

God Speakes, We Speak

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[0 : 00] We're looking at 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 1 to 16, although Peter will be referring to a number of other verses during his talk.! Starting at verse 1.

At Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[1 : 34] Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. Therefore with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

[2 : 47] For it is written, Be holy because I am holy. This is the word of the Lord. Well, again, it's a great privilege to be with you tonight.

And we're focusing on a kind of theme tonight of God speaking to us and our speaking to God, the way in which the Bible, God speaking to us, and prayer, our speaking to God, relate to each other and how the Bible should shape our prayers.

So children learn to speak by the words their parents speak to them. So we learn to speak to God through his words to us.

If God does not speak to us, we don't know what words to speak to God. And when God, when someone speaks to us, the polite response is to speak to them responding to what they've said.

So I walk my dogs and often meet other people and they say, Lovely morning, or isn't it hot, or better today, or one of those polite things that you say to people when you're meeting them and walking and don't want to say anything more than discuss the weather.

[4 : 29] And it's polite to respond and say, Yes, or no, or isn't it? Rather than say, I think the answer is 56.

That's not polite. That indicates that you haven't... that you're thinking of a question yourself and you aren't actually relating to the person who's talked to you.

So married couples, it's a bit of free advice for a happy marriage. When one of you speaks to the other, make sure you respond to what the person has said.

Now, friends of mine... LAUGHTER I'm sorry if that's a new idea, but anyway, it would enhance your marriage if you did it.

Good friends of mine have a grandchild who should have been speaking, but all he did was make funny noises.

[5 : 36] And they took him to the doctor, as you might imagine, that's what you do. His parents did. And they found out that he was deaf. So the words he was saying were the words he was hearing.

But he wasn't actually hearing human words, so he didn't know what to say. So our first response to God when we read the Bible should be to speak, not to do.

That is, if you read the Bible, the right response at the end is to speak to God about what he's just said to you. Ah.

As I say that, it sounds so obvious, but I think many of us have been trained to read the Bible and think, what should I do?

Not, what should I say? Limiting our question to what should I do, I'm now on point two for those who are enthusiastic, severely restricts our expression of our relationship with God.

[6 : 56] And if that's our only question, what should I do? It is, of course, a self-centered question. It's a self-focused question, isn't it?

It sadly balances the way in which we often restrict our prayers to requests for God to act. So then we treat our reading of the Bible as getting a list of things to do, and then, when we pray, we give him a list of things we want him to do.

It is then just a task-based relationship. relationship. But God's relationship with us and our relationship with God should be richer and deeper than God saying, this is what I want you to do, and our saying to God, this is what I want you to do.

So, the Bible is God's self-revelation in words, so we should respond in words to God as also, of course, in life and in action.

So, what we will say to God will be more varied than, I will do what you tell me to do. So, if we've just read the first words of Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

[8 : 42] What's an appropriate response to that? It is to adore and praise God for who he is, a loving shepherd.

It may be to thank him for the way in which he has cared for us, or the way he will care for us. It might be a request for greater understanding.

Please, please help me to grasp what it is to know that you are my shepherd and, particularly, the words that follow, the Lord is my shepherd, therefore, I lack nothing.

Well, that actually stops you asking for anything, doesn't it? The Lord is my shepherd, therefore, I lack nothing. Well, I can't ask for anything, can I? Though, I might say, God, please help me to grasp the richness of this great promise.

Please show me all the riches that I have in you that I haven't yet thought about. Or you might say, well, actually, I think I lack the following five things, and I realize that my prayers over the last year have focused on those five things I lack, and perhaps I should stop praying for them.

[10 : 21] Or, at least, not make them the heart and substance of my prayers. Please give me the following five things. It might be a confession of sin.

Lord, I've often followed other shepherds. It might be a prayer for others or for our church. Help us as a church to know the Lord is our shepherd, and therefore we lack nothing.

Or it might be a lament or grief for the state of the church or our world. It might be a statement of lament and grief that so few believers in the Lord Jesus Christ live as if the Lord is their shepherd and they lack nothing.

God and so limiting our question to what should I do limits our reading of the Bible as we're only looking for commands to action.

What God reveals and says in the Bible should shape our response. And as so often a weakness in prayer reveals a broader weakness in our view of God and our Christian lives, there's much more to God than someone who tells us what to do and much more to being a Christian than doing what he tells us to do.

[11 : 58] Imagine if a marriage service had just two questions. Will you do what she tells you to do? Will you do what he tells you to do?

