

Strangers in the World

Peter Growing in understanding Lesson 4

Introduction

Today we conclude our study as we consider the Apostle Peter. In the gospels you meet a younger Peter who was always quick to speak, for better or for worse. Peter experienced highs and lows as he followed Jesus. Years later as Peter wrote his epistles you see how he grew in his understanding of what it truly means to be a stranger in the world. Peter came to embrace his role as a stranger in the world and encouraged others. Throughout our lives as Christians we grow in our understanding of what it means to live as strangers in the world and citizens of heaven.

Highs and lows

John 6: [Following the feeding of the five thousand, the well fed crowds chased after Jesus. Many were just looking for food for their stomachs and not the Bread of Life. Jesus had a long, hard talk with them and attempted to shift their focus to the spiritual, eternal blessings he offered.] ⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Imagine Peter and the others witnessing all those people turning away from Jesus. What different thoughts may have crossed their minds in that moment?

What did Peter recognize that many others didn't?

For what different reasons might people today throw in the towel and no longer follow Jesus?

As we witness those around us turning away from Jesus, what impact could it have on us?

How does this account strengthen and equip you to live as a stranger in the world?

Matthew 16: ¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Who do people say Jesus is in our day?

Peter gives a rock solid confession. Was Peter's confession controversial in his day?

Is our confession of Christ controversial today?

It's easy to become frustrated or impatient when we encounter wrong ideas about Jesus. After all, the confession about who Jesus is rolls so easily off our tongues. How does Jesus' response to Peter help us put things into perspective?

Matthew 16: ²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

How is it that one moment Peter gives a rock solid confession concerning Christ and the next he is called a stumbling block?

Why do you think Peter was so opposed to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection?

Matthew 26: ⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. ⁷¹ Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" ⁷³ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." ⁷⁴ Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

What motivated Peter's denial?

How could Peter experience such a huge shift from boldly following Jesus and even being willing to die for him to denying him three times?

The temptation to "blend in" may not always result in such an overt denial of Jesus, but how might the pressure to blend in lead a Christian to more subtly deny Jesus?

Personal Growth

As you learn about Peter from the gospels and then read his epistles, you notice how Peter grew in his faith and confidence to bear his cross. Certainly he struggled his whole life with the same sinful nature that caused his blunders earlier in life. At the same time, you see how he learned to embrace his place as a stranger in the world. Just as he was encouraged and strengthened by his gracious Lord, so he in turn encouraged and strengthened others.

Growth in preparedness

1 Peter 3: ¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

There was a time when Peter failed to give an answer. Is he being hypocritical when he now tells his readers to be prepared? What does this example illustrate?

How does one prepare to give an answer?

Why do you think Peter had to give the instruction to do this with gentleness and respect?

When you are having an open dialogue with someone on spiritual matters it's fairly easy to do so with gentleness and respect as long as he shows the same measure of kindness to you. How do you show gentleness and respect in a situation where gentleness and respect from the other party seems to be lacking?

Growth in sanctified living

1 Peter 4: *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. ² As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴ They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

Do you sense a pressure in your life similar to the one Peter describes in the verses above?

What may happen when we don't go along with the crowd but rather live according to the will of God?

What encouragement does Peter give in the verses above so that we don't cave under such pressures?

Growth in embracing the crosses

1 Peter 4:12-16 – *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*

Why is the teaching of Christ and his cross so offensive to human nature?

Why is the teaching about the Christian's cross (suffering/difficulty as a result of following Jesus) offensive to our sinful nature?

Peter had his struggles throughout life. In the gospels, those struggles to grasp what it meant to bear a cross are evident. How had Peter grown in his understanding later in life?

How does your understanding develop as you continue to grow in faith?

For further study: Read **1 Peter** and note the encouragements and guidance he gives to Christians then and now.