

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Broadcast Date: 19 February 2017

No. T0977

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The Ministries of Peter, Paul and John: The Ministry of Peter - The Kingdom

Good morning. Welcome to *Truth for Today* and thank you for listening.

Today we begin a three-week series on the ministries of Peter, Paul and John. Peter's ministry focuses on the Kingdom, Paul's ministry on the Church and John's ministry on the family. Our subject this morning is Peter's ministry of the Kingdom.

Peter was an interesting character. He was one of the disciples or apostles and was usually the spokesman for the group. Sometimes he was too quick to speak and this got him into trouble on many occasions.

Peter in his training for ministry had to go through various circumstances in his life that really strengthened his faith and love for the Lord.

On one occasion, Peter denied the Lord and he was ashamed and distraught because of it (see Matthew 26:69-75). The Lord forgave him of course and Peter took the lesson he had been taught and continued serving the Lord. There is no denying that Peter always had an unwavering love for the Lord.

In John 18:1-11 as the officers came to arrest the Lord, Peter drew his sword in the Lord's defence and cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant (John 18:10). Peter was not just a man of words; he was a man of action and energy.

On another occasion, Peter had the faith to get out of a boat and begin walking on the water to meet Jesus (see Matthew 14:28-33).

After the burial of the Lord, Peter heard from the woman that the Lord's body was missing from the tomb. He got up immediately without hesitation to go and see for himself (see John 20:1-10).

Peter was very close to the Lord and he, along with James and John, seemed on occasions to be given special insights from the Lord (see Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 13:3-13, Matthew 26:37-38).

All throughout the Gospels, we read of Peter's experiences which I believe were in preparation for the ministry the Lord had for him.

Peter and Paul were both Jews but the Lord gave Peter the ministry primarily to the Jews and Paul primarily the ministry to the Gentiles (a Gentile is a non-Jew). I don't read that Peter or Paul ever questioned this, they just got on and served the Lord. Have you ever questioned the ministry the Lord has given you? Have you ever thought that you would be better at something else? God never gets it wrong. You have been given a service that you must carry out in the circumstances that you find yourself in. Remember; *"God's ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts are higher than our thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:8-9). Philip is a good example of this as he never questioned the instruction of the angel to go down to the desert (Acts 8:26). Phillip was told to leave a vibrant ministry in Samaria (Acts 8:4-8) because God had His eye on the blessing of one man in the desert (see Acts 8:26-40).

Recently I have been impressed and come to appreciate how many times that great men in the Bible regard themselves only as servants. As Christians, we are always and only servants of the living God. Do you always have this humble attitude? The Lord Himself showed His servant character as He washed the feet of Peter and the other disciples. (see John 13:1-17)

I have no doubt that Peter would always remember that occasion. In 2 Peter 1:1, he begins his letter by saying; *"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ."* Peter, although he was an Apostle who could do great things in God's power, had the heart and mind of a true servant of God. It is good for us not to get carried away with any service that the Lord has entrusted to us and we should remind ourselves constantly that we are only servants. Just to balance up what I am saying, we must also remember that God loves and appreciates His servants. The Bible tells us

that one day in heaven if we serve well on earth the Lord will say to us *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant”* (see Matthew 25:21). Oh what a joy that will be!

I have touched on a few things that happened in Peter’s life just to give you a flavour of what he was like and how the Lord worked in his heart so he could be usable for Himself. We read in Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-20 the instance of the Lord asking Peter a question: *“Who do men say that I am?”* (Matthew 16:13). The disciples answered, *“Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some Elias, and others, Jeremias, or one of the other prophets.”* (Matthew 16:14). The Lord then asks them, *“Who do you say that I am?”* (Matthew 16:15). Peter boldly answers, *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:16). The Lord then tells Peter, *“Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church”* (Matthew 16:18). This seemed to be a strange announcement from the Lord. I think we need to explain what the Lord was saying here.

Peter’s name in the Greek is “Petros” which means “a small stone or rock”. The Lord was simply saying to Peter that he had been blessed and that He had named him Peter for a reason. The Lord was saying to Peter, “You are a small stone”. Then the Lord uses a different Greek word “Petra”, the feminine form for “rock”, not a name. This rock is a great mountainous rock. The Lord was saying that Christ alone is the foundation and only head of His Church. 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 confirms this: *“According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* Peter was going to be used in the building of this Church but it was to be upon profession of faith in Christ alone that this great building would rise. When the Church is mentioned in the Bible it means a body of people, not a building.

We read in Matthew 16:19: *“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* This seems to be another strange thing the Lord is saying. The expression is metaphorical. Stewards of great families, especially of the royal household, bore a key or keys in token of their office. The phrase of giving a person the keys naturally grew into use, signifying one being raised up to great authority and power. The meaning of the promise is that Christ would give Peter (but not to him alone, for similar promises are made to all the Apostles), power to open the Gospel dispensation to the world, (which he did, both to Jews and Gentiles in Acts 2 and Acts 10).

Once we move from the Gospels into the Acts of the Apostles, we see Peter begin his work in the ministry of the kingdom. In Acts 2:1-13 we read of when the Spirit came down at Pentecost and the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enabled them to preach in various languages because there were Jews from every nation of the world gathered at Jerusalem. The audience was amazed at these unlearned men from Galilee speaking in their own tongues, so everyone from every country could hear and understand the wonderful works of God. As usual, there were those who mocked and suggested that they had had too much to drink.

In Acts 2:14, Peter addresses an audience of mainly Jews who had come up to Jerusalem to worship at the time of the feast. Peter refers on many occasions to the teachings of the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament, teachings that most of the Jewish community would or should have known very well. Peter’s message was very clear! Acts 2:21-24 reads, *“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God has raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”*

In Acts 2:38, Peter appeals to the crowd, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* The message Peter was preaching was received gladly by many and there were around three thousand people baptised (see Acts 2:41). The Lord continued to add to the Church everyone who repented from their sins. Peter had begun to play his part in building the Church of God.

