

# (1 Peter - Part 1): Introduction to 1st Peter

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer introduces the epistle of 1 Peter, exploring the complexities of Peter's character and the relevance of his message to modern Christians facing alienation and persecution.*

**Duration:** 30:39

**Scripture:** Acts 2:1

**Topics:** "Expositional"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the role of Peter in the early Church and his ability to effectively communicate the wonders of the Holy Spirit. The speaker also acknowledges the contradictions in Peter's life and expresses a desire for individuals to have a clear and unwavering path in their faith journey. The sermon then transitions to discussing the concept of being a 'stranger' in the world and the challenges of staying focused on the path to heaven. The speaker concludes by referencing the anxiety and longing experienced by young children in a pre-school setting, drawing a parallel to the anticipation of the second coming of Jesus.

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## Transcript

I believe that you would listen with a notebook and pencil and with the greatest care and attention. If it were noise throughout the city of Chicago that Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, were to speak in this church this morning, there would not be room to contain the crowds that would rush in. If it were known that Chrysostom or Francis of Assisi or Knox or Luther or any of the great who have lived were to be present and to speak, I know that we would give our closest attention and listen as though we were hearing indeed a very word from God.

Now, under the circumstances we cannot hope to hear from Saint Augustine. Knox and Luther have long been sleeping, and the great saints and mighty warriors of yesterday, their voices are not heard anymore in this twentieth century. But I have this good news for you, that if you will listen, you may hear the voice of an apostle.

For these words were written by the man Peter, who was indeed a great saint and who was worthy of the appellation saint, which is always prefixed to his name. He was not the greatest of the apostles, but I think that it is safe to say that he was the second of the apostles. Paul alone had a higher place than the man Peter, and so over the next Sunday morning Peter will be speaking to us.

Peter must speak through an interpreter, since he himself has been sleeping somewhere now these many hundreds of years. But he will speak through an interpreter, and as always, an interpreter gets more or less in the way. Our missionaries tell us of the terrible times they have with interpreters.

They say it one way, and an interpreter puts it out another way. It goes in one thing and comes out another thing, and I think that we, when we expound the scriptures, are sometimes guilty of being bad interpreters. But I shall do the best that I can to catch the spirit of the man Peter, to find out what God is trying to say to reduce the interference to a minimum.

Now, that is all I can say. I suppose that more people would like me if I were to rise and declare that I preach the Bible and nothing but the Bible. I attempt to do that, my brethren, but honesty compels me to say that the best I can do is to preach the Bible as I understand it.

And I trust to your prayers and a supply of the Spirit of Christ that my understanding may be right. If it should be false or if it should be inadequate, then you are going to be the loser by that much. But if you pray, and if I yield and trust, perhaps we can reduce the interference to a minimum.

And what we can get from Peter will be indeed approximately what Peter would say if he stood here. We will stay as close as we possibly can to the word of the living God. Now, Peter had a reputation for being first.

This man who wrote this epistle, he was one of the first men. He was either the first or among the very first in almost everything that took place that touched him while he was alive. That was because, I think, Peter was an impetuous man.

I have said that Peter would be a wonderful American because he usually talked before he thought, and that's characteristic of us. And he rushed to do what he had to do, and that is also characteristic of us. So Peter was really, in one sense, an American.

At least he had a temperament that we have developed here very largely on this continent. Peter was the first disciple, perhaps the first or among the first disciples of John the Baptist, and among the first disciples who turned to Jesus when John the Baptist pointed and said, Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. And Peter was the first apostle called by our Lord to follow him.

I believe that Peter was the first convert, for he was the first man to say, Thou art the Son of the Living God. And Peter, among the very first to see our Lord risen from the dead. There are those who insist that Peter was the first, that our Lord never appeared to anybody until he had first appeared to the man, his beloved friend Peter.

And then Peter was the first New Testament preacher. It's quite in keeping with the temperament of the man that when the Holy Ghost had come at Pentecost and someone were to rise and speak the truth, Peter should be the man to do it. I think that there is no profound theological reason back of this.

I think it's a matter of temperament and disposition. When 120 people are suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit and it falls to the lot of one of them to leap up and express the wonder of what's just happened, it would be normal for the man Peter to be the one to do it. So he got to his feet and poured out that second chapter of Acts sermon, that great sermon that converted three thousand people.

And now the man Peter had a number of contradictions in his life. I wish that every one of us was one thing or another. That is, I wish that it could be said that we, like the angel or like the strange creatures in the first chapter of Acts, the first chapter of Ezekiel, it says that when they went, they went every one straight forward.

I don't know what that means precisely, but I do know that it's an intriguing text. That when they went, they went every one straight forward. I wish that from the time I was converted at the age of 17, I had gone straight forward.

