

One of a Kind - Peter

Mt 16:15-18

¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Wow, Peter had this powerful revelation and this revelation was the Rock upon which Christ would build His church. Peter, the Apostle was definitely one of a kind. The 12 Apostles are listed four times in the New Testament and in every listing Peter is mentioned first. There is a clear leadership role he played and in many ways was the de facto spokesperson for the Apostles. He was probably the oldest of the Apostles based on his status as a married man. The Lord Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter. In Greek the name Peter is Petros, meaning rock. In Aramaic this name is Cephas. Unlike Samuel, John and Jesus, we have no information with regards to Peter's birth. We just know that he was a Galilean fisherman. We know from Mt 16:17 that his father was called Jonah.

Peter lived in interesting times where Israel was under Rome. There were lots of uprisings and riots during his time. The religious environment consisted of the Pharisees, who were known for their piety and religion and the Sadducees who were more liberal and worked with Rome. There were also the Zealots who were against any cooperation with Rome and considered to be terrorists by some. Anyone with a religious inclination did have one thing in common, they were all anticipating the coming of the Messiah. We discover more things about Peter's theology and thinking through his Epistles; 1st and 2nd Peter (written in AD 60s) which have different styles of writing. I believe this was probably because it was common to have different people assisting with the writing. Silas did not assist Peter in his second Epistle as he did in the first. Silas had a polished Greek style of writing. *1 Pet 5:12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.*

We know that Peter was outspoken, excitable, impulsive at times, headstrong, all-or-nothing and extremely passionate. As a psychologist, I find Peter's personality traits really fascinating and I think it gives encouragement to all of us who have certain proclivities that are sometimes seen as weaknesses but are really strengths overextended. He lived a radical Christian life right up to his martyrdom in about AD67. In this message, we will explore these characteristics of Peter and examine why he became such a great leader of the Early Church.

1. Peter was a family-man

Mt 8:14 -15

¹⁴When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. ¹⁵He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.

1 Cor 9:5

Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas (Peter)?

This meant that from time to time he travelled with his wife. Jesus did not just move around with 12 men. He had a large group of disciples (the 70 and 72 that he sent out), male and female, following him that he deployed regularly.

2. Peter was radically committed to following Christ

Luke 5:1-11

¹*On one occasion, while Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesareta with the crowd pressing in on Him to hear the word of God,* ²*He saw two boats at the edge of the lake. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets.* ³*Jesus got into the boat belonging to Simon and asked him to put out a little from shore. And sitting down, He taught the people from the boat.* ⁴*When Jesus had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch."* ⁵*"Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night without catching anything. But because You say so, I will let down the nets."* ⁶*When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to tear.* ⁷*So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.* ⁸*When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees. "Go away from me, Lord," he said, "for I am a sinful man."* ⁹*For he and his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,* ¹⁰*and so were his partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee. "Do not be afraid," Jesus said to Simon. "From now on you will catch men."* ¹¹*And when they had brought their boats ashore, they left everything and followed Him.*

Studying his calling gives us a glimpse into how Jesus selects people. These were not men who were idle and not doing anything. They gave up what they had been doing in order to follow Jesus. When you look at this narrative you see that Jesus called men who were already busy and industrious. We also see that Jesus called men who were already team players in relationship with others. I don't believe that it was by accident that He chose sets of brothers who had been working together. Peter and Andrew were business partners with another set of brothers, James and John. Relational maturity and interdependency are key factors in being used greatly in the Kingdom of God.

Luke 18:28-30

²⁸*Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You."* ²⁹*And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,* ³⁰*who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."*

I believe that Jesus liked the fact that Peter had been faithful and diligent in his business.

Luke 16:10-12

¹⁰*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.* ¹¹*So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?* ¹²*And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?*

Part of this radical commitment would ultimately result in martyrdom. Jesus foretold the manner of death Peter would experience perhaps to prepare him for such circumstances.