Jews historically were always looking for their Messiah to come and to set up His kingdom on earth, but their Messiah had come! The Bible tells us that *“He came unto His own, His own received Him not”* (John 1:11). The Lord was rejected by His own in this world. The Jews had refused their king. The Lord’s coming into this world was not to set up His kingdom now, but it was to lay down His life for us so that through repentance and faith we could all be part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Peter was preaching (Acts 2:14-39) that there was a kingdom being set up in heaven now which anyone could become part of. Peter’s reference back to the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32) warns of a future day when the Lord will come and set up His kingdom here on earth. Jesus will come back in authority as King of kings and Lord of lords, not in the quiet humble way He did the first time. He will come in power and glory with all the hosts of heaven with Him. He will defeat the armies of the nations and He will set up His throne in Jerusalem and He will rule and reign in righteousness for a thousand years. The future kingdom that Jesus will set up on earth will be given back to God. The

Jews who were always looking for signs and wonders were told that the Day of the Lord shall come "as a thief in the night" (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10), it will be sudden.

Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, Peter was often targeted by the local Jewish councils, because they did not like his forthright preaching and he was imprisoned on occasions (see Acts 12:5-19). Peter was a marked-out servant of the Lord and the Lord used angels in remarkable ways to remove Peter from prison and save him at times when his life was in danger (see Acts 12:6-11). Peter continued to preach to the Jews, specifically referring to them as "*Ye are the children of the prophets*", Acts 3:25. In Acts 4:10, he is more pointed: "*Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.*"

When we come to Acts 10:9-16, we read of Peter receiving a vision from the Lord. The vision was of a sheet coming down from heaven and there were all sort of animals on it, animals that to the Jews were known as clean animals and animals that were known as unclean (Acts 10:10-12). The voice told Peter to get up, kill and eat (Acts 10:13). Peter protested because in accordance to Jewish law he should not eat animals classed as unclean (Acts 10:14). The voice again comes from heaven telling him that what God had cleansed is not unclean (Acts 10:15). God, I believe, was teaching Peter so he could teach others that those who became part of the kingdom through the remission of sins were now under grace and not tied by the Law of Moses. The Jews classed the Gentiles as unclean but Gentiles too could come into a similar blessing that was being offered and accepted by the Jewish believers. Peter also had to contend with the Jewish hierarchy over the content of his message.

For the final part of this talk, I would like to look very briefly at the letters that Peter wrote to the Christian believing Jews who had to flee Jerusalem and who were isolated because of the persecution. Peter was fulfilling the commission given to him by the Lord Himself which was to "*strengthen [the] brethren*" (Luke 22:32) and "*to feed [His] sheep*" (John 21:17).

In 1 Peter 1, Peter begins his letter as "*an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*" There were five areas of the Roman Empire. Here were new believers who needed to be encouraged because they were coming to terms with the change in their lives that salvation had brought. Peter encourages them in the first letter by speaking about the grace of God, reminding them what God's grace had done in saving them. Then he points out that God's grace not only saves them but also will help them in various relationships in life and in their present time of persecution. Peter assures them of their standing before God, as he calls them the "elect" ones, the "sanctified ones" and the "obedient ones" (see 1 Peter 1:2). Peter gives thanks that God has brought them into an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that doesn't fade away and that was reserved in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). He reminds them of the power of God through faith unto salvation (1 Peter 1:5). Peter brings before them the preciousness of the blood of Christ and the endurance of the word of the Lord (1 Peter 1:18-25).

Peter goes on in his letter to teach them of their place and position in the kingdom and their responsibility of being citizens of the kingdom. They were now part of a spiritual house and they could offer up spiritual sacrifices to God (1 Peter 2:5). He tells them that they were a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9). In the past, they were not that people in practice, but now they were the people of God because they had obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:10). Peter brings them to Christ who suffered for them, leaving them an example to follow. Christ was sinless in every way (1 Peter 2:24), so they were to aim to be honest before others (in particular the Gentiles) and in this they would glorify God. He brings before them many other truths that would help their spiritual growth and which should affect their work within the kingdom.

In Peter's second letter, he introduces himself as "*a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 1:1). It is lovely as we said earlier in our talk how Peter sees himself as a servant of Jesus Christ first and foremost. Peter, I believe, is fully aware by the tone of his writing that he was not going to live much longer. He was going to be persecuted himself and in the end martyred just as some of those to whom he was writing would also be. Peter then goes on to warn of false prophets teaching heresies and denying the Lord.

As Peter warns the Jewish believers, of this he reminds them again of the fact that God will judge righteously through His Son Jesus Christ and those false teachers will receive the judgement they deserve. In conclusion to the second letter, Peter again returns to the teachings of the holy prophets and the words of the apostles as he speaks of the day of the Lord. He encourages these new believers to look for that day when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the earth and its works will be burnt up (see 2 Peter 3:10). The sufferings that they might receive now for Christ's sake will not compare to the sufferings of those who should have known better and who had the opportunity to repent from their sins.

You might be thinking this morning that this talk does not apply to me as Peter was addressing mainly the Jews in Palestine not long after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom ministry of Peter applies every bit to you as it did to those to whom he initially wrote.

We said earlier in the talk that this was the beginning of the Gospel being rolled out throughout the world for our blessing. The same false prophets and persecution are here today in different parts of the world. Christians are being persecuted for the name of Christ. You and I also need to be encouraged with the words of Peter as he closes his letter: *"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen"* (2 Peter 3:17-18).

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