

Introduction to 1 Peter

August 17, 2014

Good morning. If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. Before we begin our study, I want to remind you that next week, nobody will be here. The Spencer campus is coming north, and the Spirit Lake campus is moving south. We will meet in the middle in Milford at Florence Park for an outdoor worship service and a corn roast. This will be our first all-campus gathering. For many of us, it will be the first time we get to meet the new folks at our Spencer campus. It will be their first time meeting you. This is an exciting and important family gathering in the life of our church. We are providing the sandwiches, corn and the drinks; you bring a dish to pass, a lawn chair and a yard game.

As you can see, we have a new stage this morning because today we begin a new series from the book of 1 Peter called “Hope in Hard Times.” We will be in this book into 2015. It is a book that helps us when life is hard, which is something all of us need to hear. If your life isn’t hard now, just give it time, because it will be soon. This morning, I have a modest goal. We will cover the background of the book and the first two verses. That will set the stage for the rest of the series. Let’s begin by reading those verses together.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 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. 1 Peter 1:1–2 (ESV)

Let’s begin with the obvious question. Who wrote the book?

Who wrote 1 Peter?

I ask this question because some people, who are educated beyond their intelligence, will tell you Peter did not write the book, even though the letter begins with his name as the first word. To me, having Peter's name as the first word of the letter is a clue that he wrote it. For many scholars who are looking to be controversial, that doesn't suffice. Here is additional evidence:

- In 2 Peter, Peter talked about his first letter, which is a clue that he wrote two letters. This means if he authored 2 Peter, he also authored 1 Peter.
- Every church leader in the generation immediately following the apostles claimed the letter was written by the apostle Peter. Peter's authorship was never in question. This includes Polycarp, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and many more.
- In 1 and 2 Peter, we learn that the author was an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus. This means the author was somebody that lived with Jesus for all three years of his ministry, and his name was Peter. The list of people who could write this letter is pretty short. I don't know who it could be other than the apostle Peter.

Why do some think Peter was not the author?

Some people point to Acts 4:13, which says Peter was an unschooled common man, and they look at the educated Greek grammar and style of the letter then assume that Peter, a fisherman, couldn't write this kind of the letter. There are a couple problems with this assumption.

- Not having a formal education doesn't mean you are unintelligent. Bill Gates is still working on his college diploma but he seems to be doing pretty well without formal education.¹
- Acts 4:13 says that Peter and John were unschooled common men, but after people heard them speak, they noted they had been with Jesus.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 (ESV)

To me it sounds like Peter had the best education. Imagine living 24 hours a day for three years with the best Bible teacher that will ever walk the planet. Whenever you have a Bible trivia question in the middle of the night, you just ask him. A college education is four years but it is only a few classes a week. Peter had a three-year education that lasted 24 hours a day. I think Peter had a great education from rabbi Jesus.

- In 1 Peter 5:12 we learn Peter was writing with the help of a man named Silvanus. In the ancient world, it was common to have somebody skilled in linguistics serve as your editor. I write a lot. I am terrible at grammar. I have an editor who corrects my writing, and it is not uncommon for her to find 175 corrections in 12-15 pages. She makes me a much better writer than I actually am. If it wasn't for her, things would not look good. I am forever indebted to her. I think we have the same thing in this letter. Peter told us he was using the help of a great editor.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_college_dropout_billionaires

- Peter was writing the Word of God under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is inspiring you to write something that God plans to place in the Bible, you tend to do things better than you normally would.

All this to say what I think should be obvious. The apostle Peter wrote the book. Don't sweat it when somebody with too much education and no common sense tells you he didn't.

What were Peter's qualifications?

It is good for us to reflect on Peter's qualifications. The Bible tells us he was married. We don't know if he had any kids. He was a small business owner. He ran a fishing company with his brother Andrew. He didn't use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram but if they were around, he would have loved them. Peter was into social networking. Andrew, Peter's brother, connected with John the Baptist. John the Baptist connected Andrew with Jesus. Andrew connected his brother Peter with Jesus. You can just picture these guys becoming friends on Facebook and clicking the "Like" button on each other's posts.

