

A Growing Christian

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we can, this evening with the Lord's help, we'll turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in 2 Peter 1. Second Peter 1, and we're just going to consider the opening verses of this letter.

Second Peter 1, reading from the beginning. Simeon, or Simon 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 and so on.

The other night I was putting our youngest son Daniel to bed and I had done the usual routine of closing the curtains and then putting off the light and then tucking Daniel in and giving him the usual good night kiss.

But you know it's always around then that when the day is over and it's bedtime and parents are tired and they want their children into bed, it's always around then that the questions start.

[1 : 38] Of course Daniel had said nothing about all that was on his mind, he had said nothing all day about what he was thinking but as he was being tucked into bed it was becoming obvious that he had been thinking about all that's going on with the coronavirus because I'm sure that like many other children Daniel is missing his friends and although our children and many people in our island we've been kept safe and quite sheltered from the effects of the coronavirus, although we've been sheltered it's been very difficult for children living in lockdown and living in lockdown for so long.

And while Daniel he said himself he just wants everything to go back to the old way it was, he wants everything to go back to the old normal. But it was lying in bed the other night with his duvet right up to his chin that Daniel he asked his all important question that was on his mind.

He said Daddy when do you think the coronavirus will be over? When do you think the coronavirus will be over? But what do you say to a four year old?

What answer can you give especially when our world is in chaos? What can you say except I don't know? I don't know when the coronavirus will be over but the Lord knows and as I said to Daniel we just have to keep praying to the Lord and try and keep following all the guidelines.

And thankfully Daniel well he was satisfied with my answer and he went off to sleep. But you know in many ways Daniel's question is what 2nd Peter is all about. Of course 2nd Peter isn't asking when will the coronavirus be over?

[3 : 23] 2nd Peter is asking when will the world be over? When will the 2nd coming be? 2nd Peter is asking when is the victory and vindication of the church going to take place?

2nd Peter is asking when is Jesus coming back? Of course just like I didn't know when the coronavirus will end. Peter didn't know when the world will end.

Peter didn't know when the 2nd coming would take place because as Jesus affirms no one knows the day nor the hour, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son but the Father only.

Peter didn't know when Jesus was coming again but in his 2nd letter Peter encourages the church to keep praying and to keep persevering and to keep growing in grace.

In fact that's what 2nd Peter is all about. It's all about growing in grace. 2nd Peter is about growing in grace and the key verse in 2nd Peter is actually the last verse of 2nd Peter in 2nd Peter chapter 3 verse 18 where Peter says, grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[4 : 38] Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And so 2nd Peter is all about growing. In these opening four verses that we are looking at this evening Peter describes a growing Christian and he says that a growing Christian will have three things.

A growing Christian will have growing confidence and a growing comprehension and growing conviction. A growing Christian will have a growing confidence and a growing conviction and growing convince.

And there are three headings this evening. So first of all a growing confidence, a growing Christian will have a growing confidence, a growing confidence.

Peter opens his letter, he says, Simon 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. As you might expect, first and second Peter were written by the same Peter to the same people facing the same problem because it's the same Peter who was called to leave his nets to follow Jesus.

[6 : 02] It's the same Peter here who was given the name Peter when he confessed Jesus as the Christ. It's that same Peter who denied the Savior in order to dodge suffering.

It's the same Peter who was restored and reaffirmed as an apostle. It's the same Peter here who stood up on the day of Pentecost and commanded and called sinners to repent and over 3,000 souls were saved.

It's that same Peter who was criticized and confined to prison for preaching the gospel. It's that same Peter who was committed and continued to make Christ known for over 30 years.

It's that same Peter who wrote this letter to the same people because like first Peter, second Peter was written to scattered saints.

They were, as first Peter tells us, they were the elect exiles of the dispersion. They were saints who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bethania, which is modern day Turkey.

[7 : 09] These areas, they covered a vast area of land of nearly a thousand miles. But they were Christians who had fled for their lives and they were displaced and dispersed throughout this area within the Roman Empire.

They were scattered and suffering saints all because of persecution. And as we said, first and second Peter, they were written by the same Peter to the same people facing the same problem. And the same problem was that they had job losses, they had business problems, they had health, home and family issues all because they were Christians.

Because the Roman Emperor Nero, as we mentioned before, he had instituted emperor worship and he demanded that everyone must bow down to him and confess that Caesar is Lord.

But of course for a Christian, that was an impossibility because when you're a Christian, Jesus is Lord. And when you refuse to go with the flow and bow down to the Caesar and worship all these Roman gods, you receive persecution.

