

Introducing 2 Peter

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bibles to 2 Peter. This morning we are beginning an extended sermon series based on this short but important letter.

! One of the commentaries that I will be using for this sermon series is from the Bible speaks today commentary series. It was edited by the late John Stott. It's titled The Message of 2 Peter and Jude and was co-authored by two well-known men in the UK, Dick Lucas and Christopher Green. In their preface to their commentary, Lucas and Green wrote the following. Forgive me this morning. I'm not sure we have all the slides but we had some problems with the internet this morning so the slides may not have come through fully. This is what they wrote in the preface to the commentary. Second Peter and Jude could lay claim to being the two least valued and noticed books of the New Testament. Their special contribution to Christian living lies unrecognized and unread at the back of most Bibles.

The message of the New Testament is a great book of the New Testament. The message of the New Testament is a great book of the New Testament. It's a pretty strong claim for the authors to make, but I believe that they are correct. Many professing Christians who have sat in pews or chairs in churches over many, many years are unable to bring to mind some part of the letter of 2 Peter or the letter of Jude or think about what those letters are about in a thematic or an overall kind of way.

[2 : 23] And if you're in that category this morning, don't despair because with God's help, this sermon series will start to change that.

Lucas and Green continue and they write the following. Rediscovering what these two writers have to say could well be a bracing exercise for today's churches, meaning it strengthens them, holds them up where they may be sagging down.

So they're saying rediscovering what these two writers have to say could well be a bracing exercise for today's churches. We may claim familiarity with most parts of the New Testament, but here in 2 Peter and Jude, we are in undeniably difficult and strange territory and we are tempted to head back to more familiar landscapes.

But when we find a part of the Bible that churches ignore in public and that Christians find irrelevant in private, that we may be sure that the enemy considers he has gained a major advantage, we must recover these letters and learn again what these early Christian leaders risked their lives to teach.

It's our goal for this series. We want to recover these letters beginning with the letter of 2 Peter and we begin in earnest on that journey with this first sermon in the series.

[4 : 09] I want to say at the outset that Peter's burden that we will discover as we go through this letter is indeed my own burden for us as a church. And hence this sermon series.

I'm going to begin this morning by reading the first 11 verses of chapter 1 in 2 Peter, but our time will be focused only on the first two verses.

So please follow along as I read. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. If you have another translation, yours will read slightly differently. Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

[5 : 48] For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge and knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection and brotherly affection with love.

For these qualities are yours and are increasing. They will keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was once cleansed from his former sins.

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall.

For in this way, there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[7 : 07] Let's pray. Father, we pause this morning looking to you and asking for your help as we open your word.

Lord, I need your help to proclaim your word. You know my desire to serve these who are gathered this morning. And I pray, Lord, that you would grant me the grace that I need to do that, to be faithful, to speak as I ought to speak, and that your word will be clear and that those who hear will heed your word and be changed by your word.

So, Lord, I pray that you would come and you would help us all as we sit under the instruction of your word this morning, speak to our hearts and transform our lives from the truth that is in your word.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let me consider the letter of 2 Peter as a whole. Here's how I would summarize it.

To believers over all times and in all places, the Apostle Peter says, live faithfully to the gospel of Christ and wait patiently for the return of Christ.

[8 : 36] In short, as death is staring him in the face, this time-tested Apostle of Christ in his last words to God's people says to them, live faithfully and wait patiently.

And that's what I pray this letter helps us to do as well. I pray that's what it helps all of God's people to do.

And so this morning, as we begin this journey into 2 Peter, I want to introduce the letter and I want to do so by introducing the author of 1 Peter, the recipients of 1 Peter, and the message of 1 Peter. Those are the three introductory elements that we're going to consider this morning. So first, the author of 1 Peter. From the very outset of the letter, we're able to see who its author is in verse 1. He is Simeon Peter, or some translations have Simon Peter. But because it has been the source of much debate, a lot of ink has been devoted to it, I must say in passing that there are some who question the validity of Peter's authorship.

[10 : 06] But I stand in the company of faithful Bible scholars who accept this is God's word that 2 Peter was written by Peter as stated in the very first verse.

And further, I believe, as we consider this letter and just consider it on its face, we're able to see elements of the letter that would confirm that Peter actually wrote it.

For example, in verses 16 through 18, Peter refers to the transfiguration where he, James and John, eyewitnesses to Christ's majesty when he was transfigured before their eyes.