Jesus hand-picked Peter to be one of his inner 12 that he poured his life into and spent 24 hours a day with him. Peter had three years of watching Jesus' miracles. He saw the feeding of the 5,000, the feeding of the 4,000, the healing of the blind, and the healing of the lame. We are talking eye-witnessing hundreds, maybe thousands, of miracles, including raising the dead. He saw Jesus walk on water and, for a time, Peter walked on water, until he looked down.

Peter wasn't just part of the elite 12, he was part of the inner three along with James and John. He was at the mount of transfiguration. He saw Jesus in his blazing glory. He met Moses and Elijah, and I am sure he got their autographs. That is impressive.

Peter was at the last supper when Judas betrayed Jesus. He was there when Jesus was arrested, falsely accused and beaten beyond recognition so he wasn't recognizable as a human. Peter saw all of it. The Bible doesn't tell us Peter was at the cross but it wouldn't surprise me if he found a way to get a glimpse of Christ's crucifixion from a distance.

The first to know Jesus rose from the dead was a group of women but the angel told them to go and tell his disciples, and Peter, that Jesus rose from the dead. The angel specified Peter by name. Nobody else had that kind of special treatment. Peter and John were the first disciples to run to the empty tomb and see the empty grave.

After Christ's resurrection, Peter was the leader in the early church. Peter gave the first gospel sermon and altar call in Jerusalem where 3,000 responded and gave their lives to Christ. That is impressive.

The constant theme of Peter is, "I was there." Peter has the ultimate Christian resume. This is probably why all he needed to do was mention his first name. Everyone who heard his name knew the rest of his story. It doesn't get more infamous than Peter. When people heard they had a letter from Peter they pulled up their chairs, sat on the edge of their seats and turned their heads a little to the side to better hear what this famous man had to say.

Interestingly, while Peter could talk about himself and his qualifications, he didn't. He talked about his readers and who they are because of Jesus. We are part of that group. Let's see what Peter said about his audience.

Where were the churches?

Let's begin with the location of the churches geographically. They were in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. As you can



see on the map, these are geographic regions, similar to what we would call states in America. They are in modern day Turkey. In one sense, Peter was the pastor of these churches, and he was pastoring the churches throughout that region by preaching to them with the means of communication he had at his disposal, letter writing. His letter would have been read by an orator that would travel with the letter to the church. When the traveling orator read the letter it would be as if pastor Peter was there on Sunday. You could say Peter was the pastor of a multi-campus church, a similar strategy to the one we are using to reach our region with the gospel. Churches connected together for the cause of Christ and spiritual encouragement.

Peter called the people he was writing to *elect exiles of the dispersion*. That is a mouthful. It is important concept to understand if we are going to make sense of the rest of the book, so let's examine it.

How did he describe the Christians he writes to?

Elect

Elect means they were chosen by God to be part of his family. The same is true for us. In the Bible, the focus is always on God choosing to love us, not on us choosing to love him. Some people will tell you God only chose to love those he knew would choose to love him. That isn't true. The Bible says in Romans 3:11 that "No one seeks God." Nobody chooses God. God chooses to love those who would never choose to love him. Look at the apostle Paul before Jesus got ahold of him on the road to Damascus. He was committed to destroying Christians. He would have never chosen Jesus. Jesus chose him.

God chooses the unlovely, the undeserving, the sinful and the wicked. God is on a rescue mission to save his enemies. We are not on a rescue mission to save ourselves. We are not deserving, but we are loved. We have done nothing to earn God's favor but by his grace he gave it to us.

Let this sink into your heart. Some people fight the word elect, which means chosen by God. I didn't put it into the Bible, God did! It is our identity. We are chosen to be loved by God. We deserve hell. Hell is fair. We get to be the most blessed beings in all of God's creation for all of eternity because God chose to love us and chose to save us through his son when we couldn't save ourselves.

Why did he do it? He did it all for his glory so we would praise him for his kindness for all of this life and all of eternity. This means the most reprobate sinner, the most bloodthirsty terrorist on the planet, is not too far from God. It

never was about us reaching out to God and saving ourselves. It always was about God reaching us out of his love and supernaturally changing our hearts. God is about the business of taking his darkest enemies and transforming them into his closest friends. That is us.

