

Introduction to Peter's 1st Epistle

Victorious Christian Living

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Well, I'm excited this morning. It's been the past 15 years, pretty much, that I've been either teaching or preaching verse by verse through the Pauline epistles and this morning, we're going to start a whole new epistle by the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Peter's first letter, 1 Peter, and we will begin this morning with what will essentially be an introduction and overview looking at the setting and then we will finish in the latter part of the service or the sermon with a look at the man Peter, and it adds a particular richness to the text, to the understanding of what Peter wrote about. It's one thing to read 1 Peter and gain a lot from it as you grow in the Lord through the years, it's quite another when you look and examine the man first, when you look at the gospels and interweave them with the various doctrines he's teaching, with the exhortations he's making, and all of the things that are essentially lessons that the man Simon Peter learned himself and it brings a freshness to this epistle. It helps deepen the understanding of where some of these things may have been prompted from in his experience of being discipled by the Lord Jesus Christ himself those three years. So we'll finish this morning looking at Peter and begin this morning as we look at an introduction and overview.

So the series itself overall throughout the epistle is the victorious Christian living in times of suffering and persecution. That is primarily what Peter is dealing with. He's writing to the Christians of the diaspora or the dispersion, those Christians that are spread out, and it just makes perfect sense that today would be the day that we would begin this, because Grace Bible Fellowship has something of a dispersion this morning. We have a number of folks that are traveling or ill, and we want to remember them in our prayers as we move throughout our day. So we are going to start with this opening salutation. We're going to just read verse 1 and 2, and that's where we're going to start, and then we will primarily focus on verse 1, which begins.

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Let's pray.

Father, we ask your blessing as we begin a whole new epistle, this first of two letters written by the Apostle Peter, and so steeped in the things of God, so steeped in the things that you not only taught him didactically as a teacher teaching truth, but all in the life lessons that he learned through trial and error, through getting things wrong and then getting things right, receiving things through the thoughts of man and speaking out of turn, and yet receiving no less than the revelation from the Father himself. What a unique individual, O Lord. We thank you that his letters survive and that you deemed them worthy enough to be in the full canon of Scripture, these inspired words that are alive to us even now, today. So be with us, Lord, we pray, as we navigate through this powerful five chapter letter and bring it home to roost in our hearts and bring it home into our homes. This is what we pray that you would be glorified in these things and through this series. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So this is an introduction and an overview, as I mentioned to you. The overview will be essentially when was the letter written, where was it written, what were the circumstances going that are surrounding? These are just diligent things to investigate for anybody who wants to apply proper hermeneutics or proper principles to how to study any book of the Bible. Who's the writer? Where is he writing to? Where is he writing from and who is he writing to? What year is this? What's going on around him at that time? Because God chose in his remarkable providence to use human beings and I don't know that there is one faultier or full of his foibles and failings as Peter, and he gives us hope, doesn't he? He gives me great hope. As a matter of fact, going from Paul to Peter after 15 years, I'm like, okay, I get this guy. All right, I understand him and I'm glad that God chose him. Why did God choose a man who could get it wrong so many times? And I'm so blessed by this and I want you to be blessed by it too.

So this is roughly, I'm going to cut through a lot of the research that I've done through those who have suggested a later date for the writing and other things, just to get to what I believe with others that I'm sure you would respect, would essentially be a time frame of around 64 to 68 AD and I'll be talking about why that's important. The letter written from Rome, that is essentially what was understood by the term that he uses later in the epistle when he talks about this Babylon, it is Rome he is essentially what he's referring to. He is in Rome as Paul was in Rome and finished out his time there as well. As a matter of fact, many of the things that Peter writes about sound really familiar. They sound so familiar to Pauline epistles that there are some who suggested, I'm not sure Peter could have written this. There's other reasons they suspect that as well. But think about it logically, if they're learning from the same Master, Paul by his three year tutorial and Peter by his in-person tutorial, they're probably going to come up with the same truths. So that's not compelling evidence that it wasn't Peter. Another thing that they suggest is this is written in the original Koine Greek in such a high level of Greek. It's a it's a classical Greek. How could this Galilean fisherman ever write something so precise and with such high sounding language, high language in the Greek. And well, that could be explained by perhaps, first of all, that the one who is writing for him is Silvanus. and he perhaps was able to write in a more classical style of Greek. These reasons are just distractions that they offer up to say that this isn't Peter. As a matter of fact, pretty much

the majority of early church fathers, those who came right after the apostles, who were verifying what books belong in the full canon of Scripture, all verify that Peter is the author of 1 Peter. So we don't want to spend too much more time on that. I think I've hopefully done the heavy lifting for you on that. You can look into that yourself as well.

