

BACKPACKERS 2006

THE X FACTOR

(Changed Hearts, Changed Lives)

This year at Backpackers we will be looking at four events from the life of Peter. Peter is a great encouragement to Christians who can take comfort from the fact that Peter didn't always get it right - he was impulsive and often did something without thinking first. He denied knowing Jesus whom he had followed and learnt from for three years and yet Jesus forgave him and used him greatly in the founding of the early Church as described in Acts. He is an example to all Christians - even if we don't always get it right and don't understand, we can always be forgiven and always used in Christian service to help in the spreading of the Gospel. For non-Christians Peter gives a marvellous example of instant obedience to Jesus' call. He may have had questions and worries about what it would mean to follow Jesus, but that didn't stop him instantly leaving behind his fishing business and touring round Israel for three years with Christ learning more and more each day about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

Below we've given a summary of what we know about Peter from the New Testament but it would also be a good idea to read through one of the Gospels (Mark is the shortest!) to get the overall picture of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection and to see where the particular passages that we will be using fit in to this.

Please also read, read, read and read again the four passages until you can recount the stories by heart. And take time to study them for yourselves too - don't just accept what we've written! As you study the passages ask yourselves these questions:

- What is the passage saying?
- Why is it saying it here?
- What are the surprises?
- Is this event referred to elsewhere?
- What should I do as a response?

Then you can look at a commentary if you wish!

Each of the four passages we will be looking at is included in the material (the version is the Children's New Century Version which we use at Backpackers). Please do your preparation using this version to ensure that we are all using the same.

The memory verse for the week is:

For Christ died for sins once for all. 1 Peter 3:18

INTRODUCING PETER - WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HIM?

Peter's father was called Jonah (Matthew 16:17) and he had a brother named Andrew. In John we are told that it was Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus although the other three Gospels report their calling by Jesus at the same time.

Peter came from the area around Lake Galilee where he was a fisherman in partnership with his brother Andrew.

Peter was married. His wife is not mentioned in the Gospels but his mother-in-law is! In both Mark 1:29-31 and Matthew 8:14 - 15 Peter's mother-in-law is healed by Jesus of a fever and immediately gets up and starts waiting on Jesus. However, she does get a mention in 1 Corinthians 9:5 where Paul states that Cephas (Peter) travels with his wife.

Peter was one of Jesus' chosen twelve Apostles and, with James and John, formed the triumvirate that was closest to Jesus. It was these three who were chosen to witness the Transfiguration and also to be close to Jesus in His deep distress in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Peter's real name was Simon but Jesus changed it to Cephas or Peter which means 'rock' (John 1:42). It was Peter who first openly stated that Jesus was the Messiah in response to Jesus' question 'Who do you say I am?' (Matthew 16:12-20, Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-20). In Matthew's account of Peter's confession of Christ, Jesus tells him that he is the rock on which He will build His church.

Despite Jesus telling Peter that he would deny that he knew Him, following Jesus' arrest Peter does precisely that - three times - which leaves him in great distress. Both Luke's and John's account of the resurrection tell us that Peter was amongst the first people to see the empty tomb. And John's Gospel contains an account of a private conversation between Jesus and Peter when Jesus asks Peter three times 'Do you truly love me?' bringing forgiveness to Peter for his denial of Jesus. Jesus tells Peter to 'feed my sheep' and also warns him that he would ultimately be sentenced to death because of his faith (John 21:18 and 19).

In Acts Peter has been transformed by the forgiveness of his risen Lord and by the receiving of the Holy Spirit. He still has lessons to learn - particularly that the Gospel is for all people, not just the Jews (Peter's vision before being sent for by Cornelius, Acts 10). But it is Peter who takes the lead right from the start - in the appointment of a replacement for Judas Iscariot, addressing the great crowd at Pentecost, defending himself and John in front of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4), dealing with the deception of Ananias and Sapphira and taking a leading role at the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15. Peter gets no further mention in Acts after chapter 15 but he did write two Epistles and is mentioned several times in Paul's Epistles.

