

THOUGHTS ABOUT SIMON PETER

(This study is especially for leaders)

Leaders! Let's take a closer look at the life and ministry of Simon Peter. Here's why!

- Peter is mentioned more times in the four Gospels than any other Apostle.
- The Apostles of Jesus are listed four times in the Bible (Matt. 10:2; Mk. 3:16; Lk. 6:14 - 16; Acts 1:13). Each time Peter is mentioned first.
- There are four occasions when the "inner circle" of Apostles are mentioned (Mk. 5:37; Mk. 13:3; Matt, 17:1; Matt. 26:37). In each instance Peter is mentioned first.
- Peter and John are mentioned together many times but every time Peter is mentioned first (Acts 3:1, 3, 11; 4:1, 3, 7, 13, 19 Etc.)
- The point is, Peter was a very prominent leader. In this brief study we will seek to understand why. Perhaps by better understanding Peter, we will be able to incorporate some of his leadership skills into our own lives.
- Even though Peter was a prominent leader and Apostle, he was still only a man. No one was to bow down and give him reverence (Acts 10:25, 26).
- Neither is there evidence that Peter was Pope. In fact there is no evidence that anyone was Pope. God made Jesus to be the head of His Body, the Church (Col. 1:18). Obviously a Body only needs One Head!
- For those who think that Peter was Pope, consider that while he is mentioned more times in the Gospels than any other apostle, Paul is mentioned more times in the whole Bible.
- Consider also that Paul wrote more inspired books than Peter or any other man.
- Further, consider that Paul even publicly rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:11 - 21).
- Consider also that Paul was not married and Peter was.
- None of this, however, means that Paul was a Pope.
- Let us again state emphatically that Peter was not the Pope, Paul was not the Pope, and neither was anyone else. As we have already said, Jesus is the Head of His Body, the church, and no man, angel, or demon will ever be permitted to take His place.
- Again, the purpose of this study is not to exalt Peter, but to learn leadership; skills from him

UPON THIS ROCK

The idea that Peter was Pope rests like an inverted pyramid upon this statement by Jesus: **"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."** (Matt 16:17-19)

Because so many have misunderstood these words, let us take the time to examine them more closely. As you know, these words were not spoken in a vacuum. They came at a time when Jesus was about to tell His disciples about His impending death in Jerusalem. In order to properly

understand His suffering and death, they needed to first be confident of His deity. Please consider:

- Up to this point in time Jesus had not talked clearly about His death. He made a veiled reference to it in John 2:19, but they did not understand it at the time. After Peter made the Good Confession, we are told: **“From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” (Matt 16:21)**
- To prepare the disciples for understanding His death, Jesus did two things.
 - First, as we have already pointed out, He got Peter to confess that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16). This fact, as you know, was the foundation of His coming Kingdom.
 - Second, He took Peter, James and John to a mountain and spoke with Moses and Elijah about His death (Lk. 9:31). This confirmed that the death of Jesus was not heresy, but in perfect harmony with both the Law and the Prophets.
- Since no one can lay any other foundation than Jesus (1 Cor. 3:11), it should be obvious that the church was not founded upon Peter.
- Remember! The sign of the prophet Jonah involved Jesus, not Peter (Matt. 12:39, 40).
- Also remember that comparing temporary things with eternal reality was a teaching technique used by Jesus on other occasions as well.
 - To the woman at the well Jesus said: **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14)**
 - After feeding the multitudes with earthly bread, Jesus said: **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)**
 - After Peter made the “Good Confession” Jesus congratulated him and said: **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (Matt 16:17).**
 - It was then that Jesus made the comparison between Peter, an earthly and temporary rock, and the eternal “Rock” of His own deity. **“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”**
 - Yes! Jesus was going to die in Jerusalem, but the “gates of Hades”, that is, “the strength of the unseen world” would not overcome His deity. Jesus conquered the “Gates of Hades” by the power of His resurrection. Paul said it like this: **“who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 1:4)**
- Note also that the privilege of “binding and loosing” was not unique to Peter. It was also given to others as well (see Matt. 18:18).