So we're looking at Rome. He's in Rome. We're looking at 64 to 68 AD, and the reason 64 AD is important as a date, as a matter of fact, the precise date would be July 19th, 64 AD, is because that's when Rome burned down. You've heard the phrase, Nero fiddled while Rome burned so when you read the historians, there are those that believe, and I do as well, that it was actually Nero, he was somewhat crazy anyway, that lit the fires himself. Nero actually committed suicide in 68 AD, and this letter was obviously or had to have been written during his reign. So it has to be somewhere between the burning of Rome in 64 AD and 68 AD when Nero committed suicide. But back to Nero and the setting. So four of the five chapters in 1 Peter allude to the suffering and persecution of Christians. So hence the title. You probably already were familiar with that as a theme when you want to talk about what the Scripture has to say about suffering and persecution, you typically will turn to 1 Peter and that's what we're going to look at. It's in all of the chapters across the board. Four of the five chapters, as I said, allude to suffering and persecution of Christians. It's mentioned in and out. It's interwoven throughout the entire epistle.

So July 19th, 64 A.D., back to that. That's the setting in which Peter's writing and we need to understand what's going on there. Why is he writing to all of the believers that are not only in Rome, but beyond? There was a tremendous persecution going on and here's why we believe that's the case that Rome was actually burnt down by Nero, because he had a penchant for building, he liked building projects, and Rome was a city of narrow streets and tall wooden structures that were densely populated with people, but it didn't matter to him. He went ahead and lit a match and burned it all down and so there were a lot of people who were displaced. And he also had a palace that he wanted to build and that palace, when he ended up building it, took up some said 100 acres, some said 300 acres. So he was egomaniacal. It didn't matter to him that all of his own fellow citizens of Rome were displaced. Who knows, I didn't read anything about any casualty list or how many might have been killed, but needless to say, the people didn't know who actually did it and so Nero blamed the Christians. Nero blamed the Christians and said the Christians burnt this place to the ground.

So they're looking for somebody to blame. They're filled with resentment. A lot of them are homeless. A lot of them lost all their possessions. And he's saying those Christians and they already had in place a resentment, a contempt for Christianity and there's a number of reasons why. They first of all, they weren't idol worshipers. They weren't going to bend the knee to Caesar. So already they're being ostracized from what everybody else in the culture is doing. Sound familiar? And so there they were disenfranchised from what all of the other good citizens were worshiping in terms of Zeus and all the other gods of their idol temples and weren't bowing down and worshiping Nero or any other Caesar. So they also had what was called a closed communion. They didn't let any other pagans and they didn't let any idol worshipers or

unbelievers join them in Holy Communion, in the practice of communion as we take once a month here on the first Sunday. They were taking communion because Jesus told all believers to share in the body and blood of Christ at the Last Supper, breaking the bread and pouring the wine and so on. But the problem is the people, the citizens, they're already filled with contempt for Christians. Now they're being ostracized from communion. It's closed up. They won't let anybody come in that is not a true believer. But yet all they're hearing about is this group from this cult, if you will, this crazy religion that's not like anything they've ever heard of before that are eating the body and blood of Christ. They were accused literally of being cannibals, that they were cannibals. And not only that, but also they were accused of high degree of sexual immorality. Well, for one thing, they refer to each other as brothers and sisters. So they thought they were practicing incest. Plus they were told in their teaching from the writings of the apostles that you greet one another with a holy kiss. So men were giving each other, other men a holy kiss, so homosexuality. I mean, they accused the church of all different crazy, crazy things.

So Nero knew that he had a group of people that he could pin this on and clear the decks for whatever building projects he wanted to move forward with and so Christians were the ones, but what that did is it set in place the greatest season. Actually, that season of severe persecution took place over the next 250 years because from Trajan, who is the emperor who comes after Nero, to Domitian, who was the emperor during John's time from 96 AD to 117 AD, I believe, all the way up to Diocletian, who was just before Constantine, Emperor Constantine, right up to the year just less than the year 300, somewhere around the year 300, was severe, severe persecution of Christians. And then, of course, Constantine, the emperor Constantine's mother, Helena, became a Christian. She became converted and so Constantine became converted so he made a declaration called the Edict of Milan that he passed that Christianity needed to be let alone, need to let thrive throughout the Roman kingdom and so that's when they had a Pax Romana or a peace in Rome when Constantine came along. But you have to understand how white-hot, how terrible, how horrible this persecution was at the time and you can read about these things. Some of the horrendous ways in which they were persecuted is just gruesome beyond imagination. So many Christians were arrested. They were brutally executed by being thrown to beasts. Some of them had animal skins sewn to them, and then they'd sic their hunting dogs after them to rip them apart. I mean, it's really, really nasty stuff. Some were burned alive. Some were seared to death. As a matter of fact, Nero himself, and you may have heard this story before, used to hang Christians on poles in his courtyard, roll them in pitch, which is a tar-like substance, and light them on fire to light his garden parties. This is not the stuff of myth or the stuff of Hollywood. I wish it were.