[8 : 22] And as we repeatedly saw in first Peter, Christians living within the Roman Empire during the first century, they experienced extremely volatile and violent persecution.

And so it's into that situation that the same Peter writes to the same people facing the same problem. And you know what's remarkable is that Peter wrote his letter as someone who had empathy for the persecuted church.

Because you know, Peter, he wasn't immune to the persecution of the Roman Empire. In fact, second Peter was, in many ways, Peter's farewell speech to the Christian church.

Because Peter was about to die. And Peter knew that he was soon going to be executed for his faith in Jesus Christ. He speaks about that in verses 12 to 15.

He talks about putting off his earthly tent. And so Peter knew he was going to be executed under the authority of Nero, the Roman Emperor.

[9 : 30] And we even know this to be true because at the time of writing his letter, Peter was in Rome. In fact, Peter had spent the last 10 years of his life writing to the churches, seeking to ensure that the Gospel would be proclaimed long after he is gone.

Because it said that in 60 AD, Peter helped Mark to write his Gospel, the Gospel of Mark. And then in 64 AD, Peter wrote 1 Peter.

And then in 67 AD, 2 Peter was written, which was only a few months before Peter was crucified upside down in 68 AD.

And so we can see that Peter knew and he understood the situation that these scattered and suffering saints were facing. Which is why Peter encourages the Christian church in both his letters. He encourages them to keep persevering, to keep praying and to keep growing in grace. But you know, we see a progression from 1 Peter to 2 Peter.

[10:40] Because in 1 Peter, you'll remember that Peter encouraged the church by reminding them that they have a living salvation through a living Savior.

But in 2 Peter, even though the threat of persecution hadn't gone away, Peter is encouraging the Christian church that between now and the second coming of Christ, he says, were to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And as we said, a growing Christian will possess a growing confidence. Of course, biblical confidence is not confidence in self, it's confidence in the Savior.

And our confidence in the Savior is all because of our faith in Jesus Christ. And that's what Peter draws our attention to in the opening words of his letter.

He opens his letter by reminding the Christian church that we've received faith in Jesus Christ.

[11:49] Peter says we've obtained faith. We've received faith. In other words, our faith in Jesus Christ is a sovereign act of God.

It's all of grace. Our faith in Jesus Christ is a gift. Meaning that it's not something we conceive or conjure up for ourselves.

It's not something we fashion and formulate in our minds. It's not even something that we devise and develop in our own heart. No, Peter says that faith in Jesus Christ is a gracious gift of God. And you know, that's what our Catechism affirms to us, doesn't it? Our Catechism asks the question, what is faith in Jesus Christ?

And it says faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for our salvation as he's offered to us in the gospel.

[12:51] You know, my friend, when God graciously works saving faith in our heart and life, we're brought to receive and to rest upon Jesus Christ alone.

And as you know, that faith, saving faith can be summarized using that well-known acrostic, F-A-I-T-H, forsaking all eye trust, Him.

That's what saving faith is. It's personally trusting in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Saving faith is receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ as he's freely offered to us in the gospel.

And Peter goes on to say that we receive, when we have obtained faith, that gift of faith, we also receive the righteousness of God our Savior, Jesus Christ.

He says it's by receiving the gift of faith that we also receive the gift of righteousness where we're made righteous in God's sight.

[13:58] Because if the Bible reminds us, the Bible says that without faith it's impossible to please God. So when we receive that gift of faith, we're made righteous in God's sight.

We're able to please God because we're justified by faith. We're made righteous by faith. And the wonder of our righteousness, my friend, is that we are as righteous today as we will be when we stand before Jesus in glory.

And that's all because as Paul reminds us, the righteous shall live by faith. The righteous shall live by faith.

But you know, for these scattered and suffering saints, it's not that they were worried about their righteousness. And it's not that they didn't have saving faith.

It's that they had a small and shaky faith. They had a low and little faith. And you know, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Peter wants to encourage the Christian church to grow in grace because their saving faith is a gift.

[15:09] But more than that, Peter reminds the Christian church that just because he's an apostle, it doesn't mean that his faith is superior. No, Peter says that as an apostle, his faith, as he says there in verse one, his faith is of equal standing with the church of Jesus Christ.

In other words, he has received the same gracious gift of saving faith as us. He doesn't have a saving faith that's on a higher plane.

He hasn't received more saving faith than other Christians. But he says that his precious faith is of equal standing with every other Christian.

And you know, when we consider the people, the Peter we find in the gospels, 30 years before this letter was written, 30 years earlier, you know, we see a man who had saving faith.