But I didn't, and most of us have not. We zigzag on our way to heaven in place of flying a straight course. I'm sorry about this.

I don't excuse it, but I try to understand it. And I wish that I could stand here and truthfully eulogize the man Peter and say, here was the second greatest of the apostles from the moment of his conversion to the time of his death. He went like the strange creature, straight forward and never deviated one line or one inch from the straight path.

But I wouldn't be telling the truth about Peter. And I believe in realism and religion. I don't think there's any good comes from hiding the bad and always holding an unnatural righteousness up, which is not true to the character of the man.

Of course, Peter was a bundle of contradictions and it further glorifies the grace of God that he could take a crooked man like Peter and make St. Peter out of him. If Peter had been a fine man, well proportioned, intellectually and temperamentally symmetrical, it would not have been too great a task for God to make him into St. Peter. But he took a man who was full of contradictions.

Now I shan't mention but a few of them. But if you were to study your Bible with this thought in mind, you would find that Peter was like a pin headed one way and pointed another. That he was a man full of contradictions.

He was called a rock. Jesus named him that. And a rock, of course, is a solid, unshakable and unshaking thing.

But this rock was so wavering that he denied his Lord that he slipped off in the air from a man and apologized continually and rushed in and said things he shouldn't. That was the rock. He was a wavering rock.

And that in itself is a contradiction. I think also that he was capable of rebuking his Lord. He could walk up to Jesus and turn on him and rebuke him as though he were equal to him.

And then the next minute he might be kneeling on his knees in a welter of reverence, crying, Depart from me, Lord, for I am an unclean man. That was Peter. One minute he would be rebuking his Lord and the next minute he might be kneeling before him in trembling reverence.

Peter had more daring than any other of the apostles and he had more faith than they at first, but he had more daring than he had faith. Have you met any of God's children like that? They had a lot of daring but not a great deal of faith. You remember that Peter was so daring that he rushed out and tramped on the waters and walked on them.

And yet he had such little faith that it wouldn't support his daring, and so he sank and had to be helped by the Lord to keep from drowning. He was almost to be carried under by his own daring, but the Lord saved him. And then I noticed this also about the man Peter, that he was the first one to confess his Lord and the first one to deny his Lord.

I noticed that he had a mother-in-law but he had no wife. And of course they tell us he had no wife, and if he had no wife then he was the only man in the world from time immemorial that had a mother-in-law and no wife. They say that he wasn't married, but he did take around a sister, a wife, Paul said.

So here was a contradiction in the life of the man, at least history has made this contradiction out of it, and the Roman church has accented it, that he was the man who had a mother-in-law but no wife. He is the man that Jesus called blessed, and a few little while later called him Satan. Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, get thou behind me, Satan.

He was the only one that I know in the history of the scriptures that in one breath was blessed and in the next breath was called Satan and rebukes. And I point out also that he is supposed to be the first pope, and yet he was overshadowed by one of his fellow apostles, for unquestionably Paul overshadowed the man. The man Peter was great, but the man Paul was greater.

Now it would seem to me that if God were to pick a pope, the first one, he would have picked Paul, the mightiest and the most intellectual of them all, rather than Peter, the wavering Peter. And I point out that this man fades out of the book of Acts and out of the apostles, and as he fades out, Paul moves in, so that by the end of the book of Acts there is no Peter visible anywhere, but Paul fills the horizon. And when God would lay the foundations of his church, lay its doctrines deep and strong, he chose Paul and not Peter.

But it is out from the holy sea, the successor of St. Peter, that the great papal bulls are now escaped. And it is from the holy sea that the new dogmas are declared. But it is strange, isn't it, that when God wanted to set new dogmas in the church, he chose the man Paul, not the man Peter, nor, I believe, any of his successors.

I notice another contradiction about this man, that he is supposed to be the vicar of Christ on earth, and yet he was the only one that didn't know it. He never referred to himself as a vicar or a vicegerent. He called himself an apostle and an elder, that's all.

The humblest elder in any Presbyterian church in Chicago has a title as great as Peter ever claimed for himself, except he said he was one of the apostles. Now that's simply a little sketch of the man Peter. It's certainly not all there is to say about him.

But here we have in this saint, and he's speaking to us again out of his book, and he was declared an apostle to the Jews as Paul was to the Gentiles. Now, the Jews were scattered abroad, and that is the source of this letter, the reason for it. They were scattered abroad everywhere, and at the day of Pentecost, they had come back to Jerusalem, those Jews, many of them, up into the hundreds of thousands of them they had come back.

And when Peter preached, they were converted in large numbers, and they in turn made converts. Then they went back to their own countries in Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Bithynia. And they carried the message there, and so there was a colony of Christians in every one of these provinces of Rome.