These things were real. This is the setting and he is at the epicenter of this evil Peter's writing from and so it's important to understand that, because, again, it'll give you a depth of your appreciation for the encouragement that he's trying to write to them. He knows how they're being persecuted and he wants to reach beyond just Rome. He wants to go out to those other areas, which would be northwest Turkey area, just up to the Black Sea, the northern part, because he mentions Galatia. So he's concluding the Galatians. So this

would be northern Galatia because the churches of southern Galatia, of course, Paul had planted churches there. So he's covering this northwest area of what would be Turkey today, of Asia.

So they're suffering greatly. So Christians in this setting are decidedly in a minority. They're having hard times. They've been rejected, persecuted, mocked, scorned, arrested, put up for execution by the majority population. So as I said, persecution had become widespread, not just by the explanation I just gave you from history, but he also now it brings understanding, for instance, to chapter 5 and verse 9, where Peter writes, "knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." So he had a heart for the Christians wherever they were and wherever they were being persecuted. So Peter's writing his letter during obviously tumultuous times, not only in Rome, but beyond, and as I said, that was going to go on for close to 250 years under each successive Roman emperor hence the main theme of the epistle, which is the title I've given to the entire series, which is "Victorious Christian living in times of suffering and persecution." If you thought that, "Well, that's going to be something that's remote to my concern because we're in such a wonderfully free place in America in 2017 to practice our faith, that's never going to be the problem," you'll have to think again because we are very nearly going to endure the kinds of persecution that might include being arrested, being closed down, being persecuted at work, being persecuted among family members, all of those things maybe some of you have either heard about already or experienced yourself. So these things are real.

Now, it's important to understand that for Peter, he's dealing primarily in this book with suffering through persecution, suffering that they're enduring by affliction and by persecution, not suffering by someone who might be ill. He's not dealing with those who are ill and who are suffering; the other epistles deal with issues for those that are suffering, James chapter 5 and other places take care of things like that. So basically, if we were to summarize his purpose for writing, I thought it pretty much summarized well in chapter 5 and verse 12, "I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it." Stand firm. We talk about that a lot when I talk about the danger of stepping outside of the grace of God you're in the sights of the enemy and he's going to come at you with every sling and arrow he can. So he's saying, "Stand firm." Sounds similar to Paul, doesn't it, when he wrote to the Corinthian church, "Stand firm. Stand firm. Act like men," Paul wrote, "and stand firm," and Peter's saying, "Stand firm in grace. Stand firm in that favor that I know you don't deserve because you had to come to Christ because you were such a great sinner, but he pours out his grace and grace upon grace to take care of you, to see you through times like this. Stand in it. Don't move. Don't waver." He's going to talk a lot about faith, about how it takes such great faith, it's going to take great faith to stand firm in the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

And he also writes in 1 Peter 4, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings," showing them the same idea that James did as he opened his epistle. Remember where he said, count it what? It's possible. Yes, it's possible. It's possible. He's saying, "But rejoice in so far as you share in the sufferings of Christ. There are those who have gone and been martyred before us who counted it a privilege to suffer for Christ's sake." And you and I,

even in our day and time and our setting, need to be prepared to view it that way, that when people persecute you for your faith, count it a privilege. If you don't, you step outside and you're left with your thoughts in the flesh thinking resentfully towards somebody who's persecuting, and what comes immediately to mind is someone who stepped outside of that setting of God's grace is thinking, that's not what? Fair. Of course, it's not fair. Nothing's fair in a fallen world run by Satan who is called the God of this world. It's not fair. But it's a privilege insofar as you understand your God to be more powerful than he who dwells in this world, who will keep you safe so long as you stand in that grace.

But I'll go on, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." God rests upon you, he's assuring them who are suffering in terrible ways that the grace of God rests upon them, that they might be able to endure it. Again, we can recognize Paul in these writings when he's saying rejoice twice, right, in one verse, what does that remind us? Paul's letter to the Philippians in chapter 4 where he says rejoice and what? "And again I say rejoice. I know you're not going to get it on the first suggestion so I'm going to say it again. You really can rejoice in this. You really can." How? How is that possible? Well, Peter's about to remind us in his letter that you are not citizens of this place. He uses a word that's also translated stranger, "You're a stranger here." He's writing to those who are elect exiles in the ESV. Another version says strangers. He's reminding them right at the salutation, right at the outset, that this is not your home. These are not necessarily your brothers and sisters. We're not to send down roots here or you're going to be hurt. It's a wonderful letter.

