

CERTAIN HOPE FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

A Study of 1 Peter

by Glenn Newton



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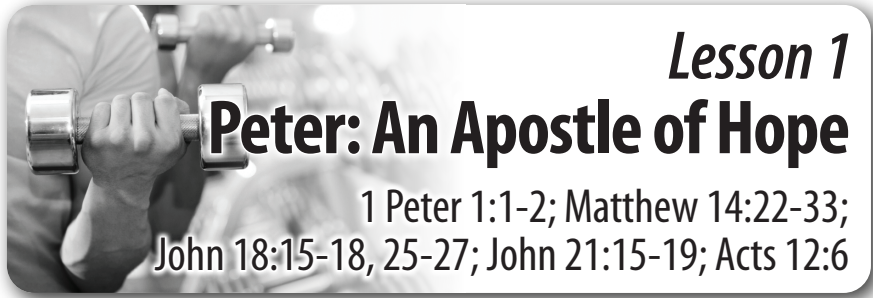
Introduction

“The American church is under persecution!” How do you react when you see that statement? Do you agree? Do you think it is an overstatement? Before you answer that, answer this: What is the purpose of persecution? It is to get people to renounce their faith in Christ. Is the current social climate in America causing people to renounce their faith in Christ? I believe that most people would answer that with a yes. If that is the case, then we are under persecution. There is no doubt that it is a different type of persecution. Christians aren’t being dragged out of their homes into the public square and stoned to death. But in a sense, it is equally difficult. Most of us would feel like we would stand up for faith under the threat of death, but do we stand up for our faith when our lives are not on the line?

This study of First Peter is designed to restore hope to those who feel hopeless. Our society wants Christians to back down from our beliefs and embrace cultural norms. Many Christians have already given in to the call to compromise. How can we avoid it? How can we continue to embrace the hope we have in Christ when the world around us seems so hopeless? How can we be people of certain hope in uncertain times?

About the Author

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Lesson 1

Peter: An Apostle of Hope

1 Peter 1:1-2; Matthew 14:22-33;
John 18:15-18, 25-27; John 21:15-19; Acts 12:6

Key Verse:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ... (1 Peter 1:1a)

WARM UP



“Who is your favorite Bible character?” the young man asked his preacher. His preacher replied, “It used to be David. I felt like I could relate to David because of all of his ups and downs. I could certainly relate with being a man after God’s own heart who had occasional struggles with his faith. But I’ve never worn kingly robes or been a man of privilege, so I couldn’t relate to David as well as Paul. So Paul was my favorite Bible character for some time until I started realizing what a strong man of faith Paul really was. When I read the missionary journeys and saw his faith and perseverance, I realized that maybe I didn’t have as much in common with Paul as I originally thought. Now my favorite Bible character is Peter.” The young man asked why. The elderly preacher replied, “I feel like God has always had faith in me, yet I have failed Him over and

over. He has continued to pull me up out of the waves around me, but there have still been times when I denied I even knew Him. But now I am at a point in my life where I recognize that He loves me, He has forgiven me, and will never leave me. And that gives me hope and peace. In that way, I feel like Peter.”

It has been stated that Peter was “the ultimate human.” In a sense, he certainly was! Yet when one reads the letter of First Peter without prior knowledge of Peter’s life, he would be viewed as a “super Christian.” Although Peter became a powerful apostle in his later years, he certainly had struggles at the beginning of his faith journey. Knowing this truth is vital in understanding and applying the book of First Peter. All the admonitions to “be strong,” to “rejoice in trials,” and to “share in Christ’s sufferings” seem unrealistic until one realizes that the man who wrote them was not always strong, complained on numerous occasions, and ran away from potential suffering. So, who is the man who wrote first Peter?



WORK OUT

Peter was a man who failed

One of the things that made Peter such a strong apostle in his later years was his failure in his early years. Peter courageously left his job as a fisherman to follow Jesus, but this courage didn’t always remain. The roar of the wind and the waves robbed him of his courage the night he attempted to walk on water. The roar of the crowd robbed him of his courage the night Jesus was arrested. Peter wanted to be strong! We know this because he wept when he failed. When he heard the rooster crow after his third denial of Christ, he wept bitterly.