But like these Christians here, he had a small and shaky faith. He had a low and little faith. In fact, four times in Matthew's gospel, Jesus says to Peter and the other disciples, he says, oh ye of little faith.

[16 : 29] Jesus said it in the sermon on the mount. He said it in the storm on the sea of Galilee. He said it after Peter had sank in the water. And then he said it after the sign of feeding the 5,000.

Jesus said it in the storm, the sermon, the sinking and the sign. Four times Jesus said to Peter, oh ye of little faith. Oh ye of little faith.

But you know, this is the thing, each time Peter's faith was tested as a Christian, Peter's faith grew. And over those 30 years, Peter grew in grace.

He grew in faith. He grew in knowledge of his Savior Jesus Christ. And that's the encouragement Peter's giving to the Christian church, that he received the same gift of faith as them.

But when his faith was tested, his faith grew. When his faith was tested, his faith grew. Because over those 30 years of living and serving as a Christian, each time Peter exercised his faith or stepped out in faith or walked by faith or lived by faith, each and every time Peter says his faith grew and his confidence grew.

[17 : 46] And you're my Christian friend, what Peter's saying to you this evening is that you may feel that your saving faith is a small and shaky faith.

You may feel that your saving faith is a low and little faith. But all that you're going through in your providences, it has a purpose.

It has a purpose. And Peter says it's all so that your faith will continue to grow. And so that you will exercise your faith and you will step out in faith and that you'll walk by faith and live by faith.

And it's all so that you'll grow in your faith and grow in your grace and grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And that's what Peter is saying, that through faith, a growing Christian will have a growing confidence. A growing confidence not in self, but in our Savior Jesus Christ.

[18 : 50] And so a growing Christian will have a growing confidence. But then he says secondly, a growing Christian will have a growing comprehension.

A growing Christian will have a growing comprehension. Look at verse two, he says, 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.

In many ways, these words are Peter's dying prayer for the Christian church. This is Peter's dying wish that the church of Jesus Christ would not only grow in grace and peace, but also grow in knowledge of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter's dying prayer for the Christian church is that as a growing Christian, we'll have a growing comprehension of our Savior.

[20 : 00] Now what's interesting is that like saving faith in Jesus Christ, Peter says the knowledge of Jesus Christ is also a gracious gift of God.

Knowledge of Jesus Christ as our Savior is a sovereign act of God. It's all of grace. It's a gift to us. And Peter emphasizes this by saying that our knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior is according to God's divine power.

God's divine power. And you know that Greek word, the Greek word for power there at the beginning of verse three, it's where we get the English word dynamite from.

Because this is the wonder of God's gracious gift of salvation that when we come to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, it blows our mind.

It blows our mind. It has this explosive effect in our lives because it just comes powerfully into our experience.

[21 : 08] Because when we come to this saving knowledge of Jesus, it blows our mind to even think that God would look upon a sinner like me. And this is what we often say, isn't it?

It blows our mind to think that God would love a sinner like me and that God would be gracious to a sinner like me. But more than that, that God the Father would send His only begotten Son into this world to live the life I couldn't live.

And to die the death I should have died. And that my Savior Jesus Christ, He lived my life. He was condemned in my place.

He was crucified for me. He was nailed to a cross for my sin. He died my death. He rose triumphantly over the grave so that I would have the hope and the promise of eternal life.

My friend, it was when you were gifted the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that God's divine power blew your mind.

[22 : 13] It had this explosive effect in your life where everything, the old passed away and all became new.

And this is the wonder of it, that when you receive that gracious gift of knowledge of Jesus Christ, you experienced and you came to know about every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. My friend, Peter's dying prayer was that as a growing Christian, your salvation would never grow old and cold, but rather that your salvation would grow new and ever through in your experience. Because as you know my friend, we were once completely ignorant of all this. We were ignorant of Jesus Christ. We were without hope in the world.

We were strangers to grace and to God. We may have heard about Jesus, but we didn't know him. We were ignorant of his grace and ignorant of our own sin.

[23 : 25] We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were walking according to the course of this world. We were carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind.

But the wonder of wonders is that God, God who is rich in mercy, he reached down to us and he plucked us as brands from the burning and he saved us by his grace and he granted us the gift of faith in Jesus Christ and he granted to us the knowledge of Jesus Christ as our Savior.

And more than that says Peter, he graciously called us to himself by his Holy Spirit. That's what he says. 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.

You know, when Peter speaks about our calling, he's referring to our effectual calling. Because as you know from your own experience, there were many times over many years where you sat under the outward call of the gospel, where the word of God was preached and the seed was sown and the king was heralded and lifted high.