So if you're insulted for the name of Christ, you're blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Doesn't that remind you, for instance, of the Sermon on the Mount? We can suppose that Peter was sitting right up front. Remember that? "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn." Remember, that's the pursuit of happiness. You want to be happy? That's where you start. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake." He goes on in those blessed Beatitudes in saying, "Blessed are you when people persecute you and you suffer." See, this is Peter. You can hear his Master's teaching in his life. You can see the influence of the Pauline epistles, which, by the way, those would have been written just before he's writing. Galatians was probably written in around 49 AD. That's one of the earliest epistles in the New Testament. And others were written in 58 and some around 60 to 63. These were fresh circulating in the churches. So that's another reason why, yes, he may sound very much like Paul and he attests to the divine veracity of Paul's writings, too, by the way, the writings of Peter does.

So this I want you to know right at the front, right as we begin, is a letter of hope and encouragement written to Christians who experienced intense suffering and persecution. That's what the theme of this is. That's what he wants to get across to you. Sure, he's talking about suffering. Who can take the horrible situation that they're immersed in and encourage us in this way, that's what the Apostle Peter's doing. So in short, Peter's

purpose for writing this letter is to send a clear message of hope, of hope to them who might have thought it was hopeless. They didn't know it was supposed to turn out this way. Remember, this is the first century. Remember, this is within the first generation of newly-minted Christians. They didn't know that we've got 2,000 years of past church history to understand that we understand you're going to be persecuted; because we have Fox's Book of Martyrs, we can see that there's a whole compendium filled with people that were put to death just because of their faith. People are being persecuted, as I said, in their families and were as a number of ways they're being persecuted. They didn't have that information. Remember, they thought Jesus was coming back right away. Read 1 Thessalonians 4. Paul had been teaching them his return is eminent. They thought, "Oh, good because, you know, I've got to be somewhere later on, and so it would be good to know that he's coming back." No, I mean, to him, a day is a thousand years, right? So for him, for God, it's been a couple of days but for these folks, it's been a long grueling.

So he's encouraging his audience to stay focused on the glorious return of our beloved Savior. That's what does it. That's what helps you to endure. Not only standing in his grace, but focusing again on his eminent return and he's reminding them of that. And so he closes the letter with this encouraging statement, chapter 5, verse 10, "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ himself, restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Strong words of encouragement. He's writing this letter because he doesn't want them to lose hope. He knows that they're in a desperate situation and they don't know what's up so he's calling to encourage them, get their focus back on Jesus Christ and the glory of Christ which shines when we stand strong in faith while we're being persecuted. Even under persecution, not returning evil for evil, but allowing vengeance, not to belong to us, but to belong to whom? To God. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." And to learn to...

Okay. If I have to bellow this out without a microphone, I'll do that, believe me because there's a lot I want you to see.

Here's a list. In this short five chapter, 105 verse epistle, look at what he covers. This is up here for you. So this is what we're about to learn. So this is a heads up on where we're going with 1 Peter. The atonement of Christ. These aren't small doctrines, by the way. The election of the saints, we're going to look at that because he uses it. Our eternal inheritance. Evidence of true saving faith. Salvation. The second coming of Christ. The holiness of the believer. The importance of obedient submission. The new birth. The milk of the word, this is a reference to spiritual growth. The priesthood of all believers. Godly conduct and relationships as citizens and in marriage, these are covered. How to suffer for righteousness' sake. How to defend your faith. Baptism. Humility. I don't think there's a greater teacher about humility outside of Christ than the Apostle Peter. Paul was very, very humbled by what happened to him in his circumstances, who he was as a Pharisee of high standing and how he had been brought down, but Peter learned the hard way this very important lesson. Anxiety, how to overcome it, he's already reaching out to them to assuage their grief and their anxiety. God's perfecting work in our struggles. So we're going to see how these things, God uses these things, the things that we suffer as his

shaping tools to make us like his Son Jesus Christ. So this is a veritable cornucopia of vital Christian doctrines and also very practical topics all in this one short epistle.

So that's an overview. That's the setting. That's where Peter is. That's what's going on around him and with Christians pretty much everywhere because when he says around, throughout the world, it was the Roman world at the time and all, as I mentioned, were being persecuted severely. So, let's look at the man. Let's look at Peter. In looking at Peter, first of all, before we go any further in this epistle, by way of looking at any other texts, it will help enrich and enliven the text for us. It'll make it much more meaningful to us when we look at this man's profile, look at his life.

Verse 1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." So in all four of the complete listings of the apostles in the gospels and then, of course, the first chapter of Acts, Peter is always listed first in every case. So Peter's the leader of the group, the head of the group, always. That never changes. The apostles were a unique group of people, hand-picked, selected by our Lord and called by him. They saw him. They knew him. They lived with him. They traveled with him. They spent their lives with him through the expanse of three years. The apostles received direct revelation from the Holy Spirit, according to Ephesians 3 and verse 5. These are the apostles. We don't have apostles anymore, but we have the direct revelation that the apostles had and prophets had received in the writings that we have in the Scriptures. So it is, in fact, that upon which the Lord is building the foundation of his church. The church, Ephesians 2:20, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. So the church is built on the revelation that God was pleased to give this select few men, and others too, who would be very closely related to the apostles, like Mark and others who wrote books in the New Testament. They got special revelation from God, and it is those teachings, their teachings, their writings, upon which Jesus would build his church.