John 21:18-19

¹⁸*Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.* ¹⁹*Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"*

Stretching out your hands here most likely speaks of crucifixion, although it could also refer to some other forms of torture where a prisoner's hands were stretched out on stocks. The most commonly accepted Christian tradition is that he was crucified upside down on an inverted cross because he refused to die in the same manner as His Lord and Saviour. He did not see himself as worthy of dying a similar death. The Bible does not state this; it is just Christian tradition.

3. Peter had simple childlike faith

He responded immediately when his brother told him about Jesus.

John 1:40-42

⁴⁰*Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.* ⁴¹*The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).* ⁴²*And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).*

Are we willing to believe those whom the Lord sends to us? He could have just taken his brother for granted.

Perhaps the fact that he was uneducated worked for him. Education is good but as we get educated let's not become intellectually proud. Never let your intellect compensate for your lack of intimacy with Jesus.

Acts 4:13

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

He took God's Word at face value unlike the Pharisees. He had a childlike faith and childlike simplicity that God could work with.

Mt 14:28-33

²⁸*"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."* ²⁹*"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.* ³⁰*But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"* ³¹*Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"*

The fact is that for a while he was walking on water. His simple faith helped him to accomplish great miracles such as raising Dorcas from the dead. There was a strong spiritual climate around him. For example, study how he escaped from prison in Acts 12 and how Herod dropped down and died shortly after that.

Acts 5:27-29

²⁷*The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.* ²⁸*"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to*

make us guilty of this man's blood." ²⁹*Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!"*

It is important to also note the boldness with which he now walked. The same Peter who had denied Jesus three times, now empowered by the Spirit, was continuing to preach despite the threats. This is what the Holy Spirit can do in and through us when we have simple childlike faith.

Here is one his most well known miracles.

Acts 3:6-8

⁶But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" ⁷And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. ⁸With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

4. Peter was action-oriented

At the transfiguration he wants to set up a tent for Moses and Elijah. He ran to the tomb and was the first to enter into it despite John having outrun him.

John 20:3-6

³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb.

He cut off Malchus' ear.

John 18:10-11

¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

It interests me that the same Peter that cut off Malchus' ear is the one who states in *1 Pet 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.*

I believe that it was his sanctified action orientation that helped him to step out into different regions and keep preaching in the face of persecution gathering many into the Kingdom.

5. Peter was open to change

Mk 8:32-33

³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Peter was emotionally honest. I like this about him. What you see is what you get. But isn't it interesting that he never got permanently offended with Jesus? Imagine someone rebuking Satan based on something you have just said to them. He was teachable and open to change.

Acts 10:1-35

¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" ⁴Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Could it be that God has found you to be a faithful vessel that He will end up supernaturally directing people to you for answers?

⁹About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

This is the same Peter that was falling asleep in Gethsemane instead of watching and praying.

¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹²It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

²¹Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

²²The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Peter was willing to break out of his prejudice and traditions of men in order to obey God. His action orientation helped him to do something immediately.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and

had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

²⁷While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

We see his childlike faith and simplicity in that he did not raise any objection. What objections have you been raising with regards to God's assignment for this season?

³⁰Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³²Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right...."

6. Peter enjoyed being close to Jesus

Peter was part of Jesus' inner circle. He was present at the transfiguration. Jesus' had intimate conversations with him. I believe it was partly because he did not take this proximity for granted. He valued Jesus' words.

John 6:66-68

⁶⁶As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. ⁶⁷So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

2 Pet 1:16

For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty.

Peter was not theoretical about who Jesus was.

7. Peter was passionate about purity and holiness

In addition to the well-known account of Ananias and Saphira who died for lying to the Holy Spirit about money, we see Peter's passion for purity and holiness as the Church in Samaria is established.

Acts 8:14-24

¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy

Spirit. ¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." ²⁴Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

1 Pet 1:15

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;