God loves us not because of who we are but in spite of who we are. Some of you were never picked for anything. In gym class, you were always last. In your high school yearbook, they forgot your photo. You are passed over for promotions. Even if you were never picked, in the one thing that really matters, you were picked. You were picked by God to be the object of his underserving love for now and all of eternity.

This changes things. We live differently and we die differently because of this. We don't die hoping or wondering if we are good enough. We die rejoicing that we will be with Jesus forever knowing that we don't deserve it. The only reason we will be with Christ for eternity is we are elect. We are getting what we don't deserve. That is the identity of the Christians Peter writes to and it is our identity as well.

Exiles of the Dispersion

Dispersion is an Old Testament term. It means scattered. The picture is putting down fertilizer with a rotator spreader. It was a term used in the Old Testament to describe God's people when they were taken into captivity. They were living in a foreign land. They were living in a strange culture and a foreign world. They were scattered into a foreign land to live as exiles in a place they didn't belong.

This is very important if we are going to understand 1 Peter. Peter tells us that our identity as Christians is that we are living as exiles in a foreign land. This world is not our home. At home, we don't have cable TV but we do have an Apple TV unit that allows us to watch movies and television programs off the Internet. It is really hard to find a good movie. Almost everything is filled with sex and violence that we do not want to watch. Sex and violence is normative for our culture but it is not normal for Christians. We are different. God chose us and changed us. Now it feels like we are strangers living in a foreign land where most movies and television programs are built on a different set of values.

Where do we belong? The Bible tells us where we belong is with Jesus. Wherever Jesus is in charge, it feels like home. This means church should feel like home, because in the church the real senior pastor is Jesus so it should feel like a place where we belong. Eventually Christ will return and he will ultimately create a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem where heaven and earth are combined. Jesus will be the president, so everything will just work. Sin, sickness and death will be stripped away and we will dwell forever on a new physical earth in our resurrection bodies with Jesus. At that point, it finally feels like home. Before then, we are living as exiles in a world fighting against us. That is why these Christians are exiles and why we are exiles living in a foreign land.

Let me give you an idea what Christians in these regions were facing. In that day, your primary allegiance was to your nation. We are talking heavy patriotism. The confession of a Roman citizen was, "Caesar is Lord." They

thought “he is the boss of my life. We live for Caesar’s fame and glory.” When you became a Christian, who do you say is your Lord? Jesus. More important than what Caesar thinks about them was what Jesus thought about them. They were not going to stand before Caesar when they died, they were going to stand before Jesus. Christians were not being unpatriotic. They would serve in the military and gladly pay their taxes but serving Jesus was more important to them than serving Caesar. Jesus was their Lord. That didn’t go over well. Christians in this part of the world were accused of being disloyal to their country. Some were eventually tortured and killed because they wouldn’t bow in worship to Caesar.

We see this today with Hobby Lobby and other Christian businesses not willing to go with government health care that funds abortions. Hobby Lobby feels like it is living as an exile in a foreign land because Jesus is Lord, not the government. Nothing has changed. Christians are exiles.

Christians were not just facing pressure nationally, they were feeling like exiles in their local cities. Every city had cultural traditions the citizens were expected to participate in. Christians didn’t want to participate in many of them because they were not in line with who God re-created them to be. They didn’t do Mardi Gras with the rest of their city. The drinking and drugs weren’t their new identity. They didn’t dress up as a witch on Halloween. Acting as a witch and casting spells didn’t feel biblical so Christians were looked at like they were weird. They didn’t get drunk on New Year’s Eve and wake up on January 1 with people telling them they were kissing their neighbor’s wife and they don’t

remember it. That lifestyle may be the way their city lived but it wasn't the new lifestyle Christians were created to live. They didn't participate, so they were treated like exiles.