Well, you could have a marriage based on that, but it would be perhaps not quite as rich as for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

Or a marriage service in which you exchange lists of tasks around the house. I will cook and do the cleaning. I will look after the garden and the car.

I declare them husband and wife. And limiting our question when we read the Bible to what should I do, what should we do, obviously limits our view of God and misses so much of God's self-revelation in the Bible.

He's much more than an instruction-giving God. I asked a minister in England once who he thought God was. He said, an angry boss demanding more and more outcome.

[13:15] I said, you're exactly wrong. He's a loving heavenly father. So God is a mighty creator, a gracious and loving and providing heavenly father, a God who rules us for our good and his glory, the God who forgives our sins, cleanses us from our sin, defeated sin, death and Satan by his son's death on the cross, who pours his love into our hearts by his Holy Spirit, who reveals himself in the Bible, who works all things for good for those who love him, who turns human evil for his good purposes, who gives us all things richly to enjoy, who calls us to praise and thank him, cast our burdens on him, confess our sins to him, assuring us of our forgiveness and who gives eternal life to all who trust in him.

The Bible is not just an instruction manual. Praising God and thanking God should dominate our response to God, praising God for who he is and thanking him for what he has done.

Our prayers should be God-centered, not self-centered prayers. because when they're self-centered, we're thinking of what we want and what we need.

When they're God-centered, we're thinking of who God is and praising him for who he is. As I pointed out last week, the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught us begins with us praying that God's plan and God's glory and his will and his kingdom will be that he'll achieve these things in our world.

It's a God-centered start to a prayer and then you can say, and we need daily bread and forgiveness and so on. God's Prayer. The great quest of our world is self-discovery.

[15:29] Our great quest is God-discovery. That is, discovering more and more of who God is from the scriptures and then responding to God and who he is.

So what I've done is to list five ways in which the Bible can enrich our praying. The first way is to know our Bible so well that we instinctively use it when we pray.

Now, the reading was from 1 Peter. There, Peter is so infused with the Bible that when he's talking about salvation in Christ, he can't help but use expressions and terms from the Old Testament.

Another example is Simeon's words of praise and thanks in Luke chapter 2. Do you remember there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout.

He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

[16:52] Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, Sovereign Lord as you have promised, brackets in the Old Testament of course, you may now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

Israel. Well, he certainly knew his Bible, that is, his Old Testament, didn't he? He says, depart in peace.

That doesn't just mean I'm going to have a restful death. It's about the peace that God has promised. And I think he must have memorised the prophet Isaiah.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his root a branch will bear fruit. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

And he will delight in the fear of the Lord. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion, and the yealing together, a little child will lead them.

[18:23] The cow will feed with the bear, the young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like an ox. An infant will play on the cobra's den. And the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

They will neither harm nor destroy an almighty holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Or Isaiah 26, Lord, you establish peace for us. All that we have accomplished you have done for us. Lord our God, other lords beside you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honour. They are now dead, they live no more, their spirits do not rise.

You have enlarged the nation, Lord. You've enlarged the nation, gained glory for yourself. You've extended the borders of Israel. Isaiah 52, how beautiful on the mountains of the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns.

God, I will praise you, Lord, who proclaim good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, the Lord your God reigns.

[19 : 53] Or from Isaiah 12, I will praise you, Lord, though you were angry with me, your anger has turned away, you've comforted me, surely God is my salvation.

Or think of the Gentiles or the nations or all flesh. Again from Isaiah, I'll read from chapter 40.

A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley should be raised up and every mountain and hill made low.

The rough ground shall become level, the rugged places are plain. The glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Or the servant song in Isaiah 49. Do not be afraid, I am with you.

[21 : 05] I'll bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I'll say to the north, give them up to the south, do not hold them back. Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

And glory from Isaiah 60. Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples.

But the Lord rises upon you, and his glory appears over you. So how remarkable that the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that this little baby, this little baby, was indeed the promised Christ, the promised servant, the promised Messiah.

And the words that Simeon uses to describe are the words that God's spoken to his people. So Simeon knew his Bible, remembered his Bible, was shaped by his Bible, so prayed from his Bible. Or we can start with the topic we want to pray about, then think of a Bible verse or verses which are relevant to that topic, then shape our prayer in response to those words, using those words in our prayer.

[22 : 37] So here are some examples. You're anxious about something, so you think, what's a good Bible verse? And you think, the better you know your Bible, the easier this is, of course.

