

I. Introduction to Peter's Character and Ministry

If you do not have a Bible, raise your hand back here and one of the guys will bring you a copy of the Word of God. You are welcome to have that Bible. Chase has got one, good, okay? You can take that with you, Chase, or anybody else who has one. It is your Bible. If you want it, you can keep it. If you do not like that one, come and see me and I will go buy you a better one. I do not care, but we want you to have a copy of the Word of God.

Last week, when we started to study the book of 1 Peter, what a great book that is. We saw in that book that the theme was the suffering of God's people and the victory that they can have through that suffering. Today we are going to be in the book of 2 Peter.

If you remember last week, I told you that all of your New Testament is built around two guys. It is an easy way to remember the New Testament because there are two men in the Bible that the New Testament is really built around. One of them is the Apostle Paul, and he is the man that God gives the commission to lay out the body mystery of the church. The other one, of course, we talked about last week, was Peter. You will find that Peter is given the charge of the nation of Israel. You will find that the books that these two men write and represent really represent what their ministry is.

At some point in your life, and we may do this together as a church at some time, what you need to do is this: you need to take a study of the 12 apostles and study them in the light of what I call a character study. These 12 men that the Lord picked, He did not just pick them because He said, "Okay, I am going to have 12 guys today, let us go out and find some." No, no. He picked them because every one of them had a particular area of character that God was looking for. He was looking for that particular area of character so that 2,000 years later, as we are studying about life and about our struggles in life and the things that we deal with and go through in life, we too might be able to look back in these men's lives and see how their character was developed.

See how their lives were just like your life and my life. We have a tendency to think because they are in the Bible and they are 12 apostles that they all walked on water, that they all just did not have any struggles in life, that they all, because they were with the Lord and they were the chosen 12, just lived above the circumstances, and we as common ordinary people are left to struggle with life. That is not true. That is not true at all. You are going to find when you study the lives of the 12 apostles that they had their ups and downs just like you and I do. They had to go through the same trials and tribulations that you do and I do.

II. Peter's Early Calling and Unwavering Zeal

I said all that to say this: Peter is an incredible study because there is nobody in the Bible that I know of that represents the spiritual growth years in a young Christian's life like Peter does. You have John, and John is the stable one. You have Thomas, and Thomas is the proving one. You

have James, and James is a good guy. But when it comes to Peter, there is no man in the Bible that I know of where you can study his life and see all the aspects of spiritual growth.

Peter reminds me of so many of you guys and gals. He reminds me of so many young men I have seen come through my life over the years. Peter represents the spiritual growth that we all have to go through. These next four or five things I say about Peter, you do not want to miss if you are trying to build your relationship with God, because it shows you where we are at.

You realize that in Matthew 4:18, Peter and his brother Andrew were the first apostles that God chose. They are the first ones that He got. The Bible says that the Lord is walking along the seashore, and He sees Peter and Andrew down there with their fishing nets. They are commercial fishermen, and they are the first two men that He calls. That itself sets up a great study because the first two men that God called to be with Him were commercial fishermen.

You know why? It sets up the great study that Jesus said later, that we as New Testament Christians are to be fishers of men. So by contrast, by example, and by consistency, the first two men picked were fishermen because it sets the scene for the great study that you and I as Christians need to be fishers for men. We need to be telling men and women the story of Christ. That is our job after we are saved.

Then I like this. You will find in Matthew 4:19, Jesus said to Peter, He goes up to him now, and get the scene: they are down here pulling in their nets or doing whatever they are doing with their nets. Jesus walks up and simply says, He did not flash an ID card and say, "Hey, I am Jesus Christ incarnate, follow me." No. All He comes up and says is, "Follow me."

The Bible says, and I love this word, this is the beauty of your King James Bible and that pure Elizabethan English language that everybody says is outdated, because the answer comes back in the Bible that "straightway" he followed Him. I love that phrase, and that is the right word. Today we would say it differently; we would say "right away." But the King James translators understood, as the pure English language before it got mauled in America knew, that when somebody did something "straightway," the Bible says that narrow is the way and straight is the way when you follow Christ. It is showing me that when Peter decided to follow God, he went the right way, the straight way. He never strayed off that path.