Some Christians were even losing their jobs because of their faith. In that day there was no Social Security system. There were no welfare or unemployment checks. You were part of a trade guild. Your whole family was a part of your guild. Ancient guilds were like powerful unions. The guilds had secret rights and rituals. Weddings and funerals took place in your guild and when you were unemployed, your guild looked after you. The guild in the ancient world was like the Masonic lodge. The Masons look like a civic organization but when you get behind them you discover they are into witchcraft and demonology and are completely against Christ. In a similar way, the guilds of the ancient world had their gods and goddesses of the guild that you sacrificed to. Christians didn't sacrifice to the gods of the guilds. As a result, some of them lost their jobs and the protection that came with being part of the guild. It was like becoming unemployed and losing medical, dental, retirement and having no unemployment check. I think you get the picture. These Christians were facing hard times.

This is why Paul said we should realize we are exiles in this world. We won't fit. We will suffer. We won't fit in.

How did they become Christians?

Peter described how all three members of the Trinity worked in their lives to bring them into a relationship with God.

According to the Foreknowledge of God the Father

The reason they knew Christ was because of the foreknowledge of God the Father. This is often misunderstood. Some people say God looked down the corridors of time and God the Father foreknew that I would choose to love him so he chose to love me. That is not what it means. We just read the only reason we know God is he chose to love us. We are elect. What this means is God knew he would create me. He knew I would need a savior. He knew he would send Jesus to die for my sins. He knew he would supernaturally step into my life to save me. It means God the Father has a plan for our lives and he is carrying it out. Life is not random. God has a good plan that included saving us. We can trust him and his plan. The verse that removes all doubt that foreknowledge is talking about God's master plan to save us is 1 Peter 1:20, which talks about Jesus as being part of God's master plan.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you. 1 Peter 1:20 (ESV)

This is saying God the Father had a plan which involved his son saving us. It was in place before the foundation of the world. Jesus' coming was only being revealed in the last days.

God the Father's foreknowledge is incredibly comforting. It means God has a plan. It involved his son coming to save us. God the Father's plan involves saving me and electing me. I don't deserve any of it. When life gets hairy and weird and hard and out of control we need to remember that it is not outside of the Father's plan. I may not understand his plan but I can trust his plan in everything from salvation to every other difficulty I face in my life. Even if

my life is hard, like the folks Peter was writing to because they were losing their jobs for Jesus, it was not out of the Father's control. It is all part of his good master plan to make his name famous through our lives. Some day when we get to heaven, he will spread out the master blueprints and we will see the role our troubles and trials played in our lives and how God used them for spiritual good in the life of others, and God the Father's master plan will make sense. Until then we will often be confused by part of the picture because we can't see the big picture.

In the sanctification of the Spirit

While the Father has a plan, we are not living the Christian life on our own strength. The Holy Spirit is in us. The Bible says he is the downpayment guaranteeing the amazing future that is to come. This past week I talked with someone who was really struggling. I asked her how God changed her life. In the midst of her struggles she told me how she was a completely different person today than she was 20 years ago. The Holy Spirit was working. He changed her. The changes in her life didn't come from her own strength. The Holy Spirit is the one who gave her new affections and desires. The things she thought were great, she now sees with God's eyes and finds disgusting. The things she thought were stupid, she now sees with God's eyes and treasures them. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says the Holy Spirit makes us into a completely new person. We are not making ourselves into a new person, the Holy Spirit is doing it.

Even when we struggle with sin, the power to beat sin doesn't come from us. The answer to beat sin is not trying harder. It is not more religion. It is not

rosary beads or hitting your head on the wall. The answer to beating sin is asking the Holy Spirit to help you become more like Jesus. It is leaning more on the Holy Spirit and asking him to change your desires and reshape you from the inside out.

God the Father has a good plan that involves saving us, even if life is hard, we are not outside of God the Father's good plan. The Holy Spirit is leading us and transforming us. He gives us new affections and desires. What does God the Son do?

Sprinkling with his blood

This sounds like a bad horror flick. It sounds like "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" with blood splatting all over the wall. Don't freak out with the blood. This is how you become a Christian. It is an Old Testament thing. In the Bible, blood typifies death. Sin is what produces death. In the Old Testament, the shedding of the blood of an animal was the only way to cover sin. In Exodus 24, when Moses inaugurated the Old Covenant with the people, he splattered blood over the people that signified they were participants in the old covenant.