Cast all your cares on God, for he cares for you, 1 Peter 5-7. So you know that God wants you to do this.

You're not burdening God with something he doesn't want to bother about, because he said, he's told you, cast your cares on God, for he cares for you.

So we thank you, Heavenly Father, for you care for us and call us to cast our cares on you, so we now cast these cares on you, and then you list the cares.

So you've quoted God's words back to him. You've used God's words to inform and encourage your faith and to shape your prayer. Or the verse that I continually quote to people who suffer injustice in our world.

[23 : 47] Jesus entrusted himself to God who judges justly, 1 Peter 2-23. So I say, you know, when you suffer injustice, say, I praise you, Jesus, because when you suffered injustice, you showed us how to entrust ourselves to you, to our Heavenly Father.

So I pray now. So it's wonderful to know that God in Jesus knows what it is to suffer injustice.

or if we need to love each other so deeply that we cover over a multitude of other people's sins.

Sins, it's a very curious disease, isn't it, sin? Because it's always easier to see other people's disease than your own. It's one of the more unusual diseases, sin. Heavenly Father, I confess that I often remember other people's sins against me.

Please forgive me and cleanse me and teach me to love others so deeply that I cover over those sins and forget them. Or a great prayer to pray from Luke 1.52 in our world today when Mary says, He's brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

[25 : 16] God, we pray that you would bring down the oppressive, evil and corrupt leaders in our world and raise up their people who are oppressed. That's a prayer you could pray every day, isn't it?

Or, if you're thinking something needs to happen to our church, Jesus said, I will build my church. How wonderful. Lord Jesus, please build our church.

Or, Jesus' words from Matthew 8, I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Here's a great prayer to pray. That we're encouraged to pray this big prayer. Lord Jesus, as you have promised, many will come into your kingdom. Please convert billions of unbelievers in our world today, especially in India and Nepal.

Well, I could have chosen any nation. But that, you see how basing our prayer on the scripture actually gives us more confidence because we're responding to what God has said.

[26 : 26] So then we're more full of faith, greater trust in God, a greater vision of what God wants to do, will do, has promised to do. Or the last example I've got here, where Paul writes, I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Gracious God, we pray for our parliaments, our judges and magistrates, that you would give the wisdom. The third way in which we can use the Bible to enrich our prayers is to find a prayer in the Bible, and there are lots of them.

Last time I was here, I think we did Old Testament prayers, but there were lots of great prayers in the New Testament as well. Here's a prayer that Paul prayed for the Colossians.

He's always thanking God for them. This is Colossians 1, verse 3, and then he says, For this reason, verse 9, Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

Well, what do you pray for fellow believers? What do you pray for your church? What do you pray for yourself?

[28 : 06] Here's what Paul's praying. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, that's a big prayer, and please him in every way, that's a bigger prayer, bearing fruit in every good work, it's growing all the time we see it, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The way Paul describes himself, he's always praying, and occasionally preaches a sermon or writes a letter, but he's always praying. And what a big prayer it is. Well, what we can do is take that prayer, which Paul was praying for the Colossians, and we could pray it for ourselves, so we're going to do that now.

Let's join in the prayer for this church now. Heavenly Father, together, Heavenly Father, we continually ask you to fill us with the knowledge of your will, through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that we may live a life worthy of the Lord Jesus, and please him in every way.

We ask this so that we bear fruit in every good work, grow in the knowledge of you, and be strengthened with all power, according to your glorious might, so that we may have great endurance and patience.

[30 : 03] For you have rescued us from darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of your beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, and forgiveness of sins.

We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen. My apologies for the typo. But isn't that a wonderful prayer to pray for your church?

You could change it and pray it for yourself if you wanted to. The fourth example is I read through Philippians, and I found all the references to Christ in Philippians.

And these are not prayers in Philippians, though there is a prayer in Philippians, which we'll use later. But I turned the kind of instructions in Philippians into prayers.

And I turned them into a prayer for myself. So I pray this prayer regularly. We could pray it together.

[31 : 18] I pray that I may believe in Christ and serve him. Trust you will bring your work to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Be open for other believers with the affection of Christ Jesus. Be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, your glory and praise.

Preach Christ, speaking the word without fear. Live for Christ, that he may be honoured in my body, in life or in death. Desire to depart and be with Christ, and also be willing to work for him in his life. Live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Suffer for Christ and contend for his gospel. Have the mind of Christ in service, humility and obedience.