And yet in your ignorance, it had no lasting effect upon your heart and your life. But the wonder is that when the Lord started working in you by his grace, he graciously gifted to you faith.

[25 : 00] He graciously gifted to you knowledge so that when you heard the gospel, you were personally and effectively called and when that explosive divine power broke into your life and broke the shackles of your sin, you could no longer refuse and resist Jesus Christ like you did before.

No, my friend, you had to come to him. You were irresistibly drawn to him and you had to come and you had to bow your knee and you had to openly confess him as your Lord and Savior, all because you were personally and powerfully and effectively called to him.

And you know, I love the Catechism and I love that question in the Catechism. It's a question I could never get past when I was in Sunday school. But it's a lovely question.

What is effectual calling? Effectual calling is the work of God's spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our will as he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ as he's freely offered to us in the gospel.

That's the explosive power that takes place in our life when we are gifted faith and gifted knowledge and gifted that effectual call to come.

[26 : 28] And you know, my friend, Peter's dying prayer to the Christian church was that our Christianity will not be a religion about Jesus, but that our Christianity will be a relationship with Jesus.

Because as you know, relationships develop and deepen over time. A relationship grows. And Peter's prayer is that as a growing Christian, we would always have a growing comprehension of our saving faith in Jesus Christ, that we would have a growing comprehension of our knowledge of Jesus Christ and that we would have a growing comprehension of our effectual calling to Jesus Christ and that as a growing Christian, these things would never grow old and cold in our experience, but rather that they would grow new and ever true in our Christian experience. Because you know, when our relationship grows as a Christian, Peter says it will have an impact and it will have an impact upon our life and our godliness.

My friend, if we're a growing Christian with a growing comprehension, it'll have an impact upon our dependence, our devotion and our dedication to Jesus Christ.

It'll have an impact upon our Christian character, conduct and conversation. Why? Because we'll have a growing conviction.

[27 : 56] We'll have a growing conviction, which is what we see lastly. Peter says that a growing Christian will have a growing confidence, a growing comprehension and a growing conviction.

A growing Christian will have a growing confidence, a growing comprehension and a growing conviction. So lastly, a growing conviction.

We'll read again in verse 2. Peter says, may grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus, our Lord. His divine power is 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.

As we said, Peter's dying prayer is that between now and the second coming of Jesus Christ. His dying prayer is that the Christian church will keep praying and we will keep persevering and we will keep growing in grace.

But as all good gardeners and good crofters know, in order for a plant to grow upwards, it must first of all grow downwards.

[29 : 28] And you know, Peter certainly knew this to be true because he had heard Jesus tell the parable of the sower and Peter had heard how Jesus warned his listeners that if a growing Christian doesn't grow downwards, then they'll just be like the seed that was sown on the rocky ground because the rocky ground was the place with no depth and no dampness.

The rocky ground was the place where the seed fell but it couldn't put down roots. And Jesus said that the seed that falls on the rocky ground is like the person who believes for a while.

But when testing or trial or temptation comes, they quickly fall away. And Jesus says all that grew upward it withers because it didn't grow downwards.

And you know what Jesus emphasized and what Peter is now emphasizing here is that in order to be a growing Christian, we need to grow down in order to grow up.

We need to grow down in order to grow up. We need to be rooted and grounded in the good soil of God's Word. We need to be rooted and grounded in the great and precious promises of God's Word.

[30 : 46] And you know, I love Peter's description of God's Word because he describes God's Word as full of great and precious promises.

But you know what I find interesting is that in both his letters, Peter describes all the things that we need to be rooted and grounded in. He describes them as precious.

It seems that Peter's favorite word is precious. He says in 1 Peter that we have a precious faith. And our precious faith is in a precious savior.

And he then goes on to say that the church consists of precious stones, stones that have been redeemed by precious blood. And as the redeemed, he says, we're to have a precious Christian character, conduct and conversation.

And then here in a second letter, Peter again says that we have a precious faith, which is to be rooted and grounded in the great and precious promises of God's Word.

[31 : 50] We have a precious faith that is to be rooted and grounded in the great and precious promises of God's Word. And you know, is that not what the hymn writer said? Is that not what the hymn writer emphasized that we're to stand upon the promises of God?

The hymn writer said standing on the promises that cannot fail when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail by the living word of God, I shall prevail standing on the promises of God.

And you know, that's what we need to do. We need to be rooted and grounded in the good soil of God's Word. And you know, that's why Bible studies are so important.

That's why gathering together around God's Word on Wednesday evening is so important because it's good for us to be rooted and grounded in the great and precious promises of God's Word.

