

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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MEETING THE MESSIAH

John 1:29-42

INTRODUCTION: A MAN CALLED PETER

If we were to compile a list of famous individuals named Peter or Pete, our list would undoubtedly include at least some of the following:

- TV news anchor Peter Jennings
- Actors Peter O'Toole (*Lawrence of Arabia*) and Peter Sellers (Inspector Clouseau in *The Pink Panther* movies)
- TV actors Peter Falk (best known for his role as Detective Columbo) and Peter Graves of *Mission: Impossible* fame
- Peter Jackson, the producer and director of *The Lord of the Rings* films
- Baseball player Pete Rose
- Basketball player "Pistol" Pete Maravich
- Tennis star Pete Sampras
- Peter Dinklage of the legendary trio Peter, Paul, and Mary
- Rocker Pete Townshend of The Who

We mustn't forget about two other famous Peters: Peter Rabbit and Peter Pan!

In the first half of the 20th century, there was a widely-known and much-loved Presbyterian pastor named Peter. Peter Marshall was born in Scotland in 1902 and came to America in 1927. After finishing seminary he served churches in Covington, Georgia, and Atlanta, before becoming pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington (the church where Abraham Lincoln had worshipped during his presidency) in 1937. He also served as chaplain of the United States Senate from 1947 until his sudden death from a heart attack in January, 1949, at the age of just 46. After his death, his widow Catherine wrote a biography of her husband, *A Man Called Peter*, which was also made into a movie in the 1950s. This man called Peter was a beloved pastor whose prayers and sermons touched many, many lives. One of his prayers was simply this: "Lord, where we are wrong, make us willing to change. Where we are right, make us easy to live with." I can say "Amen" to that.

Today marks the beginning of a new series of messages on the life and times of a different man called Peter, unquestionably the most famous Peter in all of history. His parents gave him the name Simon, but the Bible tells us that when he met the Messiah, when he met the Savior, Jesus gave him a new name. Jesus said: "You are Simon, son of John. But you will be called Cephas" (which is Aramaic for Peter, which means "rock") (John 1:42).

This Peter is a key figure in all four of the Gospels in the New Testament, as well as the Book of Acts. In the Gospel of John, he first appears on the scene in John 1:40. We're going to

begin our reading of God's Word at verse 29 of John 1, and read as far as verse 42. Let's give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God's Word.

JUST THE FACTS

Here is some of what we know about Peter:

- His father, as already noted, was named John [or Jonah] (John 1:42).
- He was married, though the name of his wife is not given in the New Testament (Mark 1:30-31; 1 Corinthians 9:5).
- His brother was Andrew (John 1:40).
- His hometown was Bethsaida in Galilee (John 1:44).
- He was a fisherman by trade, in partnership with his brother Andrew, when Jesus called them to become His disciples and to learn how to go fishing for the hearts of men (Mark 1:16-18).
- Along with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Peter was a member of the inner group of three disciples who were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, where they had a brief glimpse of Jesus in His glorified state (Matthew 17:1-13), and in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion (Mark 14:32-42).
- Among the twelve disciples of Jesus, Peter was clearly the leader of the pack. More often than not, both before the death of Jesus and after the resurrection, Peter was the main spokesman for the disciples and apostles.
- Peter was brash, outspoken, and impulsive, often speaking without thinking first. Jesus commended him for the spiritual insight he exhibited in his great confession of Jesus as the promised Messiah and the true Son of God (Matthew 16:16-18). But Jesus also rebuked him sternly when, in the next breath, Peter tried to scold his Master for explaining to the disciples that He (Jesus) must suffer and die, and then rise again from the dead on the third day (Mark 8:31-33).
- At a pivotal moment, on the night before Jesus' death on the cross, Peter three times denied being one of Jesus' disciples, just as Jesus said he would (Matthew 26:69-75).
- Following the resurrection, Jesus took him aside and three times asked Peter if he (Peter) loved Him (Jesus), demonstrating the extent of His forgiving love and restoring Peter to his place of ministry as a follower of Jesus (John 21:15-19).
- Fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter preached the first Christian sermon on the day of Pentecost, leading to the conversion and baptism of about 3,000 people (Acts 2).
- Peter also preached the first Christian sermon to Gentiles (non-Jews), when he preached to the household of a Roman centurion named Cornelius in Caesarea (Acts 10).
- He is the author of the two New Testament letters that bear his name, 1 and 2 Peter.
- Peter's death is not recorded in the Bible, though the Lord Jesus hinted at the kind of death Peter would die in John 21:18-19. According to tradition, Peter was martyred in Rome by being crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy of dying in the same way his Lord did.