Can you imagine what it felt like when Peter was sitting on the beach with Jesus after the resurrection and was asked the question, “Peter, do you love me?” His heart must have sunk as he

remembered his failures. He certainly remembered denying Christ as he said, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you" (John 21:15). Jesus asked him the same question three times. Scholars have assumed Jesus asked Peter this question three times because Peter denied him three times. This is most likely true, but don't assume it was to remind Peter of his three failures. Rather, it was more likely to remind Peter of the certainty of His love and forgiveness.

Peter was a man who grew

This forgiveness and love of Jesus was such a catalyst of growth for Peter that when we turn from the gospels to the book of Acts, Peter looks like a different person! As early as Acts 2, we see Peter boldly preaching Jesus on the day of Pentecost. By the time we reach Acts 12, we find Peter falsely imprisoned and awaiting death. He has been beaten, arrested, is awaiting the death penalty and what do we find him doing? SLEEPING! Can you think of some things that keep you awake at night? Peter's faith had grown so deep that even impending death didn't keep him awake.

Peter's faith was able to grow because he had gained a deeper understanding of Jesus and His kingdom. He had also gained a deeper understanding of his mission. When Jesus ate breakfast on the beach with Peter, He gave him the mission to feed His lambs. He also promised him, and the rest of the apostles, that they would never be alone. He promised that through His Holy Spirit He would be with them "always."

Peter was a man who loved Jesus

Preachers have speculated for ages concerning the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21. Why did Jesus ask Peter if he loved Him using the word Greek word *agape* (meaning "to love dearly"), and Peter reply using the word *phileo* (meaning "affection" or "brotherly love")? Some have speculated that Jesus was saying

“Peter, do you love Me?” and Peter was replying by saying, “Lord, you know I like You.” If that is the case, why did Jesus give him the mission to feed His lambs when he only “liked” Him? The word *agape* refers to a sacrificial love, which means a love that is shown by action. The word *phileo* refers to the emotional side of love. In today’s language, with the words for love being translated, the conversation might look like this:

Jesus: “Simon, son of John, do you love Me enough to serve Me?”

Peter: “Jesus, You know I love You with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength.”

Jesus: “Feed My sheep.”

Peter is a great example of what happens when we are motivated by love. His love for Jesus motivated him to live a life of hope even during trials that seemed hopeless. There is no greater motivation than love! Even though his fellow apostle John wrote it, Peter embodied the thought that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

COOL DOWN



Several years ago a submarine was being tested and had to remain submerged for many hours. When it returned to the harbor, the captain was asked, “How did the terrible storm last night affect you?” The officer looked at him in surprise and exclaimed, “Storm? We didn’t even know there was one!” The sub had been so far beneath the surface that it had reached the area known to sailors as “the cushion of the sea.” Although the ocean may be whipped into huge waves by high winds, the waters below are never stirred.

The reason that many Christians are tossed around by life’s storms is because our faith in Jesus Christ is only on the surface.

As a result, our reaction to life's storms is not met with hope; but with the fear of a surface faith.

- Instead of reacting to struggles with strength, we cower in the corner.
- Instead of reacting to conflict with compassion, we lash out and damage relationships.
- Instead of reacting to doubts with determination, we raise our white flags.
- Instead of reacting to pain with peace, we spend restless nights looking for answers.

There was a point in Peter's life where his faith in Jesus was only on the surface. As a result, his early years were fraught with failures and wet clothes. But as he grew, his perfect love for Jesus cast out his fear, and he was able to sleep "in the cushion of the sea." He was also able to write with certainty, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope..." (1 Peter 1:3a).

By the way, that preacher at the beginning was me! I love David, and I respect Paul, but I understand Peter. Don't you?

Questions for Discussion

1. Draw a brief timeline of the life of Peter. As you do this, notice the growth in his faith and consider what things caused Peter to grow into the apostle and elder he became?
2. Discuss this statement: "One of the things that made Peter such a strong apostle in his later years was his failure in his early years." Do you agree? How can failures make us stronger?
3. What worries keep you awake at night? Why? How can you learn to sleep like Peter did in Acts 12?

4. Do you agree with the author's conclusion about the two different words for love in John 21? If not, why do you think Peter used a different word than Jesus?
5. What does a surface faith look like? What are the dangers of a surface faith? How can we take our faith beyond the surface?