And Peter felt that he was the pastor to that great crowd of Jewish Christians that was scattered abroad. And he accepted his apostleship to the Jews very seriously, and he wrote 1 Peter as a pastoral letter to the Jewish converts to Christ scattered throughout Roman Asia. Now, the circumstances that brought out this letter were very grievous indeed.

The Roman emperors had begun to persecute the Christians. Jesus had told them that they might expect persecution. And now it begins to break over their head like billows over a sinking ship.

There arose a man by the name of Nero, whose name is known in history as the most incredibly wicked of all the sons of Rome. The history of this man, Nero, is such a wretched, offensive, heinous history that one hates publicly even to mention the crimes of which he was guilty. But he was emperor of Rome, and Peter and the rest of these Christians were under his control.

You remember, it was he that, because he had fallen in love with a married woman, the wife of Orpheus, in order to please her, he had the Roman senate condemn Nero's own mother to death. And then he divorced his wife Octavia and married Poppaea, the woman for whom he had caused his own mother to be slain. And then he killed Poppaea later by kicking her when she was in a delicate condition, and she died.

That was Nero. He had Rome set on fire, and then in a tower somewhere played the harp and sang Greek songs while Rome burned. Then he got frightened and decided that the Romans, if they knew that he had set the fire, might turn on him.

So he looked around for a scapegoat, and who was any easier to find than the Christians? They were vocal, they were noisy, they were found everywhere. So he turned on the Christians as Hitler turned on the Jews, and he had them slain by the hundreds, by the tens of thousands. Property was taken from them, they were thrown into jail, they were tortured, and they were slain.

And that throughout all the regions of Bithynia and Pontus and Cappadocia and Roman Asia. Dear old Apostle Peter, the man of God, knew what was happening. He had seen some of it himself in the city of Jerusalem, and he knew the fury of persecution.

So he writes a letter, and I believe that letter was born out of long hours of prayer and waiting on God. And he wrote to his beloved Christians scattered abroad everywhere. And it is like, our Lord, to take an epistle like this, written for a particular purpose, and make the universal out of the particular.

And to write a letter, have a letter written, that was intended for the encouragement of a small group of suffering Christians in Roman Asia. And yet, because he was God, put so much of the universal in the particular, and put so much of the vast reach of human nature in that epistle, that we read it today as though it were written for us. The simplest person in the mountains of Kentucky can read the epistle to 1 Peter, and can understand it reasonably well.

And as he reads it and kneels, he can say to himself, the Holy Spirit is saying this to me. You can listen to me here in the city of Chicago this morning and think and feel the Holy Spirit is talking to me through this letter to the Galatian and other Christians, Pontus and Cappadocia and Bithynia. Now that is exactly like God, my brother.

There isn't anything that ever is dated in the book of God. When I go to my Bible, I find dates, but I find no dating. I mean by that, there isn't anything here that I feel doesn't belong to me.

There isn't anything here that is obviously for another age, for another people. Sometimes we'll take up a book, it'll be an English or an American book, or it'll be a Roman or a Greek book in translation maybe, and we'll read the passionate outpourings of the minds of men on some local situation. But we don't read very long because we get bored with it.

We say to ourselves, why should I worry about Carthage? Why should I care about Philip? Why should it bother me, this local circumstance? Why should I be bothered with it? And you turn from it, unless you are a scholar, you turn from it as something that's dated that belongs to another age. It's like reading a letter written to somebody else not concerning you at all. But when the Holy Ghost wrote the epistles through Peter and Paul and the rest, he wrote them and addressed them to certain people, and then made them so universally applicable that every Christian that reads them today in any part of the world, in any tongue, forgets they were ever written to anybody else and says, this was addressed to me.

The Holy Spirit had me in mind. This is not dated, this is not an antiquated thing pulled out of the garrets or the attics of antiquity, but this is the living truth for me now, as though God had just heard of my trouble and had called me up to help me and encourage me in the time of my distress. That is why the Bible stays young always.

That is why the word of the Lord God is as fresh as the new sunrise, as sweet and graciously fresh as the dew on the grass this morning after the clear night, because it's God's word to man. And Peter, speaking as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, managed to pack into his epistle such a wealth of warm human understanding, such a treasure of divine thought, such blessedness that we Americans reading it in 1953 forget that it was written to the Bithynians and Cappadocians back in the year 65. Forget all about that.

God makes it applicable to us, addressed to somebody else, and means me. That is the wonder of divine inspiration and the wonder of the book of God. I think that the whole Church of God is intended by this epistle.

I have one more word which I want to simply speak of briefly and then close for this morning, for this has been introductory and will introduce us to the epistle of Peter. And incidentally, introductions are things that are not written, or if written, are not read. They simply take up space.