When they heard the father's voice saying, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Notice in verse 1 that Peter identifies himself as a servant and an apostle, literally a slave of Christ and one who has been sent by Christ.

That's what apostle means, one who was sent and the word that Peter uses is a slave. He identifies himself as a slave of Christ and as an apostle of Christ.

[11 : 27] And as we seek to understand who this author is, I think it's instructive for us to notice how Peter identifies himself. He, first of all, identifies himself as a slave, then as an apostle.

So Peter identifies himself as a slave and as an apostle. And this is especially important at a time when false teachers were making all kinds of claims about the authority, authority they did not possess.

For example, if you look at chapter 2 in verses 10 and 11, Peter is referring to them and he says, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority, bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones.

Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. And then in verse 17, he calls them waterless springs.

He calls them mists being driven by a storm. What he's saying is there's nothing to them. They have a pretense about who they are, but in terms of substance, they are nothing.

[12:52] They are waterless springs. They are a mist driven by a storm. You know a mist driven by a storm is still a mist? The storm doesn't change it. It is still a mist.

It would have been remarkable if Peter had, in this context, just referred to himself as a servant, but he does it first.

He first identifies himself as a servant in a context where people were making false claims about their own authority. And I think this should be instructive for us this morning.

I think we should be more intentional to identify ourselves through service, the service we give more than the position we hold.

I believe that Peter's authorship is also further confirmed in verses 12 through 15 where he refers to his impending death. He writes, therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are establishing the truth that you have.

[14:04] I think it right as long as I am in this body to stir you up by way of reminder since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon as our Lord Jesus made clear to me.

And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. the Lord had shown Peter that the day of his death was near.

And as a true apostle he wasn't concerned for himself. He wasn't concerned about the death that he knew awaited him. We're told that he was perhaps in a Roman prison even at this time.

Knowing the kind of death that the Roman emperor Nero would mete out to people like him. Yet he is not concerned for himself. He is concerned for God's people. He is concerned for their souls. He is concerned for their spiritual welfare. And he's also concerned about false teachers whose false teachings and whose ungodly examples will bring harm to unsuspecting and undiscerning individuals.

[15:23] In verse three, sorry, in chapter three, verse one, we have what seems to be a reference to 1 Peter when Peter identifies this letter, 2 Peter, as his second letter.

But here again, some scholars argue that the writing style of 2 Peter is very different from the writing style of 1 Peter. So they say, well, they don't believe that Peter actually wrote it.

And while the writing styles are different, one very logical reason that Bible scholars give is that Peter used different secretaries to whom he would have dictated the letter.

So the secretaries would have had different styles, no doubt. But that is an aside. That is not really an important issue. What is important is that Peter is repeating his concern in the second letter that he expressed in the first letter.

He wants his readers to remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord that he had given through his apostles. He wanted this to happen in an environment where false teachers and ungodly living was abounding.

[16:45] And so he had the same concern in the second letter that he had in the first letter that he wrote. He wants God's people to remain faithful to Christ.

He wants them to wait patiently for Christ's return. Church historians tell us that Peter was executed by the Roman emperor Nero.

Nero himself died in AD 68. And while we can't be exactly sure when Peter wrote this letter, we're not sure exactly when Peter died, historians give us a range of between AD 60 and AD 68 that Peter would have written this letter and then he would have died a short time later.

Well, that's an introduction to the author of this short letter. He is a servant of Jesus Christ, he is an apostle of Christ, and he writes with the authority of Christ, not with the pseudo-authority of the false teachers who he is refuting in this letter.

Let's now consider the recipients of the letter of 2 Peter. And they're not a part of verse 1. We're told that the recipients are those those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[18:27] Simeon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with us by the righteousness of God, of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Unlike 1 Peter, we don't get any specific geographic location of the recipients. Those details are not given to us.

Peter writes to a more subjective audience, a broader audience. He writes to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours.

I think this is important for us to consider that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter writes these words and he is concerned for all of God's people because he addresses it to all those who have obtained a faith of equal importance, of equal standing, sorry, with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So no matter where they live, no matter when they live, this letter is addressed to them. I want to hear this this morning because if you know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are captured directly and immediately in the group of recipients to whom this letter is written.