It is not easy to discover exactly what Peter did after the Council of Jerusalem but from various references in Acts and the Epistles it seems likely that he did missionary work in Palestine (we know he visited Joppa and Caesarea). He also visited Antioch (Galatians 2:11ff) and he probably visited Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12). He was certainly closely associated with the Christian community in Northern Asia Minor to whom his first Epistle is addressed.

It is probable that Peter's first Epistle was written from Rome either just before or during the persecution under Nero. It is likely that Peter was martyred during this time of great persecution against Christians.

DAY 1 : FOLLOWING JESUS – Matthew 4:17-22

AIM: To help the children understand that we are all called to repent and follow Jesus

Notes

V17 – A summary of Jesus' preaching. Need to explain what 'change your hearts and lives' and 'the kingdom of heaven' mean.

'Change your hearts and lives' – This is where 'sin' comes in. It is important that we help the children understand that we are all sinners. Make it clear that you are not just talking about them but that even you, a Backpackers leader, are a sinner! It is very easy to see what terrorists, murderers and burglars do and think that they are the sinners. But if the children don't understand that everyone is a sinner because we all try and live our lives the way we want and not the way God wants, then Jesus' death and resurrection won't make sense to them when we look at those events on day 3.

Although the word 'repent' is not used in the translation we are using, with the older groups it might be worth explaining that 'repent' means 'change your hearts and lives' as this is a word they may already know and/or will come across.

'Kingdom of Heaven' (same as 'Kingdom of God') – Whole books have been written on this subject and much theological debate continues! It is not something we need to spend much time on in our groups but it is important that we have some understanding. For our purposes it is probably easiest to think of it in terms of past, present and future. Parts of the Old Testament look forward to the Kingdom of Heaven, it begins to be established when God sent Jesus into the world, it continues through the spreading of the Gospel in the world and will be perfected at the end of time when the new heaven and earth are created.

This passage gives us a picture of repentance. Peter turns his back on his life as a fisherman and gives his life to following and obeying Jesus. When we repent, we turn our backs on life under our control and give that control over to God.

Jesus calls Peter, his brother Andrew, John and his brother James. They follow Jesus 'at once'. Peter and the others won't have known exactly what Jesus was calling them to do and they probably had many questions but that didn't stop them from following Jesus immediately. Like them, as we follow Jesus each day, so our faith and understanding will grow.

Jesus tells them 'I will make you fishermen for men' (v19). As they follow Jesus, He will teach them and train them how to tell others about God and so bring them into the kingdom of heaven. Again, this idea of Christians being 'fishermen for men' will be developed on day 4.

Avoid

Too much on the Kingdom of Heaven. Please concentrate on what it means to follow Jesus.

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Change your hearts and lives, because the kingdom of heaven is coming soon."

¹⁸Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee. He saw two brothers, Simon (called Peter) and Simon's brother Andrew. The brothers were fishermen, and they were fishing in the lake with a net.

¹⁹Jesus said, "Come and follow me. I will make you fishermen for men." ²⁰At once Simon and Andrew left their nets and followed him.

²¹Jesus continued walking by Lake Galilee. He saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, repairing their nets to catch fish. Jesus told them to come with him. ²²At once they left the boat and their father, and they followed Jesus.

- What did Jesus preach?
- What job did Peter, Andrew, James and John do?
- What did Jesus tell them to do?
- What did they do in response to Jesus' command?
- Does Jesus call people to follow Him today?
- What does 'change your hearts and lives' mean?
- What should our response to His calling be?

My Response

In response to what I have learned about Jesus today I will

DAY 2 : TRUSTING IN JESUS – Matthew 14:22-33

AIM: To help the children learn that following Jesus means trusting Him all the time

Notes

When we 'change our hearts and lives' and start to live our lives under God's control, we have to learn to trust Him. It can be very easy to trust Him for the little things in our lives but what about the big things?

Obviously the main example of trust and lack of trust in this passage is Peter walking on the water. However, one of the ways we can develop our trust in God is through prayer and Jesus gives us a wonderful example of this right at the start of the passage in verse 23. Jesus makes sure that He is alone so that there is nothing to distract Him from talking to God.

It would be good to talk a little about prayer with your group during one of the teaching sessions for this day – perhaps the afternoon session so that you can concentrate on the main teaching point in the morning session.

Note that Jesus seeks to reassure the disciples in their fright by identifying Himself.

Verse 28 is a typical Peter moment! As impulsive as ever he challenges Jesus to prove that it really is Him by telling him to walk on the water. Peter does fine until the enormity of what he is doing sinks in and he begins to sink. It may be that he takes his eyes off Jesus or just that he allows the noise of the wind and the height of the waves to make him doubt. Whatever the reason Peter loses his trust in Jesus but as he sinks, it is to Jesus he turns to save him.

It is important that the children learn that they can trust Jesus in everything, however big or small. They also need to learn that if they stop trusting Jesus, He is always longing and waiting for them to start trusting Him again.

Avoid!

Does this passage teach that we can do things that Jesus could do? It's a valid point for discussion but not at Backpackers! The important lesson to get across to our groups is that Jesus was teaching Peter to trust Him more fully.

²²Then Jesus made his followers get into the boat. He told them to go ahead of him to the other side of the lake. Jesus stayed there to tell the people they could go home. ²³After he said good bye to them, he went alone up into the hills to pray. It was late, and Jesus was there alone. By this time, the boat was already far away on the lake. The boat was having trouble because of the waves, and the wind was blowing against it.

²⁵Between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus' followers were still in the boat. Jesus came to them. He was walking on the water. ²⁶When the followers saw him walking on the water, they were afraid. They said, "It's a ghost!" and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus quickly spoke to them. He said, "Have courage! It is I! Don't be afraid."

²⁸Peter said, "Lord, if that is really you, then tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹Jesus said, "Come." And Peter left the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. ³⁰But when Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink. He shouted, "Lord, save me!"

³¹Then Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus said, "Your faith is small. Why did you doubt?"

³²After Peter and Jesus were in the boat, the wind became calm. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshipped Jesus and said, "Truly you are the Son of God!"

- Why were Jesus' followers on their own?
- Why were they frightened?
- How did Jesus seek to take away their fright?
- Peter wants more assurance; what does he ask Jesus to do?
- What stops Peter trusting in Jesus?
- Who does Peter turn to for help as he begins to sink?
- What does Jesus do and say?
- What might stop us trusting in Jesus?
- What does this passage tell us to do when we are tempted to stop trusting in Jesus?

My Response

In response to what I have learned about Jesus today I will

DAY 3 : SURPRISED BY JESUS - John 20:1-9, 19 and 20

AIM: To teach the children that Jesus' death and resurrection means we can be friends with God

Notes

Today's Up Front and Group times bring together the teaching from days 1 and 2. We've seen that to follow Jesus means changing our hearts and lives and learning to trust Him with everything. But we can't be God's friends unless our sin is dealt with. And the only way our sin can be dealt with is through Jesus' death and resurrection.

We can't omit reference to Jesus' death but covering both in the group sessions would be a very big task. So the plan is that the Up Front session will 'do' the crucifixion. However, we need to refer to the crucifixion as we look at this account of the resurrection.

It is vitally important that the children understand that:

- Jesus really died
- Jesus really came alive
- This means that our sin is dealt with once and for all and we can be God's friends

John makes it very clear that Jesus really had risen from the dead and is alive. V7 - If Jesus' body had been stolen it is unlikely that the thieves would have gone to the trouble of removing the burial cloths, let alone leaving them neatly folded with the cloths from His head separate from the rest. V20 - Jesus shows His followers the marks of the nails and the spear to demonstrate that it really was Him.

In one of your sessions today please do explain to the children how they can become God's friend. (It is my intention that the supporting material to go with this material will contain some ideas for explaining what Jesus did on the cross.)

Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. It was still dark. Mary saw that the large stone had been moved away from the tomb. ²So Mary ran to Simon Peter and the other follower (the one Jesus loved). Mary said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb. We don't know where they have put him."