PETER WAS A MAN WITH POTENTIAL

Jesus saw potential in Simon Peter from the very first. Their first meeting was at Bethany, on the other side of the Jordan (Jn. 1:28). When Jesus showed up, John the Baptist identified Him as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). At this time Peter was not a leader. He was merely an unlettered fisherman. Jesus, however, saw in him the potential to be much more than that. That's why, on their very first meeting, Jesus gave him a new name. It is exciting to think that Jesus also sees potential in us, just as He did with Peter.

To clarify the chronology, this encounter with Peter had to have happened after Jesus was forty days in the wilderness.

- Remember! Immediately after Jesus was baptized, He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (Mk. 1:12).
- This meeting with Peter therefore had to be at least 40 days after His baptism.
- Three days later, Jesus, Peter, and other disciples were together in Cana of Galilee for a wedding.
- John makes this clear by mentioning the "next day" (Jn. 1:29); and the "next day" (Jn. 1:35; and the wedding taking place on the "third day" (Jn. 2:1,2).

But back to Bethany. After Jesus was identified as the Lamb of God, two of John's disciples followed Jesus and spent the day with Him (Jn. 1:39). One of the two was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The other was probably John, who later also became an apostle. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him about Jesus, then he physically brought him to Jesus. (Jn. 1:41, 42). Note that Andrew also brought people to Jesus on other occasions (See Jn. 6:8, and 12:22). How beautiful! It was on this first meeting that **"Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter) " (John 1:42).** Apparently, Jesus saw potential for leadership in Peter that He did not see in Andrew.

The giving of a new name is significant. There are many examples in the Bible of a new name preceding new power. Abram (exalted father) was given the new name Abraham (father of multitudes). Sarai (my princess) was given the new name Sarah (mother of nations). These new names preceded the miraculous birth of their son Isaac. Jacob (supplanter) was given the new name Israel (prince of God.). After years of manipulating men, Jacob finally obtained power with God. Note that these new names were a harbinger of transformation. Abram and Sarai were transformed from being barren old people to having descendants as numerous as the stars of the heaven. A deceptive man like Jacob was transformed from manipulating men to a spiritual prince who had power with God. The name Peter, as you probably know, is the Greek word for "Rock" (Jn. 1:42). The old Simon was vacillating and unpredictable, but Jesus saw in him leadership potential to be like a rock. That's why He gave him the name Peter. Jesus, of course, was right! The gifts and calling of God involve certainty (Rom. 11:29).

Remember also that "transformation" is another word for "conversion". All Christian people

are not “conformed” by outward pressure, but “transformed” by the Spirit of Christ from within (Rom. 12:2). When Peter saw Jesus being transformed on the Sacred Mountain it was a life changing experience (Matt. 17:1 - 9). In fact , years later he not only remembered the transformation of Jesus, but considered it convincing evidence that he was not following a cunningly devised fable (2 Pet. 1:16 - 21).

What happened to Jesus is described by the Greek word “metamorphosis”. This is the word used to describe the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The supernatural power of God transformed Jesus before his very eyes. Perhaps as Peter saw Jesus being transformed, he reflected upon his own transformation. To show that this transformation is for everyone, Peter wrote: **“and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19)** While conversion takes place immediately, transformation is a life time process. **“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).**

We must emphasize that neither Peter, nor any of the other Apostles, were selected by accident or mistake. Jesus prayed all night long before choosing the 12 and this special list included only those whom God chose to be His Apostles (Lk. 6:12 - 16)

Yes! Peter was a person with great potential, but so are you! While all believers are not leaders, all believers do receive a gift from God (See Rom. 12:3 - 8; 1 Cor. 12:1 - 31; I Peter 4:10 Etc.) May learning more about Peter help you to develop the full potential of the gift that God has given you.