[20 : 22] And the concerns that Peter would have had for the original audience who would have received this letter is the same concern that he has for you, that he has for us as the people of God.

Peter is wisely writing this letter. He knows where he is going. He is not stringing this together as he goes. In this statement where Peter says, this is written to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with us.

Peter is even now addressing the errors and the false teachings and the concerns that he has about those errors and those false teachings.

You see, one of the concerns is that oftentimes believers are made to believe that the faith that they have is not enough.

It's deficient. They need something else. They need some other experience. They need some additional power. They need something else. False teachers will exploit them and say, oh, you need this other teaching.

[21 : 32] You need this additional experience. You need this power. They're literally people who trust in Christ, but they have faith that there's someone else whose prayer will work better than their prayer.

faith. They see themselves as deficient in some way, and when they see themselves as deficient, they make themselves vulnerable to false teachers who will exploit that and take advantage of that. Peter is addressing this concern in this description of those to whom he writes. and the first thing he tells his recipients is this, your faith is not deficient.

He says, your faith is of equal standing with ours. We who walked and talked with Jesus, we who heard his teachings, we who saw his majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration, we who saw the miracles, he says, your faith and our faith is of equal standing.

There's no difference. that is an amazing truth. That is an absolutely amazing statement that Peter makes.

[22 : 56] I think we all know how sometimes as humans we can be very carnal and we want to have one up on the other person. You talk about your experience, the other person embellishes their experience.

Peter is not doing that. Peter is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He is not flattering the recipients of this letter. He is saying to them, even though we walked and talked with Jesus, even though we saw the miracles, we heard the teachings, your faith is of equal standing with ours.

Peter wants his recipients to know that their faith is not deficient, they lack nothing. Peter makes a similar statement in 1 Peter chapter 8 where he writes, though you have not seen him, you love him.

Though you do not see him, you believe in him. I rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

Peter was concerned, but he marveled at this reality that those who have not seen Christ have the same precious faith of equal standing as those who have seen him, those who have heard him.

[24 : 29] Now, why is this important? why is this, not just important, but why is this actually remarkable? Here's why.

If you have an English Standard Version Bible, we're told that the faith that we have was obtained. It says, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing.

And if you have another translation, perhaps like the NIV, it uses the word received. We're told that it's a faith we received. What's interesting is that in the original language, in the Greek language, this word that Peter used for obtained or for received is the same word that's translated to cast a lot. It is a word that is used to speak about a process over which a person has no control. And so, for example, we read in Luke 1 and 9 that Zechariah was selected to burn incense in the temple by lot.

They cast a lot to determine who would burn incense. Zechariah had no control over whether he would burn incense or not. The lot determined that he would burn incense.

[26 : 08] And then another example is in John 19 24 where we have the record of the soldiers casting lots for the garments of Jesus. Whoever got the garments of Jesus based on the lot had no control over that lot.

They could not determine that they were going to get the garments. The lot was cast and the result determined who got the garment. No one's will gave them the garment.

It's very interesting that Peter would use this exact word to talk about the faith we have received. And he's not saying that God kind of threw the dice and decided who was going to be saved.

He's not saying that at all. That would be a bad inference to draw from Peter's use of this word.

What Peter is saying is this though.

Peter's reminding his hearers that the faith that they have has nothing to do with what they determined. It has nothing to do with something that they control the result of.

[27 : 20] Peter says this faith you have you've obtained it. This faith you have you have received it. It is a divine gift. It is a gift from God.

It's a point that Peter is seeking to make to them. And see I think one of the reasons we may miss how important this is and how amazing this is is that there are people who actually believe that they would be a different Christian so to speak or there are those who don't know Christ who believe that if they lived in the time that Jesus lived and they saw his miracles and heard his teachings that they would believe.

There are people who actually believe that they believe that if they were around when Jesus was around they wouldn't have been saying crucify him they would have believed. Not so. not everyone who saw Jesus believed.

Not everyone who saw miracles believed. I was reading this week and it struck me in was reading in John the gospel of John chapter 7 and in verse 5 John says that even the brothers of Jesus didn't believe in him.

They lived with him. They knew him perhaps better than anybody else and yet they didn't believe in him. Why is that? One thing we should know is that you had no advantage saying Jesus.

[29 : 12] you had no advantage hearing Jesus. You had no advantage observing miracles. Why? Because the same way they believed we believed they believed because they obtained a precious faith.