Now I know what you are saying right now. You are saying, "Well, he did too, Bob. He denied Christ." Well, hang on just a minute. We will get to that in just a second. I want you to see this man called Peter, and it is an incredible study. Those two statements pretty well sum Peter up in all of his life. Peter is a hard charger. Peter is a bull in a china shop. But when he got Jesus, he got Him.

The things that I love about Peter, you have got to love this guy. Peter makes up his mind that he is going to follow God straightway. He is going to serve God no matter who says what, including God. He does not have a lot of knowledge, but he has a tremendous amount of zeal. I have seen young men like that. I would rather have a young man be on fire for God and do stupid things because he is on fire for God than a young man that does not care about God and just does stupid

things. That is Peter. I have watched him in his life as you come through the Word of God, and he is always there.

III. Peter's Spiritual Journey: Zeal, Mistakes, and Growth

I will give you some examples. In Matthew 14, they are in a little boat. You know the story: Jesus comes walking to them on the water. Here are the 12 disciples in the boat. Nobody says anything. One of them may say, "It is the Lord." Peter says, "Hey, Lord, can I come out and walk with You?" The Lord says, "Come on, Peter." Peter is the only one in the boat that had enough faith to step out of that boat. He walked on the water for a short time. But then the Bible says that the wind and the storm around him and the waves, he got his eyes off that, and what happened? He began to sink.

You know what that is a picture of? That is a picture of some of you young men right now, and some of you young ladies, that have a desire to serve God, but you are not yet a water walker. That walking on the water and coming to Jesus is a picture of the principle in the Bible that we as Christians walk by faith and not by sight. When he had his eyes on the Lord Jesus, walking by faith, he was on top of the water. When he got his eyes off the waves and off Jesus, he sank. That is a great example that Peter was not ready to walk by faith. He is still walking by sight, but he wanted to.

I do not care how many times you fail in life as a child of God. I do not care how many struggles you have, as long as when you get up, the desire to do what is right is there. In time, you will, as Peter did, overcome that, and you will learn how to keep your eyes on Christ and walk that way that God wants you to walk. It will happen. It has to happen because when you have a man like Peter who wants to do right so desperately that he makes mistakes in doing it because his zeal is way ahead of his knowledge, I can fix that. I have a spiritual staple gun in my office, and when you feel like being froggy and want to leap before you are ready, I will nail your feet to the floor. I will hold you accountable, and I will help you grow to that zeal, and that is what it takes. That is what it takes.

I love this. In Matthew 15:1-14, the Lord is up there giving a great discourse on the scribes and the Pharisees, and He is giving it in mystery form. Right in the middle of the thing, Peter stands up and says, "Hey, Lord, will You declare unto us this parable?" He wants to know. He has no thought of the fact that Jesus is speaking to a group. All Peter can see is, "I am here, I am listening, and I want to know, and if I do not know, I want to know what is going on." I love that. I love that. I may tell you to shut up and sit down, but I love that. It is incredible. That is exactly what he does. You see that all the way through the New Testament. He wants to know. He wants to learn.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, he does it again. In Matthew 17:1-5, at the Mount of Transfiguration, let me explain to you, the Mount of Transfiguration is a place where for a moment of time Christ goes beyond the cross, and He gets glorified on that mountain like He will with the second coming of Christ. The Bible says that seeing this event were Peter, James,

and John, and it is an incredible, incredible story. Right in the middle of this, while all this is going on, Peter pipes up and says, "Hey, hey, hey, hey, Lord, is it good for us to be here?"

Now I can just, there are sometimes you can just put yourself in Jesus' place. The obvious answer is, "Well, Peter, I would not have brought you up here if it was not good for you to be in this place." But no, no, no, Jesus does not say that, but I will tell you one thing, and you see, you have got to see these little things in the Bible. Peter is opening up his mouth and inserting his foot still, but he is figuring things out.