PETER WAS NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK

Another leadership characteristic in Peter was his willingness to speak up, even if sometimes was wrong. It is remarkable how many times Peter dared to speak while the others remained silent

Here are a few examples:

- **“Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." (Matt 14:28)**
- **“Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." (Matt 15:15)**
- **“Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt 16:16)**
- **“Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"(Matt 16:22)**
- **“Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters-one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (Matt 17:4)**
- **“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matt 18:21)**
- **“Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" (Matt 19:27)**

- “Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." (Matt 26:33)
- “In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" (Mark 11:20-21)
- “Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." (Luke 8:45)
- “Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" (Luke 12:41)
- “Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69)
- “No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." (John 13:8)
- “Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" (John 13:36)
- “For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, 'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, 'May another take his place of leadership.' Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:20-22)
- “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.” (Acts 2:14-15)
- Etc.

Someone has quipped, “Silence is not always golden, sometimes it is yellow”. That is, sometimes people are reluctant to say anything because they are afraid to do so. As we have said, Peter was sometimes wrong, but never afraid to speak. On the Mount of Transfiguration, for example, Peter spoke up and wanted to build three tabernacles, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. Peter was wrong to suggest building three tabernacles. His error of putting men on the same level as Jesus was so great that God Himself interrupted from heaven and said: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”** (Matt 17:5). God wants everyone to listen to Jesus! Jesus is the One who correctly interprets the Law and the Prophets. That’s why God said: “Listen to Him”.

As you contemplate your own leadership potential, remember that Peter was not afraid to speak, regardless of the circumstances. May his boldness inspire us to be more courageous in what we say..

PETER WAS NOT AFRAID TO ACT

Not only was Peter not afraid to speak, he was also not afraid to act. Please consider:

- While the other disciples chose safety, Peter dared to get out of the boat and try to walk on the water (Matt. 14:29).
- Against his own judgement as a fisherman, Peter dared to obey Jesus and let down his nets into the deep (Lk. 5:5).

- In the Garden of Gethsemane Peter dared to draw a sword and singlehandedly take on a cohort of Roman soldiers (John 18:10).
- At the arrest of Jesus, when the other disciples fled, Peter dared to follow Jesus to His trial (Jn. 18:15).
- When Peter and John ran to the empty tomb John got there first, but Peter was the one who was bold enough to enter the tomb (Jn. 20:6).
- When Peter saw the resurrected Christ standing on the shore, he was the only disciple that leaped out of the boat and swam to meet Him (Jn. 21:7).
- When Jesus said to “them” to bring some fish, it was “Peter” who dragged in the net and did it (Jn. 21:11).
- In the upper room it was Peter who boldly took the lead and found a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15 - 26).
- On the Day of Pentecost it was Peter who again took the lead and dared to preach to those who had crucified Christ (Acts 2:14 - 47).
- At the Gate Beautiful it was Peter who took the initiative and healed a man who was crippled from birth. He even had to take the crippled man by the hand and lift him up (Acts 3:1 - 10).
- Taking advantage of the crowd who came to see the man just healed, Peter dared to again preach the Gospel to a large crowd of unbelievers (Acts 3:11 - 26).
- It was Peter who dared to tell the Jewish elders and teachers that he had to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19).
- It was Peter who presided over the deaths of Annanias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1 - 11).
- It was Peter who rebuked Simon the Sorcerer and warned him of judgement (Acts 8:20 - 23).
- It was Peter who also was the first to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1 - 48).
- Etc.

Peter did not rise to his position of leadership in a vacuum. His life choices “in the present” prepared him for leadership “in the future”. If we manifest the boldness and courage of Peter, perhaps we too will become a “pillar” in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:9).