They received a precious faith. We believe because we received a precious faith. It is the same faith as Peter says there is no difference. He is grounding them to protect them against false teachers who will say to them you are deficient.

You need some other experience. You need some other knowledge that you don't have. Peter says we're all equal because the faith that we received is exactly that of received faith.

Nothing that we did or will do brought that faith to us. Listen to Tom Schreiner in his commentary on this statement he writes this statement is remarkable indeed.

Faith which is necessary for salvation is a divine gift. It cannot be produced by the mere will of human beings but must be received from God himself.

[30 : 33] If you know Christ this morning I just encourage you to let that settle in. The faith that you have is not by your own doing. That you believe in God through Jesus Christ.

That you believe that Jesus is the Messiah that he is the Savior of the world. That you believe things that you cannot explain with your mind. That you can come to God's word and even when you see questions there is still a burning faith in your heart.

That is a gift we can work up. That is a gift from the living God.

And Peter says the faith that is in Christ that he and the other apostles had is the same faith that you and I have.

And it is a divine gift from God. And brothers and sisters when we don't believe that we are on dangerous grounds. When we believe that someone else who professes to know Christ is more privileged and more special and more powerful that's the way many false teachers exploit those who are not discernment.

[32 : 00] Notice also the basis for our faith and how it comes. Peter tells us that it comes by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

It comes to God's people through Christ's righteousness and not their own. And here Peter is referencing Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

He is referring to Christ as our Savior. And notice what Peter does. Again, he's addressing heresies. He's addressing some of the issues up front.

that he is going to address in more detail in the letter. He uses this phrase our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

And what Peter is doing is Peter is ascribing divinity to Jesus Christ. Peter is recognizing Jesus Christ as God.

[32 : 59] God is important to see that. He's not talking about God the Father and Jesus Christ. He writes this to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

That's the same as saying our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When we say our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we know it's the in Scripture because of the revelation that we see in Scripture that Jesus Christ is at times referred to as God.

We develop our doctrine of the Godhead. We understand that though the Father and Son are distinct and separate persons, they are of the same essence and of the same divinity.

Peter will go on to talk about those who deny their only Lord and Master. And so what he's doing right at the outset of this letter, he is wisely, as he refutes error, he's referring to Jesus Christ as our God and as our Savior.

So Peter writes, these warnings and encouragements are reminders to those who have obtained a faith of equal value to his and those who walk with Christ.

[35 : 03] They are the recipients of this letter. So let's consider third and finally the message of 2nd Peter.

In verse 2, we find a standard Christian greeting, but in this standard Christian greeting, I believe the message of 2nd Peter is generally summarized.

Peter has a concern that those who come to Christ will grow in their knowledge of him. His concern is that some who profess Christ do not exhibit the evidence of knowing Christ.

In other words, they are unfruitful. That's a concern for Peter. In verse 2, we have the practical effect of the process of salvation.

Notice what he says in verse 2. He says, May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

[36 : 18] The first part of salvation that affects our lives is the grace of God. God's grace comes to us, transforms our hearts, convinces us of our sin, opens our eyes to the reality of sin, opens our eyes to the beauty of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ as our Savior.

His grace comes to us and as a result of that we gain peace with God, we are reconciled with God, we are no longer at enmity with him, no longer estranged from him and we have peace with God.

God's grace comes to us through the person and the work of Jesus Christ. When we experience that grace we obtain God's peace. Peter's desire is that God's grace and peace will be multiplied to us in our knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.

What Peter is saying is that through knowing God the Father and knowing Jesus Christ is the only Son which is another way to refer to salvation grace and peace will be multiplied to us.

We know if something is multiplied it grows it doesn't say the same. when we mature and we grow as Christians we will bear fruit we will bear more fruit over time as evidence not just of our salvation but of our growth in salvation.

[38 : 03] Turn to the end of the letter with me chapter 3 and look at verse 18. This is a concern for Peter. He states it at the beginning of the letter he states it at the end of the letter in verse 18 he writes but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That word grow can be substituted or we can substitute and multiply there.

Peter has this concern that we would grow in our knowledge of the Lord. Brothers and sisters that's part of the evidence that we know Christ.

Notice what Peter writes in verse 17. He writes verse 17 of chapter 3. Peter is saying to us that as we grow in the knowledge of God and of our Savior Jesus Christ it provides a protection for us against false teachers and against the errors and the instability that they can bring in our lives because we aren't growing in our knowledge of our Lord and of our Savior.

