

**THE CHURCH AND ME - TOGETHER FOR A PURPOSE**  
**AN INTRODUCTION TO FIRST PETER**  
**FRIDAY P.M. / 18 SEPTEMBER 2009**  
**TWIN ROCKS FRIENDS CAMP**  
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This weekend we're going to take an exciting journey together ... a journey that will take us through the second chapter of *The New Testament* book of **FIRST PETER**, looking at the topic of **THE CHURCH AND ME - TOGETHER FOR A PURPOSE**. But to help us prepare for this journey I'd like you to take 30 minutes, tonight or tomorrow morning before our first session, and read an introductory teaching I've prepared on **FIRST PETER** ... and that you'll be able to pick up on your way out of this service. And then when we begin our study of **FIRST PETER 2** tomorrow morning we'll be on the same page in terms of who wrote the letter, why it was written, and whom it was written to.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **FIRST PETER**. It's almost at the very end of *The New Testament* ... just a few books back to left from **REVELATION**. The *WORD In Life Study Bible* has this to say about **FIRST PETER** ...

Are you feeling beat up by life these days? Perhaps you've lost a job, or your family is in turmoil, or your health is poor. Perhaps a friend has turned against you, or an investment has gone bad, or the system has let you down.

Whatever the circumstances, if life has become such a struggle that your faith itself feels under siege, then pay attention to **FIRST PETER**! It was written for Christians just like you ... One of the great comforts of this letters is that we are not alone when we encounter disappointment, pain or persecution. Jesus suffered the same kind of "fiery trials" and Peter invites us to "follow His steps" (**FIRST PETER 2:21**).

**THE LIFE OF PETER THE DISCIPLE / APOSTLE ...**

1. Peter was born at Bethsaida - on the NE corner of the Sea of Galilee ... and was called from his fishing nets on the Sea of Galilee to become Jesus' disciple (**JOHN 1:44; LUKE 5:1-11**).
2. It was in the region of Caesarea Philippi (30 miles North of the Sea of Galilee) where Peter acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Messiah (**MATTHEW 16:13-16**).
3. Peter, James and John witnessed the **transfiguration** of Jesus on a mountain, (perhaps Mt. Hermon), which is North of Caesarea Philippi, just to the East of the Jordan River (**MATTHEW 17:1-9**).
4. Just as Jesus predicted, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times on the night before Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem (**MATTHEW 26:69-75**).

5. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the other disciples, **and to Peter** in the Upper Room in Jerusalem (MARK 16:7; LUKE 24:33-43).
6. Peter was a bold witness in the early church at Jerusalem - and he was more than likely their first pastor (ACTS 2:14-41). Following a vision God gave him while he was up on the rooftop of Simon the tanner in Joppa (ACTS 10:9-23), Peter broadened his witness to include Gentiles.
7. Most of Peter's ministry was to Jews - asking them to believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah they'd been looking for. Beginning in Caesarea, Peter traveled throughout Judea and Samaria, proclaiming Jesus Christ (ACTS 10:24 - 11:18). ACTS 1-12 is basically the story of Peter's ministry to his fellow-Jews ... and ACTS 13-28 is basically the story of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

### **WHAT ABOUT THE THEMES OF FIRST PETER? ...**

FIRST PETER has 105 verses. Peter wrote it about 30 years after Jesus Christ ministered, lived, was put to death, came back to life, went back to heaven, sent His Holy Spirit into the world and used His band of followers to “**turn the world upside down.**” (ACTS 17:6) More than likely, Peter wrote it just before, or shortly after July, AD 64, when the city of Rome burned.

FIRST PETER speaks to a wide range of topics ... but the five main themes Peter's words speak to are:

- What it means to be “**set apart for God's exclusive use.**”
- The role of **hard times** in our lives ... showing us the connection between **suffering, glory** and **hope**.
- What it means to be on a **pilgrimage**, or on a **journey** with God as we walk each day through this thing called “life”.
- And finally, Peter teaches us about the connection **between receiving God's grace** (through **confession** [telling God “we're sorry”] and **repentance** [asking God to teach us “**a new way to live.**”]) ... and how **living lives of “grace”** will equip us to be people of **discernment** and **courage**.

### **TITLE AND AUTHOR ...**

Like most of the general epistles or letters in *The New Testament* ... like JAMES, JOHN and JUDE ... the letter of FIRST PETER has almost always been identified with the name of the author, Peter, and with the notation that it was his first inspired letter.

### **WHO WAS PETER WRITING TO?**

There's little doubt that Peter was living in Rome when the Roman Emperor Nero started his great wave of persecution against the Christians. All throughout the Roman Empire, Emperor Nero was having Christians tortured and killed for their faith ... and this is why so many Christians were fleeing to the outlying regions ... seeking out places where they could live in peace, openly share their faith and establish churches.