Seek Christ's interests and the interests of others, not knowing. Rejoice in the Lord always. Count everything as loss for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

[32 : 29] Gain Christ and be found in him, having the righteousness that comes through faith in him. Know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

Share his sufferings and be like him in his death, that I may obtain the resurrection from the dead. Press on toward the goal for the prize of our heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

Eagerly await the coming of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies to be like our glorious body. Stand firm in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord always.

Do all things through Christ who strengthens me, so that I can be content in any and every circumstance. Trust that you will fully satisfy my every need, according to your riches in Christ Jesus.

Know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of my life and history. That's a rich prayer, isn't it?

[33 : 40] If you don't know what to pray, pray the Bible. So I'm trying to show you different ways in which you can make use of the Bible to enrich your praying.

The last one that I'll talk about tonight is to meditate on a Bible passage and then pray in response to it.

And I believe that this was the custom of Christians in the past, which we have lost. I think in the 19th, 18th and 19th century, this is how lots of Christians combined their Bible reading and their prayers.

We often separate them. We think, well, I'll do my Bible reading and then I'll pray. But what I want to show you is that you can combine the two. Let me read the wonderful passage from Mark's Gospel. People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant.

[35 : 06] He said to them, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

So, after meditating, visualising the scene, thinking of each phrase, what does this mean?

Why is it here? What's the connection with the other words in the sentence? What were people doing?

What did Jesus say? What did Jesus do? What did Jesus do? So, having meditated on the Bible passage, we can then pray in response to it.

[36 : 43] If you're happy to do this, please join in these prayers. We praise you and we thank you, Lord Jesus, that you welcome little children, helpless as they were, and unable to understand who you were.

We praise and thank you that in all you were, all you did, and all you said, we reveal God's character, his mind, his heart, his will, his love, his standards, his acceptance of those who had nothing to offer you.

Please forgive us for the times when you hinder your purpose. Sorry, I'm sure that when, sorry, that should be when we hinder your purpose. Be on me. What a citizen which I am.

Let's try that one again. Please forgive us for the times when we hinder your purposes for the best of reasons as we perceive reality.

Please reform our ideas, our values, our actions, our reactions, renew our minds, reform our lives, and provide our desire to follow your example and serve your good gospel purposes as a visible.

[38 : 04] Thank you for all the people in the gospels. We brought our hearts to you. Andrew brought us to you. The four friends brought our lives man.

The king and our woman brought your daughter. The people brought all who were sick and demon-assessed, and the people were bringing little children. Help us to bring others to you.

We are praying to you. Hold on, hold on. We'll just take a gap between the prayers because they reflect different insights into the Bible passage.

So just wait for me if you would. We praise you, Lord Jesus, that you came not to be served, but to serve and to give your life as a rest for me.

Lord Jesus, you said that anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter.

[39 : 11] Please show us our helplessness and our need of your sovereign grace to choose, save, and transform us so that we begin, continue, and persevere as we are.

Amen. We praise and thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, because you took the little children in your arms to show that you welcomed them.

You placed your hands on them to show that you loved them, and you blessed them with God's blessing. We praise you, Lord God, for the blessing which your Son, Jesus, gave these children.

We thank you that your blessing is powerful, creative, effective, enduring, character-forming, community-shaping, and history-making.

When you bless, you're at work in human lives, bringing all your good purposes to fulfil. We thank you for this sign, your continual power, generosity, compassion, goodwill, grace, kindness, and faithfulness, through which you will achieve your great gospel purposes.

[40 : 31] All glory to you, God of grace. grace. Gracious God, please forgive us when we are so worldly that we overvalue competence, gifts, abilities, achievements, success, measurable outcomes, energy, contributions, and effectiveness, and so have no room in our lives for those who are not like this.

Give us for forgetting and ignoring helpless people or regarding them as a nuisance or interruption to our activist world. Please forgive, cleanse, and change us into the likeness of Christ our Saviour.

Lord Jesus, you caused so much embarrassment and opposition when you accepted and welcomed the unwelcome, tax collectors and sinners, Gentiles, people who were ill, demon-possessed, leprous, poor, dangerous, helpless, on the edge of polite society.

Help us to live like you, to run our churches in the way in which you live, to go freely into other people's world, their meeting places and their homes.

Help us by your saving grace, not just so that we are saved, but so that others are saved as well.

Be all. Finally, gracious God, your son Jesus was so unpopular that he was crucified.

[42 : 19] help us to take up our cross daily, follow him and live and die for him. In his name we pray. May God in his grace enrich your prayers by his scriptures.

Amen. Thank you.