvary, all the way into the grave, all the way back to life, and all the way to the Father's right hand so that failures like Peter, like me and you can have true and lasting hope.

Man's religion says "do this" and you will be accepted, but gospel hope says Christ has done all that is necessary, and His success is greater than all my failures. His grace is greater than all my sin.

- *Grace isn't **guilt ridden***

Jesus didn't put Peter on a guilt trip there on the beach in John 21. Peter well understood the guilt of his own sin. He isn't restored on some conditional basis. Jesus doesn't meet him halfway—Grace comes all the way for Peter.

This epistle begins in an unbelievable way when you really think about it
— ***“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”***

It is almost as if we hear him say, “He didn't write me off! He didn't cast me aside! Even when I failed Him, He didn't fail me!” Grace takes a failed fisherman and converts him, changes him, empowers him, and sends him out as an apostle of Jesus Christ. That's what the grace of God does in mine and your life as well. Converts us, transforms us, and commissions us. All to the glory of God!

- *Maturity isn't **mistake free***

God has something to teach us through every hurt. God never wastes a hurt or a crisis in my life. He uses adversity in this life to forge my faith. Peter reminds us that we can “rejoice, even though [we] have been grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6). He knew from personal experience.

God's grace can take the biggest and most embarrassing of our failures and use them as the means to humble us, stretch us, and mold us into the image of His Son.

Take for an example what Peter writes:

1 Peter 3:15—“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

He had learned the importance of this firsthand.

Regardless of what you have been tempted to believe by the world around you, there is hope for you. There is hope for those you love. You are not too far gone or too much of a failure that God's grace cannot reach down and rescue you just like He did for Peter.

Where is your hope?

In whom do you place your hope?

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness!