

Born again to love one another

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 July 2021

Preacher: Benjamin Wilks

[0 : 00] So 1 Peter chapter 1 from verse 13. Since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

For all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

[1 : 40] And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Well, Zipporah turned two earlier this week. So it's been a little while since we've been at the newborn baby stage that Peter refers to here in chapter 2, verse 2.

It's not going to be long before it comes around again, though. And I remember it well enough that the metaphor that Peter uses here in this verse, it hits home for me, and I hope it does for you as well.

What way is it that you think that newborn babies crave milk? There's a hint there, isn't there, in the word *crave*. It's not an idle wish.

It's not a case of, oh, mother, perhaps sometime in the next hour, if it's not too much trouble, perhaps, you know, just maybe you might arrange some sustenance for me. If it's not too much trouble, no biggie.

[2 : 55] No, no, babies aren't like that, are they? There's an urgency. Why is that? Well, because to the newborn baby, milk is an absolute necessity. It isn't one food source among many.

It is their only source of sustenance, never mind the boost to the immune system, the comfort of bonding with mum and all of that. To the baby, milk is an urgent necessity, a craving.

And Peter says that is the kind of attitude that we ought to have to pure spiritual milk. If we want to sustain life in Christ, then we seek divine grace with this kind of attitude, this kind of approach.

So my question to you is, does this characterize your life at the moment? That you crave spiritual milk?

See, I suspect if we're honest, most of us, we like the idea of growing up in our salvation, but we probably don't always ascribe it the kind of urgent, vital importance that Peter is here commending.

[3 : 59] The baby's life depends on that milk, and so the baby seeks it urgently. Well, folks, your life depends on that spiritual milk from God.

So are you seeking it urgently? In these verses that we're looking at, Peter explains some of the what and the how of this kind of urgent desire for God's gracious gifts.

So let's unpack and see how God calls us to live. Two commands in these verses that form our headings this morning. First command, love one another.

Second command, crave spiritual milk. So we'll take each of those two commands in turn, but bear in mind these aren't two kind of completely separate ideas.

The chapter division here in our English translation is not the most helpfully placed ever. The word therefore in chapter 2, verse 1, this shows us that the second aspect is closely linked to what Peter's already said before.

[5 : 00] And also that despite the time that passes from week to week, or in this case, a fortnight past, it's good to bear in mind what's gone before in this letter. That when Peter talks here in verse 23 about being born again, well, that's the same rebirth that he talked about back in verse 3 of chapter 1.

The new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. These calls here in these verses as to how we behave, these are rooted in the salvation that verse 12 says is so amazing, even the angels long to look into these things.

We're called in these verses to certain actions because they are the natural response, the appropriate outworking of what God has already done for us.

So first command, love one another. Verse 22 through to the end of chapter 1. Now this is a familiar command to us, isn't it? We've heard this command before, love one another.

This is far from the only place in God's word that we have this kind of instruction. Jesus said, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. It's a familiar instruction, but it's still one that we have to ask ourselves, well, how well do we actually follow this command?

[6 : 14] Because sometimes perhaps we're rather superficial in our love. Peter doesn't just say love one another. He says have sincere love for one another.

Love one another deeply from the heart. Sincere, deep, from the heart. What do you think? Is that kind of love fulfilled by a friendly wave across the room before we file out to go home?

Even in better days, is that love a matter of a chat about the weather over a cup of tea after the service? Karen Jobes says this is about righteous relationships based on God's character.

This is the kind of love that costs something. This is the kind of love that exists within natural families when they exist as God intended them to be, and that here that love for the natural family is extended to the family of the church, to the family of believers.

Now that's not kind of about an exclusive love that builds up walls against the outside. Peter's going to talk later in his letter about loving relationships with the rest of the world.

[7 : 25] But here he's focused internally. Here he's looking at loving one another within the fellowship. He's calling you, he's calling me, to treat one another in this manner based on God's character.

God is love. So we love one another. He's calling us to do this in a way that might cost us something. Calling us to the kind of love that might involve us doing things that we don't like, that might involve us doing something that someone else needs rather than what we feel like doing.

1 Corinthians 13.4 says, Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast.

It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Now there's loads to unpack there, isn't there? And we're not going to dive into that particularly today.

[8 : 30] That's understandably a favorite reading at weddings, isn't it? When we think about the love between a husband and a wife. But Paul isn't actually directing those words to husbands and wives.

I mean, there are implications for husbands and wives. But these verses about what love is like, they come a few verses after his comments on the church being the body of Christ.

Different members have different parts to play, says Paul. So Paul commands the family of the church to this kind of love, that is patient and kind, not easily angered, rejoices with the truth, and so on, and so on.

So when you think about your relationships at Covenant Church and within the wider church of Jesus Christ, do we love one another deeply from the heart?

Would you say that your love is never self-seeking, never envious? Does your love for one another always persevere? This kind of deep, sincere love always expresses itself, doesn't it?

[9 : 39] It never kind of exists in the background. It's no good saying you love somebody if you never actually make time for them. It's no good saying you love the family of the church. If your approach to church life is entirely, what do I get from coming?

And never, how can I serve? Now, there may still be good reasons to be watching online rather than coming in person. And I'm pleased that we can offer this option, especially for those for whom medical issues make it difficult or dangerous to be here in person.

But there are also bad reasons to still be online rather than here in person. If you're saying to yourself, well, I can get everything I need by listening to online sermons.

And I think this command from Peter is a rebuke to you. How can you love one another if you aren't spending time together? How can you love the children of the congregation by teaching them in the creche if you aren't here to do it?

How can you love those who struggle to get here by offering them the simple lifts down the road? How can you do that if you're not here yourself? How can you take your turn at setting out chairs and running the tech equipment and making the teas and coffees in a few weeks' time?

[10:56] How can you do these things if you're not here? Love one another deeply from the heart. How can you encourage the person who's struggling with a smile and a hug if you're not here to do it?

Now, before those of you who are here in person smugly pat yourselves on the back, well, first up, you might well be here, but not involved in doing any of those things, in loving one another in those ways.

So maybe pause to reflect on how your presence here actually helps others and conveys love. But more significantly, for all of this, this command to a deep, sincere love, it can't possibly be about one or two hours a week and that's it, can it?

Deep, sincere love from the heart cannot be adequately expressed on such a small scale. So what about your home? Is your home a place of love?

Not just internally for those who live there, though it should be that, but outward, overflowing love. Are you on the phone in the week to the lonelier members of our congregation, popping round if they're comfortable with that?

[12:10] Are you inviting them in to your life, into the messiness of family life, into your small home that you struggle to feel like it's big enough to have people around?

Well, I mean, maybe you're here and there and everywhere with children and maybe you feel like you don't have much to offer, but love overcomes those kind of obstacles, doesn't it? Sincere love says, well, what can I do?

What can I offer? How can I love my friends? It doesn't make excuses for the things that we cannot do. See, loving Christian hospitality is not the same as entertaining.

It's not about the impressive four-course dinner, is it? Folks, you can be hospitable with a jar of instant coffee and a packet of digestive biscuits because love is about people, not about things.

Some framing around this command here in Peter's letter that helps us to think through what this love looks like. This love comes in the context of obedience to the truth.

[13:17] Do you see there, verse 22, it is having been purified by obedience to the truth that this love comes. Now, this roots this in the context of what's been done for you, the context of the salvation that you have received.

It does that, but it also, it seems to me, has implications for the nature of love. Because if what you needed to do was to obey the truth, then doesn't love point others to likewise obey the truth?

Isn't that what they need too? And isn't love helping them to do so? But if you want to combine this truth and love, and we absolutely should want to do that, shouldn't we?

Well, then that means we speak the truth to one another in the context of love. Love means we tell one another truth, and love means we want the truth to be heard, to be accepted.

And so we don't speak that truth in isolation as kind of a download of information or as a condemnation and rebuke without context.

[14:20] No, we show the love. We build the relationship. We invest the time, and then we speak. Maybe you can look in from the outside on somebody's life and see ten different things that are wrong.

A dozen areas where someone's falling short of God's command. Maybe you can look in and see that, but if you don't take the time to know and to love that person, then you don't know what lies behind those things.

And so you don't know which of those things need to be sharply rebuked, and which of them need a little bit of time for people to see those flaws themselves, and which of those things that actually,

when you know the context, aren't sinful at all.

I don't know whether this is making sense. I feel like I'm slightly disjointed. Let me try and zoom in and clarify. Let me give you my conclusions in abbreviated form.

Number one, a baseline level of loving fellow believers means making every effort to gather together on the Lord's Day. That is a baseline level of love for one another.

[15:27] Second, loving one another requires an investment of time. Third, loving one another means being willing to speak the truth in the context of an existing relationship.

Doubtless, you can think of other implications for this command to love one another deeply from the heart, but I hope that some of this helps to frame the discussion to help us to think through deep and sincere love rather than superficial love.

Finally, before we move on from loving one another, note the reason that Peter gives in verse 23 and following for this love. Love one another because you have been born of imperishable seed and because all human lives and achievements are here today and gone tomorrow, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Love one another because your impact on other people and your impact on their eternal standing because that is one of the few things of lasting significance that you can possibly do.

Everything else will pass away. Love one another because you know how richly you have been loved, that you have received new birth and that unto everlasting life. Born of imperishable seed because you will dwell for all eternity in the presence of your Savior.

[16:50] So love others enough to invite them into that presence. The verse that Peter quotes in verse 24, this is from Isaiah chapter 40. Now the key point that he's making here is this comparative duration of human existence versus the eternal word of God.

But most times that the New Testament writers quote a verse from the Old Testament, most times they're giving you the key verse, they're giving you the most important concept, but it's also meant to be a hook.

It's meant to cast your mind into the context from which they're drawing that verse. It's not a sentence in isolation. They're evoking this whole understanding by way of a couple of verses.

You know, you can say to somebody, "'Tis better to have loved and lost." And you don't have to finish it, do you? Everybody fills in the second half of the quotation themselves. They're never to have loved at all.

Well, in the same way, when you hear, all people are like grass, Peter expects you to fill in the rest of the context. Isaiah chapter 40 begins, comfort. Comfort my people, says your God.

[18:03] Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for. And then there's the bit that predicts the coming of John the Baptist, the one calling in the wilderness, prepare a highway for our God.

And then, verse 6, a voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry? All people are like grass, and their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

And then following on from that, the verses following talk about the coming of the sovereign Lord with power, and describe in evocative language the extent of his power over all creation.

All of this from Isaiah chapter 40 comes in to Peter's quotation of these few words. So then why is this reminder of the brevity of human existence, why is that a comfort for God's people?

Why does that belong in the chapter of comfort in Isaiah? How does Peter expect it to comfort his readers as he uses it here? Well, think about the context. Isaiah's writing to people in exile, people far from their homeland.

[19:16] Peter's writing to spiritual exile, suffering under an oppressive Roman regime. Do you see how a reminder that these things will pass could be a comfort? The Babylonian Empire, the great superpower of the day, all its glory is but the flower of a field.

The Roman Empire that asserts its dominance and looks so very, very permanent, so powerful, so glorious in its imperial might and majesty. To that context, Peter says, the glory of humanity is like the flowers of the field.

It might be impressive right now, but you can take comfort from the fact that it will not stand. Take comfort from the fact that it is what God has said, what God has decreed.

That is what stands for all time. No failed promises with God. The word of the Lord endures forever. He measured the waters in the hollow of his hand.

He weighed the mountains on his scales. He has the power. Take comfort. What does it matter what Rome might do to you? Love one another. What does it matter what our culture today says its proclamations will not endure.

[20 : 29] It is God's word and his alone that will endure. It is what he has said that forms the rule of our lives, not the temporary decrees of a government that is here today and gone tomorrow.

It is not the whims of cultural acceptance, but it is the absolute promises and commands of our God. And so love, love in that context of the enduring word of God, isn't defined by our culture that says, well, love never confronts anybody.

Love always accepts whatever anyone else says. That is the nature of love is to accept somebody. Well, no, love isn't defined that way. Love in the context of God's enduring word takes the form that God says.

And so love challenges what stands opposed to what he said because in love, we recognize the fearful consequences for those who continue to reject Jesus with their lips or continue to live a life which denies him day by day.

If God's word endures, then love means calling one another to repentance in line with that word amongst these other things. Now that brings us on to this second command, this second instruction in these verses.

[21 : 49] First few verses of chapter two, Peter says, like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. Perhaps as you're looking, perhaps it looks like there's another command before verse two.

Verse one, therefore rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. But that's not actually a separate command. It's not apart from the command to crave spiritual milk.

Grammatically, Peter uses a participle verb. So it does inherit some of the force of the command that follows on. Rid yourselves isn't a bad translation, but it's linked.

This is sort of the means by which one craves spiritual milk, or at least part of that means. Which is interesting, isn't it?

Because if I asked most of you yesterday, how do you seek spiritual milk? I'm pretty sure 99.9% of you would have said you do that by reading God's word.

[22 : 59] And that's not wrong, and I'll come back to it, but this command to crave spiritual milk isn't separate from the command to love one another in the preceding verses, and isn't separate from ridding yourself of malice and so on here.

So for Peter, this seeking after spiritual milk seems to be much more practical and more concrete than perhaps we're inclined to suspect.

We're called to dependence upon God. We're called challenged to seek His grace with the urgency of a hungry baby seeking the breast. We're invited to do that in this context of loving one another deeply, which means ridding ourselves of malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander of every kind.

John says, whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen.

You can't love God without loving others. You can't seek the things of God without ridding yourself of malice and deceit. You might be able to recite Scripture for hours on end but if you're malicious in your speech, if you're speaking ill of others, then all your learning has done you no good whatsoever.

[24 : 19] Having put off these things, having rid ourselves of them, having devoted ourselves to the love of one another, we're then in a fit place to crave pure spiritual milk, to actually grow up in our salvation rather than being puffed up by increased knowledge.

Now yes, this milk comes to us principally through God's Word. God's Word read and proclaimed. But the Word itself is not the milk.

We've made a misstep if our desire is for God's Word. No, the milk is what one commentator calls the sustaining life of God given in mercy to His children.

What we crave is life from God's hand. What we crave is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. What we crave is the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

We don't seek the Bible. We seek Christ. Now yes, we meet Him in and through His Word. That is the means by which we find Him.

[25 : 28] But it is Him that we are looking for. It is He who saves us. This milk that we crave, says Peter, it must be pure.

The word pure here in verse 2, this is the opposite of the word deceit in verse 1. Avoiding deceit. What we need is pure, unadulterated, uncontaminated milk.

Contaminated milk is a dangerous thing, isn't it? You really don't want to be drinking milk with whatever in it, milk that has gone off. Contaminated milk is dangerous.

My friends, an adulterated gospel is more dangerous still. More dangerous by far. We must seek pure spiritual milk that we may grow up in our salvation.

salvation. And so Peter reminds his readers in the last verse of this section, he reminds them that they have tasted that the Lord is good.

[26 : 30] They've tasted this milk. Now again, he's quoting from the Old Testament, this time quoting from Psalm 34. In Psalm 34, it's a command. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

And the Psalm then enumerates a variety of ways in which it is true that the Lord is good and reminds the hearers of the Psalm the ways that they have seen that, the ways that God has acted. Not least in the ways that God is good, that the lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Verse 10. The Lord's attentiveness to the cries of the righteous and so on and so on.

You might well like to read the Psalm through this afternoon if you have a chance. It's an encouraging Psalm. But Peter here, when he quotes this verse, he shifts. He shifts from the imperative to the indicative, no longer telling the readers go and taste and see, but saying to them, you have tasted.

And that forms the ground for the preceding command. Why do you crave pure spiritual milk? Because you know it's good. you've tasted it, you've seen, you know.

[27 : 47] Why can you rid yourselves of these things in verse 1? Because you've tasted the goodness of God. Why do we love one another? Because we've tasted that the Lord is good.

Why would you not want more of this goodness that you have tasted? Why would you not want to fill yourself with it? You know your salvation has come from God, so why would you not immerse yourself as fully as you possibly can in the records of what he has done, acting in salvation throughout history?

Why would you not delight to spend time with his people who point you back to him again and again? Why would you not delight to show others where you have found life? Why would you not throw off malice and deceit and hypocrisy?

why would you not want to love others as deeply as you have been loved? Surely you will want to immerse yourself in the word that speaks of him, that endures forever.

Surely you will avail yourself of every opportunity to dig in deeply, to delight, to worship the God who has delighted you, to delight to do that alongside the people who you love, as we together crave more of his grace in our lives.

[29 : 18] And if you haven't yet, if you haven't tasted that the Lord is good, or if you've forgotten that taste, if you haven't thrown yourself in God's mercy, if you haven't found the preciousness of being loved by God, if you haven't understood the security of knowing the enduring promises of God's word, if that's you, well, my invitation is simple.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. Try it. I promise you he won't let you down. Come and see that the Lord is good, that his ways are best, that he is good to those who are far away from him, that he is good to those who are in danger of wandering off, that he is good and faithful to those who crave his goodness and his grace.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we long for the milk of your goodness.

Having tasted your goodness to us, we cry out to you for more, that you would transform our lives, that we might indeed live this way, because it is good for us, it is pleasing to you, it is honoring to one another, it is an attractive invitation to those outside of our fellowship at present.

Lord, give us this love for one another, equip us to throw off the things that destroy our relationships with one another, the slander, the malice, the deceit. Give us the strength to do as you have commanded, because we rejoice in your goodness, we rejoice in what you have done for us, we rejoice in the new birth that we have received from your hand, the inheritance that will never perish or spoil or fade.

[31 : 25] Lord Jesus, we thank you for this living hope that we have from your hand. Amen.