³So Peter and the other follower started for the tomb. ⁴They were both running, but the other follower ran faster than Peter. So the other follower reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down and looked in. He saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then following him came Simon Peter. He went into the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying there. ⁷He also saw the cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up and laid in a different place from the strips of linen. ⁸Then the other follower who had reached the tomb first, also went in. He saw and believed. ⁹(These followers did not yet understand from the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from death.)

¹⁹It was the first day of the week. That evening the followers were together. The doors were locked, because they were afraid of the Jews. Then Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The followers were very happy when they saw the Lord.

- What do you find surprising in this passage?
- Who brought the news that the stone had been rolled away to Peter and John?
- What did Peter find inside Jesus' tomb?
- What did Peter and John not understand?
- Why were Jesus' followers locked in a room together?
- What happened?
- How did Jesus' followers know that it really was Him?
- How did Jesus' followers feel when they saw Jesus alive again?
- What should our response be to knowing that Jesus is alive?

My Response

In response to what I have learned about Jesus today I will

DAY 4 : TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS - Acts 3:1-8 and 4:5-13

AIM: To help the children understand that our response to what Jesus has done for us should be to tell others about Him

Notes

As we come to the conclusion of this year's teaching it is important that the children understand that when we are a friend of God it is our duty to share our faith with other people.

It would be good to fill in briefly what has happened since Jesus' resurrection, ie Jesus returned to heaven and then the Holy Spirit came. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to help and guide them and us, if we are God's friends. Peter's healing of the crippled man demonstrates Jesus' power in the world, through His Holy Spirit.

It would also be good to refer back to day 1 when Jesus told Peter, Andrew, James and John that he would make them 'fishermen for men' as today's passage shows that in practice.

3v6 - Peter makes it completely clear that he is healing the crippled man in the power of 'Jesus Christ of Nazareth'.

4v5-12 - Peter could just have answered the question put by the Jewish leaders but after he has answered their question he moves straight into a short explanation of the Gospel.

4v8 - The Holy Spirit was giving Peter the confidence and the words to say as he answered the questions of the Jewish leaders.

4v12 - Peter makes it absolutely clear that Jesus is the only one who can save people.

We should try and help the children understand that not only has Jesus commanded that as God's friends we should tell others about God but our desire to do so should also come out of the deep gratitude we have for what Jesus has done for us.

3 One day Peter and John went to the Temple. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. This was the time for the daily prayer service. ²There, at the Temple gate called Beautiful Gate, was a man who had been crippled all his life. Every day he was carried to this gate to beg. He would ask for money from the people going into the Temple. ³The man saw Peter and John going into the Temple and asked them for money. ⁴Peter and John looked straight at him and said, "Look at us!" ⁵The man looked at them; he thought they were going to give him some money. ⁶But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold, but I do have something else I can give you: by the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth – stand up and walk!" ⁷Then Peter took the man's right hand and lifted him up. Immediately the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk. He went into the Temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God.

4 ⁵The next day the Jewish leaders, the older Jewish leaders, and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander were there. Everyone from the high priest's family was there. ⁷They made Peter and John stand before them. The Jewish leaders asked them: "By what power or authority did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said to them, "Rulers of the people and you older leaders, ⁹are you questioning us about a good thing that was done to a crippled man? Are you asking us who made him well? ¹⁰We want all of you and all the Jewish people to know that this man was made well by the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth! You nailed him to a cross, but God raised him from death. This man was crippled, but he is now well and able to stand here before you because of the power of Jesus! ¹¹Jesus is 'the stone that you builders did not want. It has become the cornerstone.' ¹²Jesus is the only One who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been given to save people. And we must be saved through him!"

- Who asked Peter and John for money?
- What did they do for him instead?
- Who really healed the man and what was his response to his healing?
- What question did the Jewish leaders ask Peter and John?
- What did Peter reply?
- Who gave Peter the courage and the words to say as he answered the Jewish leaders?
- What evidence did they have that Jesus was God's appointed King?
- In verse 12, what is Jesus able to do that no one else can do?
- What do we need saving from?

My Response

In response to what I have learned about Jesus today I will