So they were also referred to as the Holy Apostles in that verse in Ephesians 3:5. So they set the example of Christian virtue. The miracles they performed were being verified to authenticate that they were in fact bona fide apostles by the miracles that they were able to perform. So all of these tests and the Lord's hand-picking of them and choosing to walk with them, live with them, teach them personally, this small group of men, are the building blocks of the church of Jesus Christ upon which would never be conquered, though the gates of hell itself came against it.

So his name referred to in the Scriptures also is Simon, Simon Peter, and so we're going to look at now what I'm calling Simon Peter, the imperfect, impetuous leader. And as I said, this should give us all encouragement. Peter was an imperfect man. Next to Jesus, the Apostle Peter is the second main character in the gospels. Second only to Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke to Peter more than he spoke to any other person that he dealt with. He always seemed to be dealing with Peter. So clearly, among the twelve, Peter had the closest relationship therefore with Jesus. So he was a leader and the thing about leaders is when you look at the record of Peter's life in the gospels, leaders ask questions. Peter asked a lot of questions, didn't he? He spoke right up. Leaders aren't afraid to do that, and we're going to see that as we look at some of the accounts from the gospels. They want to

know things, so they speak up. Without fear of reprisal, Peter would speak up. Peter was a spokesman for the entire twelve. He was the one who would speak up to ask questions of our Lord while the others stood silently by. They were too afraid to ask any questions. This is Jesus, whose claim is to be the Christ, all they wanted to do was listen. See, they were followers. There are followers and there are leaders. Peter is a leader, but remember, he is the imperfect, impetuous, clearly, leader.

So, leaders not only ask questions, but they ask questions because leaders are inquisitive. They want to know how things work. They want to know what's ahead. They want to know what the truth is. They want to know what they're supposed to be spending their life pursuing. They want to know why some things don't make sense according to their understanding of what would have been their Scriptures back then. They want things explained. So there's a real burning curiosity there. Peter asked questions of Jesus about the end times. He asked him many questions of the risen Christ. So he's always curious. He's always fearless to speak up. That's Peter. That's who he was. That's who he was.

Leaders also initiate action. You don't have to try to get something done, as I like to refer to it, it's not like pushing a string. They're acting. As a matter of fact, you've got to run out ahead of them because they're going to go. They're going to do something. They're going to act. That was Peter. He's going to move and sometimes it's right, and sometimes it's wrong. So Jesus had to stay pretty close to this one. So sometimes he was right, sometimes he was wrong.

His original name was Simon. Simon, he was a fisherman by profession as you probably already know. He had a brother named Andrew. He was married, by the way, 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 5 makes that clear where Paul is saying the apostles have a right to go about and lead with their wives as Peter does. So Peter had a wife. He also had a mother-in-law. You remember the situation where they were over there to have dinner, and the mother-in-law took ill, and Jesus had to make her well so that she could make supper.

So this is who Peter is. When Jesus met Peter, his name was Simon. his name was Simon, and he changed it to Peter, which you understand that means, what? Rock. And Cephas is the Aramaic version of that. So sometimes you'll see the name Cephas, same thing. So sometimes he's Simon and sometimes he's Peter. Jesus calls him Simon, his old name, when he acts like his old self. I enjoyed hearing John MacArthur say that years ago. He gets his old name, some of you, maybe when you were misbehaving, your mother would have a whole longer name or a different name for you when you misbehaved, right? It wasn't that sweet little endearing nickname she had for you anymore, sometimes it had several names to it.

So when he was acting like his old self, he went back to his old name. There's some examples. When he went up to the garden of Gethsemane, remember, he's about to be crucified. I mean, this is the major pinnacle of Jesus' life and so he's going up there to pray, and Peter and two others of the apostles go up there, and he said, "I'm going to pray. Pray with me." And so in Mark 14:37, "And he came and found them sleeping, and he

said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?'" It's amazing, isn't it? So the same folks that have trouble keeping their eyes open for an hour-long sermon have their eyes peeled for a full three-hour football game or a two-hour matinee. It's not a problem. So here's Peter. They were tired. I mean, they're trying to figure everything out. They're going through their own struggles as well, following around the Messiah who's being rejected and that doesn't make sense to them, so we'll give them a pass. But here's Jesus saying, "Simon, are you asleep?"

And then another time, he says to him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." So he must have really been being tempted in some particular way where Satan was particularly trying to get a hold of him because Jesus had to address him with his old name again. "Simon, Simon, Satan's demanding to have you."