There is much more about this man called Peter in the New Testament. His name is mentioned more than 180 times – which all by itself should convince us of his prominent place as one of Jesus’ closest friends and followers.

MEETING THE MESSIAH

In our Scripture reading from John 1, Peter isn’t introduced until the very end. The passage begins with John the Baptist, the one who came ahead of the Messiah to “prepare the way” for Him. On two consecutive days, the Scripture says, John pointed to Jesus and said: “There He is! He is the One we’ve been waiting for – the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world” (1:29, 35). The Bible doesn’t tell us specifically to whom John was speaking in verses 29-34, but the next day, it says he was with two of his disciples (1:35). This means, of course, that John the Baptist had his own band of disciples before Jesus did. Only one of these disciples of John is mentioned by name – Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter (1:40). While the other disciple isn’t mentioned by name, there is a good chance it was actually the author of this Gospel, John himself, who, like Peter, would become one of Jesus’ closest friends and disciples. Throughout this Gospel, John is reticent to speak about himself or put himself in the limelight. There is good reason to believe that Andrew and John were the two disciples of John the Baptist who went to meet Jesus and spent the day with Him (1:35-39).

But John is not the one in the spotlight here. Nor is it Simon Peter. At least not at first. It is Andrew. Andrew lived most of his life, it seems, in the shadow of his brother. And it seems that Andrew was perfectly OK with that. He was content to serve the Lord Jesus quietly in the background. But think about this: If it had not been for Andrew, there might never have been a Peter.

Look what took place: John the Baptist told Andrew and John about Jesus. Andrew and John went to meet Jesus for themselves. After they met Jesus, what happened next? Verse 41 says: “The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah!’” Then what did Andrew do? Verse 42: “He brought him to Jesus.”

First, in God’s gracious plan for his life, Andrew met the Messiah. He found the Savior who would give His life as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the world. Then he went out and found his brother and brought him to Jesus. Andrew didn’t just casually bump into his brother. He went looking for him. He was intent on finding his brother and introducing him to Jesus.

What can we learn from Andrew? First, that God wants finders of the Savior to be seekers of their brothers and sisters. And neighbors and friends, too. Just like Andrew. Have you found the Savior? Have you met the Messiah? Then God wants you to go out and find whomever is in your personal “sphere of influence” and introduce them to the Savior who has changed your life. Finders of the Savior are meant to be seekers of their unbelieving brothers and sisters.

I’m not sure how old these statistics are, but the Institute for American Church Growth did a survey of 10,000 people to find out who or what had had the greatest influence in bringing

them to faith in Christ and getting connected to the church. Here is some of what the survey said:

- A special need: 2 percent
- A church program: 3 percent
- Visitation: 1 percent
- The pastor: 6 percent
- A friend or relative: 79 percent.

Do you see who has the greatest impact in bringing others to Christ? You do! Most people are introduced to the Lord Jesus and the ministry of the church by introducers. Introducers are people like Simon Peter's brother Andrew. And you and me. Usually, the Lord will use more than one introducer in the process of bringing someone to faith in Christ. Not always but usually. We're not lone rangers in this ministry. It's not up to you alone. We are all part of a team with a common goal. But God wants each of us, like Andrew, to do our part. God wants you to be an Andrew in somebody's life.

So, if you have found the Messiah, God wants you to be a seeker of others and an introducer to the Savior. But – here is the second point – you can't bring anyone else to the Savior until you have met Him yourself. Andrew couldn't bring his brother to Jesus until he himself had found the Messiah.

Have you met the Messiah and put your faith in Him? If the answer is no, or if you're not sure where you stand with the Savior, today is the day to come to the Lord Jesus just as you are, trusting in the sufficiency of His saving work on the cross for you. As it says in 2 Corinthians 6:2, today is the day of salvation. If you have never come to Him before, let today be the day for you.

This initial encounter with Jesus was but the first of many decisive moments in the life of Simon Peter. Jesus saw something in him no one else could see. Jesus saw what Peter could become – what he *would* become – as a result of being with Jesus and experiencing the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in his life. He would become what his new name implies: A solid rock of faith and hope in hard times.

Jesus looks at you the same way. He sees not just what you are today. He sees what no one else can see. He sees what you can become through the transforming power of His love. If He could take a rugged, unstable fisherman like Simon and turn him into the spiritual leader Peter became, He can change you, too, and use you in ways you never imagined.

Do you believe that? I do. Lord, let it be so in us as we give you our all, in faith and hope and love. Amen.