What we find in the New Testament, when Jesus died on the cross, it says his blood inaugurated a new covenant, a new relationship between God and his people, based not upon the animals sacrifices we make but the once-for-all sacrifice God made of his own son for us. Just like the people were sprinkled with blood in Exodus 24 to show their participation in the Old Covenant, in the same way, we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus to show our participation in the new covenant through him.

How are we sprinkled with blood? It doesn't happen literally. It happens figuratively. When we trust in Jesus to save us from our sins, we join in the new covenant.

All we need to have a restored relationship with God is Jesus. We don't need karma, good works, Mecca or trying harder. We don't need reincarnation, purgatory or doing better. It is just by faith joining the new covenant God has done for us through Jesus and we are figuratively sprinkled with his blood to show our participation in it just as the people in the Old Testament were sprinkled with blood to show their participation in the Old Covenant.

For obedience to Jesus Christ

This is an important piece. God the Father has a good plan for our lives that involves saving us. God the Holy Spirit has an active role in our lives which involves transforming us into a new creation, and God the Son has an active role in our lives which involves a new covenant which pays for our sins and restores us into a relationship with God, the purpose of all this is so we live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ.

What can Peter teach us about hard times?

At first, Peter seems like someone that is hard to relate with. He walked on water. I can barely get out of bed in the morning. He saw hundreds to thousands of miracles, I am still waiting to see one. On his first sermon he had 3,000 come forward in the altar call. I am jealous. I can't get those kind of results even after preaching for 20 years. He has the ultimate resume. I fail

Jesus every day. What would a guy like Peter have to say to someone like you and me, who fail Jesus under pressure every day?

I think the reason God chose Peter to write this letter to people who fail under pressure is because Peter knows what it is like to fail under pressure. Peter had this incurable desire to be liked by people around him. He failed Jesus repeatedly under pressure because of it.

After Jesus was arrested, before his crucifixion, Peter was lurking around the temple courts waiting to see what would happen. He was warming himself by a fire when a junior high girl started saying, “Weren’t you with Jesus?” He said, “No.” She kept insisting he was one of Jesus’ friends so he began swearing up and down that he didn’t even know Jesus. He cursed! After three years living with Jesus and watching hundreds to thousands of miracles and walking on water, he caved under the pressure of a junior high girl. The Bible tells us that Jesus turned and the eyes of Peter and Jesus met in this moment. Peter ran away in tears. He was a miserable Christian failure. I can relate to that. I think you can too.

In a similar way, God gave a supernatural dream to Peter involving a sheet and unclean animals to supernaturally show Peter that all unclean things and gentiles were now made clean because of Jesus. The separation between the Jews and Gentiles was gone. Peter, the good Jewish boy, could present the gospel to Cornelius, a gentile. Peter did that and saw the evidence of the Holy Spirit transforming their lives. The barriers of needing to follow the Jewish religion and culture were gone. All people needed was faith in Jesus.

Paul told us in Galatians there was a group of Jewish Christians called the Judaisers that wanted Gentiles to not just follow Christ but they said Gentiles also needed to follow Jewish culture and practices. Rather than standing up to them, Peter caved under pressure and agreed with them. This is the same guy God gave a vision to to supernaturally explain to him that all you need is Jesus. He still caved under people-pleasing pressure. Peter was once again a miserable Christian failure. In Galatians we find the apostle Paul had to publicly get in Peter's face over this issue.

Peter, just like us, failed Jesus miserably on many occasions. He knew better. The good news is that in spite of those failures, Jesus was incredibly kind and loving. When Peter repented, Jesus restored him and kept on using him. Jesus didn't use Peter in a little way but continued to use him in a big way for his kingdom. Peter remained the leader of the early church and Peter ultimately became the leader of the church in Rome in spite of his glaring sins. He became such a leader that even today the Roman Catholic church looks to flawed Peter as its founder.

In this book, we will see that Peter understood hard times. He understood the pressure to conform. He faced it and failed at it multiple times. Peter's life is an incredibly encouraging testimony to each of us that even when we fail Jesus miserably, when we repent, Jesus is incredibly kind and loving. He will restore us and continue to use us. He will not write us off but will continue to use us in big ways, even if we fail him again and again.



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