And then in another place in Luke 22, Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." And Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day until you deny me three times that you know me." There's a classic Peterism. He makes these bold statements and he's completely wrong. He doesn't know what he's talking about, but that's a leader. They make statements. They're willing to take risks. They're willing to ask questions even though it might, as we would say, make a fool out of them. They're going to inquire because it's important to them because they're leaders. When God chooses a leader, therefore, he doesn't choose a successful leader in our eyes, he chooses a potential leader. He chooses a man who has the raw materials. Peter had the raw materials because of the things that I'm listing here, he took initiative, he asked questions, he was curious, and he would make statements even if they were completely off base. So he's an imperfect man, but one who has the raw materials to be made into a spiritual leader. As one Anglican priest and poet wrote, "There's nothing in man that's perfect. There's nothing that's all complete. He's not but a big beginning from his head to the soles of his feet."

So that's Peter. That's Peter. Potential leaders will make mistakes, and he made a number of them. After this, John 6, here's another example, "Many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him," that is with Jesus. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Now be honest, if you're there, are you going to speak up? This is Jesus who is the Christ. And they all walked away and he turns and looks at you and says, "Will you go away too?" What are you going to say if you're going to say anything? "No, no, I'm all in. I'm all in. There's just, no, I'm good. I'm fine." No, they stayed quiet and Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God." Now there he received a direct revelation from the Father, didn't he? There's no way he could have known that truth. So sometimes Peter speaks the truth. Sometimes he receives already the direct revelation from God. He's the leader in this. He's the leader of making true statements and just as boldly making ones that are completely false. That's him. But that's what a leader does.

In Matthew 16, you'll remember when we went through Matthew 16, Jesus said to the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." How do you think Peter felt at that moment? Pretty excited.

So the revelation Peter received from God would become the foundation of his church. Potential leaders are shaped by the Master. Often they enjoy soaring heights of blessing as Peter just did, but then other times they crash big time in disappointment, discouragement, confusion, and not knowing what just happened. And it can even lead to disenchantment altogether, like, "I don't know what this is all about after all. I thought I knew." So here's Peter speaking these bold words, direct revelation from the Father, and in three verses later we read, just three verses later, "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 on the third day and be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan, you are a hindrance to me, for you're not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'" Now he has to be thinking, "What just happened? I thought this was great. I mean, I'm making these statements of direct revelation from the Father. You told me it was. And now a few verses later, I'm using that direct revelation or so I'm thinking to prevent you from suffering," because he's still thinking like a man and the people of that day are thinking that he's there to conquer the Roman government, to set the Jewish people free from subjugation by the Romans. And that's not the case at all.

So nobody received more rebukes in the New Testament gospels than Peter, and yet at the same time, no one had the audacity to rebuke the Lord except for Peter as well. That's a leader. So they're sometimes right and sometimes they're wrong but they take bold steps. They inquire. They ask questions. So here's Satan working through Peter to tempt Christ to avoid the cross. There couldn't be anything worse. There couldn't be a more damnable diabolical statement or objective than to prevent Jesus from fulfilling what the Father gave him to fulfill. So he's this imperfect leader, a bold initiator, a brash inquirer. He's outspoken, often just plain wrong. But Jesus took an imperfect man named Simon, and he made him Peter. Jesus did that. Why didn't he just pick somebody who was known to be a good leader, somebody who really knew the Scriptures, maybe, oh, I don't know, like Gamaliel, that preeminent teacher that Paul studied under? How about him? How about one of the high priests? How about the high priest or a chief priest at least? Somebody. Why wouldn't he pick them?

So I'm sure he doesn't fully understand himself, but clearly imperfect leaders are risk takers. They want to be right up front where the action is. They don't want to miss anything. They want to be there and they're looking and they're listening and then they're just boldly making statements, as I said, sometimes right, sometimes wrong. But they want to be there. Even sometimes when they're in enemy territory, Matthew 26, then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night for it is written, I will

strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter answered him, here we go again, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." That is so classic Peter. "I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He's still sticking to his story, Peter is. "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you," and look at this, "And all the disciples said the same." That's proof that he's a leader. All the rest of them were, "Yes, what he said. We'll die with you if we have to."

So this is classic Peter getting it not just a few degrees wrong, right? I mean he's way off. But my curiosity as I was looking at these passages is why would Jesus pick somebody like that? Why would he pick somebody that he has to turn out like 180 degrees in some regards? Peter had the raw material to be a leader, that's what he looked at, and for other reasons that may not be known to us because they're in the mind of God clearly, but from what we can see, we're thinking, "Wow, I think I'd have picked somebody else and started over at this point, wouldn't you?" There you are again. You're not going to deny me. You'll see because Luke 22, and after an interval of about an hour, this was after the first two denials of Christ, here's the third one, we pick it up here in verse 59. "And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, 'Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about.' And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly." Can you identify with that, the searing pain and agony of his soul when his eyes met the eyes of the Savior as he's being led away. That had to be so, so heart piercing.