You know how I know that? How did he know it was Moses and Elijah there? Because it is Moses and Elijah. Because in that chapter he says, "Lord, stupid question, is it not good for us to be here?" Dumb question. "Should we not build three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, one for Elijah?" Good answer. He is half and half now. Part of his life he is just doing dumb things; now he is doing half dumb things and half good things. That is the way it works. My goal in life is to get you to do more good things than you do dumb things. But it is okay to do dumb things. Everybody does them. I still do them. But as you grow spiritually, you learn.

Here is a case where he is speaking, saying, "Should we be here?" But he figured out that this is the picture of the Feast of Tabernacles, and he knows who Moses and Elijah are. The only way he could have known that is it is revealed in the Old Testament, and he is learning his scriptures as he goes. I see some of you the same way. I see some of you the same way. I am excited when everybody preaches. I do not mean to single you out. Everybody preaches down there. You know why? Because I get to evaluate you that way. I get to see the good things that you say. I will listen to your sermon and I will say, "You know what? There are things that he did not say that he should have said, but look at the things that he got." That is what I am looking for. I am not concerned that you did not say everything the way you should have said it. Nobody at your age spiritually can. What I am interested in is the fact, look at the things that you did say because of what God is showing you. That is growth.

When I leave my sermon, when I leave on Sunday morning and I drive home and I am thinking about what I preached, I get about 9,000 things that I wished I would have said. But of course, we all know we would still be here until four o'clock if I did that. My point is this: you look at and you understand that as you grow, God gives you the things to say, and it is part of the process. That is why I love young men and young ladies in my ministry. My whole adult life has been taking young men and young ladies and showing them how to learn the Bible, how to preach the Bible, and how to build their marriages and families around the Word of God to accomplish what God wants them to do. I just think that it is the greatest calling in the world.

I am telling you, you are going to find that although in Matthew 26, right before the Lord is being crucified, and this goes to show you where Peter is at. In Matthew 26, he has two events. The Lord says, "I am going to be betrayed, and I am going to be sold into the hands of sinners tonight, and one of you 12 is going to betray Me." Peter says, and he is the only one that really speaks this way, "Lord, I will never deny You." God says, "Peter, I have some news for you. Before the cock crows in the morning, you are going to deny Me three times." And he did.

But it was that same Peter that said, "I will not deny You," and then over here did deny Him three times, that when they come to take Jesus, he pulls out a sword and swings that thing around and cuts off some guy's ear with it. You see the difference between them going back and forth. Now, a lot of preachers make Peter out to be a coward. A lot of preachers preach on Peter as a disappointment to God. A lot of preachers want to take the character study of Peter and use it as a thing that you should not be because Peter obviously denied the Lord.

But let me tell you why, when you study it out, why he denied the Lord. If you think Peter was a coward, you do not know your Bible very well. He was not a coward. Peter's problem is simply this: his problem is he loves God. He loves Him with all of his heart. He loves Him more than anything else in all this world. He wants to learn. He wants to do it, but he is frustrated. Things are not going by Peter's timetable. He wants things in an orderly fashion. In the Christian world, it does not go that way in an orderly fashion.

Here he is. He wants to die for the Lord, but the Lord will not let him. After he cut that guy's ear off, the Lord said, "Put your sword away," wept over, picked up the guy's ear, and healed it and put it back on. He is frustrated. Then he is over there, and he followed Him behind the Lord. They take the Lord inside there, and he hears them slapping Him. He hears them whipping Him. He hears them laughing and cursing, and he is outside, and he wants to go in there with an AK-47 and level the playing field. But he cannot because God rebuked him and told him no. He is frustrated. He is frustrated.