Brothers and sisters the concerns of Peter's day are the concerns of our day. And this is why I felt directed back in December to preach this series of sermons from 2 Peter.

[40 : 06] This letter of 2 Peter provides us with protective warnings against false teachers and their harmful teachings and we're reminded that we are to grow in our salvation.

We're reminded that saving knowledge from Jesus Christ produces evident fruit in our lives.

I mentioned that Peter would have written this letter somewhere between 80, 60 and 68. So 30 some years after the Lord would have left this earth.

love. And it's quite remarkable that even as the apostle Peter and the other apostles were still alive there were false teachers that were abounding and that were refuting the teachings of Christ.

And when we look at the contents of this letter we see that these were men who were lovers of money, they were lovers of pleasure, they were lovers of sexual immorality, they prophesied for money, and they even denied the future return of Christ and the judgment of the world.

[41 : 30] And those two go hand in hand. When we either actively cast off the return of Christ, or we passively live without any reference to the return of Christ, it brings us into a kind of carelessness and slackness in how we live life and how we view life.

And what we see in the lives of these false teachers is to the extreme where they totally discarded the idea of the Lord's return and a future judgment. And it was manifested in how they lived.

They lived without restraint. They gave themselves to whatever pleasure they desired because they thought there's no consequence. they turned the grace of God into license.

And brothers and sisters, I am persuaded that we will not go that far. I am persuaded that those of us who have trusted in Christ will not go that far. But I will say to us this morning, that when we lose sight of the reality of Christ's return, when we are not living daily with an awareness that one day this world will end, and Jesus Christ is going to return and he is going to judge the world.

And he's going to reward his saints. If we don't live with that awareness, we live with a kind of indifference, we live with a kind of carelessness. The Apostle Peter talks about those who mocked, saying, oh, he's not coming back.

[43 : 06] Things have existed now since they've always existed. and they mocked with their mouths. Brothers and sisters, my concern for us is that we can mock with our lives, with how we live.

We don't say with our mouths he's not coming back, but with our lives we can show that we really aren't convinced and persuaded that he is coming back. And it is absolutely stunning that the Apostle Peter lived to see this.

It's kind of like what I was saying about two weeks ago in the sermon that when my mother would say to me the way things were when she was young, I couldn't believe things changed that drastically.

And here the Apostle Peter is living to see Paul's teachers arise and refute and reject that which he was willing to die for.

Reject the gospel that Christ died so that sinners may hear. And so it is my desire that as we work our way through this letter the steel that Peter had in the midst of false teachers, in the midst of ungodly living, will be ours as well.

[44 : 33] So we can't say what Peter said. Peter says, I was an eyewitness. I'm not telling you fables. I was an eyewitness. We can't say that, but what we can do is we can stand in the apostolic tradition and we can say this is the revealed word of God and this is where we're going to stand.

During the discipleship class on Wednesday night, I asked this question. We were talking about how important it is to look to hear God from his word as opposed to some other means and some other source.

And sometimes you would hear people say, I want God to speak to me. And I asked the question, if God spoke to you audibly, how would you know that's God? You wouldn't know.

The only way that we are able to identify a person's voice is if we have a reference point for it. So you know someone, they call you on the phone and you know who that is.

But if someone you've never heard before calls you on the phone, you don't really know who that is. And so as enthralling as it may sound that we have God speak to me, people get up and they say that all the time.

[45 : 54] Oh, the Lord spoke to me in an audible voice last night. Well, you don't know that's God. You won't deny you heard something audible, but you don't know that's God.

And here's my point on this. We can't say what Peter said, but we can stand in the apostolic tradition, we can stand on the steady ground of the word of God, and we can hold up the word of God.

Brothers and sisters, it's going to be more and more important as time goes on, because false teachers and false prophets have arisen, and Peter says they will continue to arise.

What Peter says is they will be among you, they will be among every single generation. And what's going to keep us steady, what's going to keep us stable, is that we're growing in the knowledge of our God and Savior.

And we're staying anchored in the apostolic tradition of the written and revealed word of God. And this letter of 2 Peter is designed to help us do that.

[47 : 10] The summary of 2 Peter, again, live faithfully to the gospel of Christ and wait patiently for the return of Christ.

That's true.