But when you are hearing a series of sermons, I suppose that circumstances require that you sit and listen to the introduction, which usually is the least important and certainly the least interesting part of any series of talks. But the man of God says here, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the strangers. I want to develop that thought a little before I sit down.

Here was the man of God writing to the strangers, the Jews that were scattered abroad. They were strangers in the first place because they were Jews. They were Jews scattered among the Romans and were totally and altogether unlike the Romans, and they never could learn the Roman ways.

They learned the Greek tongue, but they never could learn the Roman ways. They were always a people apart, and they are to this day a people apart. The Jews are to this day a people apart.

You can always tell a Jew, if you can tell him by his looks, you can tell him by his accent, and if you can tell him by his accent, follow him to the nearest restaurant, and you can always identify him as a Jew. And the Jews have been a people apart. They are always strangers.

And now that they had become Christians as well as Jews, that sense of loneliness was intensified. Now that they had become Christians and were no longer merely Jews, that sense of alienation had increased and doubled. They were now not only Jews, unlike the Gentiles around them, they were Christians even unlike the Jews, as well as unlike the Gentiles.

My friend, it is easily possible that the loneliest person in the world can be a Christian under a certain right set of circumstances. Put a Christian down in an army camp where there is no other Christian, and he may easily become the loneliest man in that camp because he is a stranger there, an alien, and does not belong. That sense of not belonging is a part of the Christian heritage, ladies and gentlemen.

That sense of belonging in another world and not belonging to this one steals into the Christian bosom and marks him off as being different from the people around about him. So he may easily be lonely, tragically, pitifully lonely, living in a world that is like itself. He is in the middle of it, unlike the world, and so the loneliness comes upon him.

Many of our hymns have been born out of that very loneliness, that feeling that you do not belong. You know, the people of the world are afraid of that. They say that if a child grows up in school and does not get socially adjusted and gets a feeling that he does not belong, that he will get a complex and probably have a nervous breakdown when he is thirty-seven.

So they do their best to try to get everybody adjusted to everybody else so nobody feels he does not belong. I suppose there is a certain modicum of truth in that. It is down on the human level.

I know that a child that goes to a school and is from another city, until he wins his right to be known as one of them, he will have a tough time on his hands. I know that a child from another city or another country or particularly speaking another language has a hard time breaking into the circle in any school. I know that.

I know that apart from the grace of God, that sense of not belonging, that feeling that I have no certain dwelling place and that I do not belong here, can be a deadly thing to the mind. But it is just exactly the thing that keeps a Christian separate. It is the sense that he does not belong, that he belongs to another world, that his citizenship is not on earth at all but in heaven above, from whence also he looks for the Savior.

And who is there that can look more earnestly for the coming of the Lord than the one who feels he is a lonely person in the middle of a lonely world? We have what we call kindergartens or preschool schools where little children are taken. They go maybe when they are three or four. They just play and spend a little while there and try to get them used to going to school.

My son has two of them that go to that kind of school. He tells touching stories about the little chaps, how they are taken there and they cling on to their father or mother. And the teacher tries her best to get their attention and get them relaxed and at rest, but they are worried.

And then when the parents disappear, they let go in a wild wail of utter despair. And all day long they are sniffing and trying to keep from crying, but waiting, waiting, waiting. Waiting for what? Waiting for the hour when the parent will come back because they haven't got adjusted to the children around them.

They don't know them yet. They don't belong. They are strangers in a strange place.

And all they know when love is somewhere else. Now, that's precisely what should be true of a Christian. A Christian ought to be a lonely soul in the middle of a world with which he can have no fellowship at all.

And if he breaks down occasionally and lets himself go in tears, he ought not to feel his weak. It's a normal loneliness in the middle of a world that's disowned him. He's a lonely man.

Once many centuries ago, a city over in Asia Minor got in trouble, and they sent for a man to get them out of trouble. They said, Go tell Abraham the Hebrew that Lot has been captured and we're in trouble down here. And for the first time that I know in history, we have the word Hebrew.

Scholars are not agreed on what the word Hebrew means. They're all agreed that it means a stranger, an alien. But they're not quite sure why the word means a stranger.

They think it may be that because Abraham had crossed the river from Ur to get down where he was, that the crossing over of the boundary made him a stranger. But Abraham was a Hebrew and stood alone. He did not mix with the people around about him.

He maintained his Hebraic character and stood a lonely man, bent on doing the will of God, in the middle of a world that did not understand him and didn't know him at all. So they named him Abraham the Hebrew. He spoke another tongue.

He had a whole world of memories that antedated his present place and went back to Ur. He had heard a voice of God, and he knew the future. He had had a covenant made with him, and his tomorrows belonged to God.

He loved other kinds of food. He spoke another language. His dress was different from the people there, and his customs and habits were different from the people there.

He was Abraham the Hebrew. He was a lonely man.

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