So he would, of course, deny him three times but I just want to remind you of this: he was there. The rest of the apostles are in the wind. Peter was there. So before we find fault for him, for not having the courage to not deny the Lord, before we start shaking our head and wagging our finger, we have to remember he was there. He was there. Frightened to death, I'm sure, but he had to be there. He had to be there. To him, that was fulfilling the gist of what he had said, "If they want to kill me let them kill me," but when it came right down to it he caved in. But he was there and he was the only one who was. That's the point.

The restoration and recommissioning of Peter, of course, comes in John's gospel. You can turn to John chapter 21, in John chapter 21 where the resurrected Jesus had instructed the disciples to go to Galilee and wait for him there. And how does this thing open with verse 3 of chapter 21? "Simon Peter said to them," what? "I am going fishing." They went out, got in the boat, but they caught nothing. So you see them going with him. This is Peter as a leader. This is something I believe Jesus is investing in, that part. But he's got a long way to go. He doesn't understand what happened. He doesn't get it. He has to be feeling disappointed, discouraged. He has to feel grief in his heart for betraying the Lord. He has to feel ashamed of himself for what happened. They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got in the boat, but that night they caught nothing. So he

lacks confidence in himself. He's beginning to question himself. He's beginning to doubt. He's beginning to wonder what this was all about. He thought he had leadership figured out. He thought he knew how this was going to play out and he was wrong. But remember, leaders have to, leaders are going to do something, they're going to act, and so here's Peter acting upon something that he does know. He's a professional fisherman. "That I know. He came and found me when I was in my family's fishing business. I know how to fish. I'm going back to fishing."

Think about that. When you're pressing on with the Lord and you have those high places, right, and all of a sudden things didn't go the way you thought and the Lord says no, and there's a significant downturn sometimes, what do you often do? Turn to something that you do know well. You can't stand being in the place of feeling like a failure. This is something that he knew. I thought I knew how my calling was going to go. It didn't go that way. It didn't go that way. After I was ordained, everything just looked like it was falling into place. You can even back that up a little further when I thought I was going to go to a particular seminary and went there with bells on my heels. I mean, I was so excited. And the door got closed. Took a position, moved to Tennessee, got ordained in a church after I moved on from one particular calling, and things just were looking great in terms of the opportunity to teach a whole group the word of God down in Nashville, thinking that I know what the path is going to be, where all this is going to turn out. And it all just vaporized. It fell apart like dust in my hand. And I thought, you know, this doesn't make any sense. It just doesn't make any sense to me. And I had some of the worst years of my discouragement that I had ever known as a Christian in over 27 years. I had to drop back and do something I hadn't done for years, going back to the '80s. I had to drop back. I had to support us. So I went and built scenery in West Nashville. And I couldn't figure out why.

I identify with Peter. I really do. Because you think you're understanding how something's going to go. You think you have the right answer. You're making statements. You're making plans. But it's the Lord, as it turns out, that's actually directing your steps. That's what Proverbs says. We have the best intentions. We're trying to please him. Peter's just trying to please him. He's not trying to annoy him, even though I would suggest he's pretty annoying at times. He's trying to do well. He's trying to lead these guys. He probably feels pretty good that Jesus is spending so much time with him and allowing him to speak. He always wants to rush off and take the initiative and do things. Remember the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17, when they were all there, Moses and Elijah and Jesus in their transfigured state, and this is just an absolutely remarkable, spectacular event, and Peter gets to be up there and he said, "What should we do, Lord? Should we make three tents? Should we commemorate this place?" And maybe he's thinking, "This is going to be a place that's forever established as a place of worship for us, because this is pretty amazing. This is spectacular. Let's get to work." He's ready to do something. He wants to build an altar. He wants to do something. That's what a leader does. And what happens? Now it's not Jesus this time. It's his Father that chimes in. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." You've been there before. I know you have. I have. You need to listen to him. Back to the book. Back to prayer. "Yes, Lord, you're directing my steps." Do you see how he's uniquely qualified to teach us about the importance of

submission and obedience? Because when we've tried to buck up against his hand of providence or his revealed will, it's hard, isn't it? That's what he's dealing with.

So here he is fishing. Now, how would you like this if you go out to fish, if you're still in John 21, you go out to fish because that's what you know how to do well, that's where you can finally be successful. A lot of men will do that, right? When things get tough in the home or with a family or with some situation, they go to work, right? "That I can do. I'm going to work," and that's what he's doing. "Give me that net. I'm going to show you guys how to fish. Man, it's good to be back." How much did they catch? Nothing. Not a single fish. This is the professional fisherman. Now think of things that you've done professionally and you go back and it just doesn't work out. Do you see how this applies to us? You can't make it work out. It just won't work out. But many times, that's what men will do. It's exactly what Peter did. He said, "You know what? You guys figure this out. I don't know what just happened. I can't seem to work it out. I said some good things and said some other things that I'm embarrassed about. But worst of all, I denied my Lord. I'm going fishing. I can lose myself in something that I do well." Who among us can identify with that?