PETER OVERCAME DIFFICULTIES TO BE A LEADER

- As a fisherman Peter lacked the skills and background to be an international ambassador for Christ. With the help of Christ, however, he overcame his handicap and did it anyhow!
- Peter had a thick Galilean accent that must have been offensive to many Jews (Matt. 26:73). He not only overcame this problem, but even dared to become an Apostle to the circumcised (Gal. 2:8).
- Peter had little or no formal education. That’s why he was considered “unlearned and ignorant”. When his critics saw his boldness, however, they took knowledge of the fact that he had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).
- Peter owned a boat (Lk. 5:3). He and his brother Andrew were partners in a fishing business with James and John (Lk. 5:10). In order to be a leader for Christ, Peter had to leave his business. In fact, Peter left everything to follow Christ (Mk. 10: 28).
- Jesus predicted that Peter would die in a way that would glorify God (Jn. 21:19). Peter was

- faithful to his calling and died precisely as Jesus predicted.
- Peter made the mistake of denying Christ three times in Jerusalem. Yet, this was the very place that Peter overcame his fear and boldly preached the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
 - When Peter and the other Apostles were arrested for preaching, an angel of the Lord released them from jail and commanded them to the Temple and preach the full message of this new life (Acts 5:20). Though it was not easy, Peter and the others boldly obeyed.
 - When Peter and the other apostles were flogged because of their faith, they did not quit but rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for Christ (Acts 5:40, 41).
 - Peter was once so prejudiced against Gentiles that God had to give him the same vision three times to help him overcome that prejudice (Acts 10:1 - 48). Again, with the help of Christ, Peter overcame his prejudice and preached the Gospel for the first time to Gentiles.
 - When Peter later acted hypocritically in his conduct toward Gentile believers, Paul rebuked him in public for his error (Gal. 2:14). Peter repented of his mistake, overcame his embarrassment, and went on to claim his throne in the Apostle's Hall of Fame (Matt. 19:28).
 - When the early church was scattered by persecution, Peter and the other Apostles risked their lives and dared to stay in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).
 - After James was beheaded, Peter was arrested and his execution was planned after the Passover. God, however, sent an angel to deliver Peter from prison (Acts 12:1 - 19). Even though the authorities sought to arrest him again, Peter overcame this obstacle and continued to preach Christ.
 - Please do not let any obstacle keep you from obedience to the call of Christ!

PETER WROTE LETTERS

As we have already pointed out, Peter was a man without formal education (Acts 4:13). Yet, he is credited with writing two books of the Bible (1 and 2nd Peter). The fact that these letters were written in excellent Greek is easily explained. First, Peter was inspired by God to write these letters. Prophetic writing does not originate with man, but inspired men spoke and wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). Second, Peter said that he wrote this letter with the help of a skilled secretary named Silas (1 Pet. 5:12).

It is also generally believed that the Gospel of Mark was dictated by Peter. Be that as it may, it is obvious that Peter did not let his lack of a formal education keep him from writing.

Some anonymous author has written these poignant words:

“The printed page never flinches, never forgets, never shows cowardice, never is tempted to compromise, never gets tired, never gets sick, never gets discouraged, never loses it’s temper, never gets in an argument, and never goes to sleep. It can travel across national boundaries without a passport, fly at high altitudes without oxygen, survive cold without a coat, and never needs air conditioning. It travels cheaply, and requires no hired halls. It works while we sleep and always catches a reader in the right mood, for it only speaks to him when he takes the time to read

it. It can continue to work long after we are dead. The printed page is a visitor which gets inside the home and stays there. It always patiently says the same thing and is like bait permanently left in the pool.”

Someone has quipped “a short pencil is better than a long memory”. If Peter could write letters, then so can we.

WHAT ABOUT HIM?

After Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him (Jn. 21:15 - 19), Peter turned and saw that disciple whom Jesus loved. This was probably the Apostle John. Then Peter said “Lord, what about him?” (Jn. 21:21).

“Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’ ” (John 21:22)

Do you see this principle?

Every disciple of Christ is responsible for personal obedience. Peter would never be John, and John would never be Peter. Each disciple is responsible for following the leading of Christ in his or her own life. What someone else does should never be our primary concern. Our goal is not to imitate someone else, but to obey Jesus.

We should be careful therefore, that our study of Peter only helps us to understand the gifts and calling of God in our own lives. Paul said it like this: **“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1)**. Paul made it clear that he did what he did, not because of James, Peter, or John, but because of Christ (Gal. 2:6 - 10). Whatever we do in word or deed, we are also to do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father through Him (Col. 3:17).

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. “ (Rom 12:4-8)