And so as Peter wrote this letter, he was writing to Jews who'd become Christians and been driven out of Jerusalem by persecution ... and who then scattered to the winds, landing in a variety of locations throughout an area that in *The New Testament* is often called "Asia Minor". Asia Minor is where modern-day Turkey is located.

### **WHERE PETER WROTE FROM ...**

In **FIRST PETER 5:13** Peter says that he was writing from "in **Babylon**". The word "Babylon" was often used as an *alias* for "the city of Rome itself" - like a code word used by people. During times of heightened persecution, it wouldn't have been uncommon for Christians to exercise extreme caution when writing - "concealing" where they were so the authorities wouldn't know where to find them.

And so as we look at the man named "Peter" and into the words in this letter that he wrote ... it's my belief that we'll see some **awesome truths** and some **simple truths** ... and all from a guy who I think almost all of us can relate to. I love this great big old fisherman, because in him, I see a lot of me. I see four main ways that I'm a lot like Peter ... and I have a feeling that you'll probably see yourself in him as well.

#### **1. FIRST, SOMETIMES PETER WAS TALKING WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN LISTENING.**

But maybe, sometimes, like Peter, and like me, just maybe, you and I talk when we should be listening. And when we do that we all too easily miss out on the joy of really participating in God's plans, partnering with God in what He's up to.

How many times do I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I need to just be quiet and listen ... I need to listen in order to **hear**, **understand** and **embrace** God's words, God's plans, God's instruction, God's correction, God's embrace. So ...

- 1. FIRST, SOMETIMES PETER WAS TALKING WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN LISTENING.**
- 2. SECOND, SOMETIMES PETER WAS SLEEPING WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN PRAYING.**

Have you ever felt like God wanted you to go deeper with Him in prayer about something, but instead you just went deeper under your covers? We all have. And when we do, it would be good for us to remember Jesus' words to us in **MATTHEW 11:28-30** ...

### **MATTHEW 11:28-30 (THE MESSAGE)**

**Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.**

So ...

1. **FIRST, SOMETIMES PETER WAS TALKING WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN LISTENING.**
2. **SECOND, SOMETIMES PETER WAS SLEEPING WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN PRAYING.**
3. **THIRD, THERE WERE TIMES WHEN PETER STEPPED OUT WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE HELD BACK.**

Have you ever been so close to Jesus to the point that His presence was so real and so potent that you thought to yourself, “Man, it just doesn’t get any better than this. I’ve got ‘my Jesus on’ and this is exciting!” But then, instead of staying in sync with Him, if you’re like me, and like Peter, you know how easy it can be to rush ahead and do something stupid, something out of step with God. And when we do that Jesus doesn’t ridicule us or reject us ... usually ... instead, He just says to us, “**Stay in step with Me. Walk with Me. Learn from Me.**” So ...

1. **FIRST, SOMETIMES PETER WAS TALKING WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN LISTENING.**
2. **SECOND, SOMETIMES PETER WAS SLEEPING WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN PRAYING.**
3. **THIRD, THERE WERE TIMES WHEN PETER STEPPED OUT WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE HELD BACK.**
4. **FOURTH, THERE WERE TIMES WHEN PETER HELD BACK WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE STEPPED OUT.**

You know full well the story of when Peter let Jesus down. When he turned his back on Him and denied ever knowing Him. But even though Jesus knew that this would happen, He prayed for Peter. And what’s true 2,000 years ago in the Middle East is true right now, here this morning in Rockaway Beach, Oregon. When we’re faithless and fickle, when we fail and when we falter, know this ... that Jesus is praying for us, believing in us, rooting for us, and trying to lead us into His way. Because Jesus is our *intercessor* ... Jesus is the One who is standing the gap between us and God the Father.

Peter wanted to tell his fellow-Christ-followers to follow the example of Jesus Christ and to stand strong in persecution. He also tells them some things about the Second Coming of Jesus, and that God wants to make them *discerning* and *courageous* so they’d be able to continue following God’s will and not just “any old teaching that came down the pike.”

In our post-modern culture, where Truth is relative to our likes and dislikes, our successes and our failures. Where every wind of doctrine is blowing through our world, not like a gentle breeze, but like a tornado ... isn’t it good to know that God wants to equip us to be both *discerning* and *courageous* so we can stand strong with Him and with one another in our life of faith with Him?

We’re going to have a great time in the next couple of days studying **FIRST PETER 2**. I hope that this introduction to this little *New Testament* letter will set the stage for you to hear from Peter and from God’s Holy Spirit what God wants you to discover about Himself, about yourself, and about how come He has wired us to connect with Him, with one another, with the culture, and with the church, the way He has.

As you close this time of preparation, take 15 more minutes and read through **FIRST PETER** in one sitting, inviting God to share His heart with you through Peter's words. We'll be together soon ... sitting down together to read and study **FIRST PETER 2**. See you in a bit. Godspeed.

read.think.pray.live.

Gregg