Worse yet, when Jesus shows up on the shore, remember, what does he ask them? "Children, have you caught any fish yet?" Now does the omniscient One need to know? Does he really need to ask that question? Why do you think he asked that question? "What are you doing in your boat? I told you I was going to make you a fisher of men. Why do you not trust me? Why do you not listen to me? Did I not endure you when you said all those things that were completely wrong and actually taking up even the agenda of Satan instead of God? I stayed with you. Why have you left me?" "Listen, King Asa," 2 Chronicles 15, "to the Lord who is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, you will find him. If you forsake him, he will forsake you." Peter's learning these lessons the hard way and this is going to dye the fabric of this entire epistle. It's going to make it come alive for you. Who among us can't identify with these things? And we need to remember this as we go forward.

It gets worse, doesn't it? It's not just, "Have you caught any fish yet?" What does he do? "You need to cast on the other side of the boat." How would you like him telling you, who has done your line of work for the years that you had, and you just can't make it happen, it's just not happening, because he had called you to something else, and now he's telling you how to do it. "Cast on the other side." Oh, listen, I know, let me just, I won't blame Peter, but if it was me, there'd be a real temptation to have a grumbling heart, wouldn't there? I mean, a little bit of murmuring going on? A little muttering. "I was trying to....," gongysmos, that's the Greek word for murmuring. Gongysmos, gongysmos. "Throw it on the right side. I've been fishing all my life. I don't know if I can throw it, I'm gonna throw it over you. Who is that guy anyway?" What does John say? "It's the Lord. It's the Lord."

So who's the first to throw off his robe and dive in the water? Peter. He's not going to wait for the other guys. You want leadership? There it is. "I'm not even going to wait for you guys to row the boat in. I'm diving in. I'm going for him." Who was it who when

Jesus was walking on the water said, "Can I do that? Lord, command me to come out." He says, "Command, Lord, command me to come out onto the water." He loves the Lord. He wants to be with him. He wants to do the spectacular things that are promised in the word for those that follow him and that are raised up by him to fulfill his world and build the kingdom. But he's been filled with wrong answers. He's now, worst of all, he's ashamed of himself. He lacks, he has no confidence in himself. It's gone.

So he goes back to this one thing and then he gets told, "You're not fishing right." Verse 6, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some." "How would you know? Who is this guy?" "So they cast it and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish." Here it is for you up on the screen, one of our Lord's most powerful and necessary shaping efforts in our life, that is for potential leaders, is humility. Who risks being prideful the most, right? Somebody who's in some capacity of leadership, and believe me, you're in some kind of leadership right now, whether it's of a family or where you work or in the church. If you are, you'll be humbled. As Martin Luther said, either be humble or be humbled.

He loved Peter. He loved him, and he knew exactly what it would take. He saw the raw materials there, and he knew that by shaping him in those rough hewn ways that takes him from 180 degrees off to being right on, to be able to write the first epistle of Peter would take some dramatic, powerful, tremendous amounts of work that are going to just rack him one way and then the other. That's what he does so that he can write something like this. Now see the meaning with the background to Peter writing this, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you." Who had the mighty hand of God holding this man, this strong first century fisherman who took nothing, no guff from anybody. He was a leader of men. He told them what to do. He's under the weight of the mighty hand of God. You know from whence he writes. He knows what he's talking about and Jesus knows what he's doing in you and that's the gem of the virtue he is, number one, attempting to achieve in you is humility because apart from humility, if there's any vestige of pride in you, if there's anything that survives the brutal thrashing of our Lord's shaping influences, you're disqualified. We're servant leaders in this life.

You know how he was restored in verse 15 to 17, where he asked him three times if he loved him. He taught him about love and forgiveness so that he could write chapter 1 in verse 8, and we're closing now, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible, filled with glory." He's speaking a very deeply personal experience. He now knows not just hears about, not just learns as a disciple or a learner. He knows and understands it, firsthand experience. The love of Christ was forged in his heart as it was put through the cauldron of the shaping influences in his life. So that's where we start. That's who wrote this epistle. We've got some background. Let's look forward to all of these wonderful doctrines and practical directives as we finish, as we travel forward in Peter's first epistle.

Let's pray.

Father, I thank you. Thank you, Lord, for your work in us, your love for us. We thank you, Lord, because we know how many times we've failed. We know how many times we were sure we had it figured out, we had it right, and you turned us away, you closed the door. Would that we had submitted as well as the Apostle Paul did when he was told he would not go into Asia. We understand that you are the Lord who opens and no one can shut, who shuts and none of us can open. You are the creator of opportunity, as you are the one who provides the grace to shape us into vessels that are useful to you. So Lord, help us as we go forward now in this epistle that we would glorify you in all of these things. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.