When he is frustrated, he does the same thing that we do when we are frustrated. He had not learned yet to trust God. He still had not learned to walk by faith and not by sight. He is reacting to the circumstances that he sees by his own desire to make things happen. He has not yet learned that some things that are bad just have to happen because God is the ultimate one in charge. When you cannot fix it, you have got to just give it to God sometimes. When you did not screw it up and you did not cause it to happen, and it is out of your control, there are times that you and I as a child of God just simply have to say, "God, I am with You. I am hanging in there. I do not like this, but You are calling the shots. We are going to ride it out together." Peter had not learned to do that yet.

So he is out there, and a little gal comes up, and she says, "Excuse me, are not you Peter?" He said, "No, I am not Peter." She goes over here and does something else, comes back to her. She says, "Surely, you must, are not you, I saw you, you were with him." He says, "Lady, look, I am not with him." She goes back over here a little bit, does a few more things. She comes back over, and she says, "You know what? Here is the key. You do not want to miss this. Here it comes. Do not miss this. Surely you must be one of His because you talk like He talked."

At that point, Peter, to convince her that he was not really one of His, cursed and talked like the world so she would not mistake him for a Christ follower. It is what you say and how you say it that people associate. It is the way you talk at work. It is the way you say things, the way you do things that people around you associate you with who you are with. When he wanted to blow off following the Lord, he just let out a string of cuss words, and she said, "Whoa, I guess I was wrong. No follower of Christ could talk that way."

Great lessons, great lessons. Yet at the same time, I understand. He did not deny Christ because he was a coward. He did not deny Christ because he lost his faith. He did not deny Christ because he is a young Christian, and he is frustrated, and he is not yet matured to the place, and he wants to go in and save his Savior, and his Savior said no, and he is frustrated. When we get frustrated, we do stupid things. Before any of us cast a stone at Peter for denying the Lord, we better go back in our own lives and see how many times we have denied Him.

Then in John 21, you have the great story where Jesus and Peter meet for the first time after his betrayal. When they meet that first time, I will make a long story short. Finally, the Lord gets him alone, and you know what He says? He gives him some great advice at the end of John 21, and breaking it down, He simply says this: "Peter, you are a good man, and I really love you, but Peter, you know what your problem is? You need to grow up. You need to quit acting like a child. You need to quit looking at things like a child. Someday, Peter, you are going to be a man, and you may die yourself." Tradition says that he was crucified. He says, "Someday you are going to have to stand on your own two feet, Peter, and you are a good man, Peter, and I love you, and I am glad I picked you, but Peter, I do not know how else to tell you this, you just need to grow up spiritually."

IV. The Call to Leadership and Learning from Mistakes

I said all that about Peter to tell you this: if you want to study where you are at with Christ, I do not know any other man in the New Testament that you can follow his growth process better than Peter. He did something that most people today are not willing to do. He learned from his mistakes.

I do not care what mistakes a man or a woman makes. I do not care what your past has been or what your present is. I do not care that you stumble and fall in the sense of caring that I look at you badly, because we all stumble and fall. What you have to begin to do is learn from your mistakes. A man or a woman who does not learn from their mistakes will continually make the same mistakes. Peter is a man, and I know of no other man in the Bible that you can just look at his life and his character and study him, and with all the mistakes that he made, here is a man that learned by his mistakes and turns out being a leader of men.

I have got to be honest with you, men and gals, my goal for every one of you is to be a leader of men. That is my goal. I see it in some of you. Some of you I can shake your hand for the first time and know by the grip you grip me that you can be a leader for God if you would just get it all put together. I do not know what else to tell you. That is my job. That is what I do. That is what God has called me to do.

You need to be the leader first of all in your marriage. Then you need to be the leader in your family, and then you need to be a leader of men for the Lord, that men look at you and people see you, and ladies look at you, and they see the stability that they want in their lives. I know of no other man anywhere in the Bible that lays that out better than Peter. If you want to follow his life and look at it, you are going to get a picture of most young Christians' lives. Many young Christians, when they make mistakes in life, because the pastor does not understand the Bible

himself, all they do is kick you. I do not ever help you. You never keep somebody accountable without letting them know that you love them and trying to offer them a way out.