It's good for us, my friend, to be grounded in the good soil of God's Word. We need to grow down in order to grow up. But you know, Peter says that we need to be rooted and grounded upon the precious promises of God's Word for a purpose.

[33 : 06] There's a purpose in this. He says it's so that we will become partakers of the divine nature. We will become partakers of the divine nature, which simply means that we will become Christ-like.

We'll become Christ-like. Peter says that as a growing Christian, we're to have a growing conviction so that we live like Jesus and love like Jesus.

As a growing Christian, we're to have a growing conviction about the Word of God and the people of God and the Church of Christ and the Lord's Day and the Lord's Cause.

We're to have a growing conviction that's rooted and grounded upon the precious promises of God's Word. We're to have a growing conviction that grows down in order to grow up.

My friend, as a growing Christian, we're to have a growing conviction that's rooted and grounded in God's Word. And so as Peter begins his final farewell to the Christian Church, he says that a growing Christian will have three things.

[34 : 18] A growing Christian will have a growing confidence, a growing comprehension and a growing conviction. And in order to be a growing Christian, we need to grow down in order to grow up because a growing Christian will have a growing confidence, a growing comprehension and a growing conviction.

But you know what Peter's saying here, it's clearly taught to us in the book of Psalms. In fact, what Peter's saying here is taught to us in the first Psalm because Psalm 1, and with this I'll close, Psalm 1 presents to us two people on two paths going towards two positions.

One is reckless and godless with God's Word. The other is rooted and grounded in God's Word.

One is reckless and godless with God's Word. The other is rooted and grounded in God's Word.

And the Psalmist says that the one which is reckless and godless with God's Word is cursed. And they're cursed because they're like the chaff, which the wind drives away.

But the other, he says, the one who is rooted and grounded in God's Word, he says that man has perfect blessedness. And they don't walk astray.

[35 : 46] Why? Because they're like a tree. They're like a tree planted by a river that grows and bears fruit. They're like a tree that has grown down in order that it can grow up.

They're like a tree that is rooted and grounded in the Word of God. That's what it is to be the blessed man. That's what it is to be a growing Christian.

And you know, someone asks us, how do you want to live your life? How do you want to live your life? Do you want to live your life reckless and godless?

Or do you want to live your life rooted and grounded in God's Word? Do you want to live like the chaff which the wind drives away?

Or do you want to live like the tree that's planted by a river and in its season yields its fruit and his leaf faded? Never.

[36 : 46] How do you want to live your life? Do you want to be a growing Christian with a growing confidence, a growing comprehension and a growing conviction?

If that's the kind of Christian you want to be, my friend, then Peter is saying to you this evening, grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Grow in grace. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together. O Lord, our gracious God, may we give thanks to thee for thy Word, thy Word that is full of great and precious promises.

And may we give thanks for that reminder this evening, that we are saved by grace through faith and not of ourselves. It surely is the gift of God.

We thank the Lord that that gift of faith has been granted to us and that that knowledge of Jesus has been given. And Lord, we give thanks for calling us from darkness unto thine own marvellous light, but to help us, Lord, as thy people, to continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that we would be a growing Christian, a growing Christian who is like the tree planted by the river, drawing its nourishment and its refreshment from the life-giving water that comes through the Word of God.

[38 : 24] O Lord, help us, we pray, as thy people, to be rooted and grounded in the Word of God, that we might have that growing conviction and that growing comprehension of God's Word.

O Lord, bless us, we pray, guide us, we ask, that thou wouldst undertake for us, even in the week that lies ahead, that whatever is before us, help us, Lord, to know that the best is yet to come.

Keep us in, we pray, go before us, taking away our iniquity and receiving us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our time to a conclusion by singing in that Psalm which we mentioned, Psalm 1.

Psalm 1 in the Scottish Psalter, a Psalm that reminds us about two people on two paths going towards two positions. A Psalm which reminds us about one who is reckless and godless, or the other one who is rooted and grounded in God's Word, the man who is blessed or the man who is cursed, and which one are we?

That's what Psalm 1 asks us, which person are we? That man hath perfect blessedness, who walketh not astray in counsel of ungodly men, nor stands in sinners' way, nor sitteth in the scorner's chair, but placeth his delight upon God's law and meditates on his law day and night.

[39 : 58] He shall be like a tree that grows near planted by a river, which in its season yields his fruit and his leaf fadeeth never, and all he doth shall prosper well, though wicked are not so, but like they are unto the chaff, which wind drives to and fro.

Let's sing on to the end of the Psalm of Psalm 1 to God's praise. Let's sing on to the end of the Psalm of Psalm 1 to God's praise.

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