Christianity is one of those basic things in life that is real simple to understand. You only get out of it what you are willing to put into it. Somebody will call me this week with a problem, and the first thing I will say to them is, "Where were you Sunday?" "Well, you do not understand, I had to do this or I had to do that," and there it is right there. You only get out of something what you put into it. When other things in life are more important than God, then that is, it is not like we meet here every day of the week. You have two times a week where you get an organized fashion, something from God. I do not know of anybody in the world, without obvious extenuating circumstances at some point in your life, because things do come up, but the bottom line is, you get out of what you put into it.

V. Peter's Growth in Humility: From Apostle to Servant

The greatest example of what I just said about Peter is found in the book of 1 Peter and the book of 2 Peter. I want you to get those first two chapters of 1 Peter and 2 Peter in your little mitts, and I want to show you how Peter grew.

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

I love that. Peter, I get to see it now, trumpet in hand. "Peter, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, look at me, here I am. I walked with Him for three and a half years, and I am upon me. I have got the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the Lord bestowed upon me that great blessing in Matthew 16, and I am going to do what I have got to do, and my name is Peter." That is the old Peter.

Look in 2 Peter 1:1.

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

You see that thing? He learned some things. He learned that first of all, before I am a pastor, I am a servant. Before he was an apostle, he needed to be a servant. Before you become whatever you think you are, you need to understand that we saw it last week, the way up is down. You have to be a servant. No great leader in the Christian world that I have ever studied ever became the man that God was willing to use to the degree that God did if that man or that woman was not willing to be a servant of God, whatever God wanted them to do. It is as simple as that. So between these two books, we see that he has grown from a baby Christian, "Peter, an apostle," to a man who leads men, who really is used of God, "Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ."

VI. The Exceeding Great and Precious Promises of God

With that introduction, I want to look at this small book and go through some things. The first thing we want to do, and if we are going to lay some things out, where is Steve at? Where is my buddy Steve? Steve, you asked one of the greatest questions last Thursday night that anybody has ever asked me on a Thursday night, or really at any time of my life. Your question, if you do not mind me sharing it with everybody this morning, because I want everybody to learn from it, and you will learn from it today too.

His question last Thursday night was, "You know what?" He says, "I am just really getting beat up at work and all the things that are going on and all the pressures. I am trying to live my life right. I am trying to do what God wants me to do." He says, "Sometimes I just get discouraged, and things at work, people at work, they make fun, they laugh at you. You have pressure. Sometimes it is your own family, whatever the case." I took him through some verses, and I laid some things out. I did not give you this one because I did not want to shoot my sermon in the foot this morning, but I knew you were going to be here, and if you would not, I would call you on the phone, get you out of bed, get you over here. But here is another one that goes along with what you said.

Let us look at this. I am going to read 2 Peter 1:4-9.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

Your question, Steve, was, "How do I get over this? How do I...?" That question, even though you ask it, I promise you right now, is in the minds of 75% of God's people here this morning because we all have to struggle with the same thing.

Now there are two things in here I want you to see. The first thing I want you to see is that the key to your growth in your Christian life are the promises of God. Promises of God in the Bible come in two forms or fashion. This is real easy again. Promises in the Bible come in two forms or fashion.

1. The first form of promises are for your salvation.

If you are here this morning and you do not know for sure if you died, and if you do not know 100% accurate for sure in your heart that if you killed over in the middle of service that you were going to go to heaven as sure as anything in this world, then God has written some promises to you that tell you if you put your faith and trust in His work on the cross, God

promises He will not only save you but He will give you that eternal life and know for sure through the assurance. He says in Titus 1:2,

Titus 1:2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; God gave you a promise before you and I were saved that if you would give your life to Him and apply His death on the cross to your sins, He promised you He would save you. That is the first kind of promise.

2. The Infallible Authority of God's Word