

“GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU FROM PETER.”

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Scripture Texts: II Peter 1:1-2

Introduction.

People don't write letters anymore. They are going the way of the pocket calendar, the checkbook and the flip phone. Some of you may have collections of letters written by relatives, a few of you get letters from Holland yet, maybe some of you still have a stash of love letters somewhere you hope the kids never find.

Letters are being replaced by e-mails, texts or tweets. Thank God Jesus came in the first century and not the twenty first century. What a privilege we have of reading Peter's mail, which of course is also God's mail.

As we study this letter we are reading the very words of God, they have full and complete divine authority. Receive this as God's truth for you. Take it seriously and take it to heart. Having heard these words we will be accountable for what we do with them.

This is God's revelation, God's truth. You can say you don't understand it, but you cannot say you don't believe it or you disagree with it. That you do at the peril of your soul.

This was written late in Peter's life around 67 AD when he was in prison in Rome, just before he was martyred for his faith in Jesus. It has some marks of being a last will and testament.

What a debt we owe to apostles who poured out their faith and teaching and their own blood from prisons in Rome. Both Peter and Paul were martyred for their faith under the persecution of Emperor Nero.

Peter wrote this out of a pastor's heart, out of a genuine love for these Christian brothers and sisters. He wrote it to comfort and encourage and to strengthen their faith in difficult and challenging times.

Our world is different from theirs in terms of material possessions, advances in inventions, what we are able to do because of changes in transportation, medicine and technology. But from a spiritual point of view, from the perspective of our hearts and

souls there is no difference, no change. The superficial aspects of life have changed dramatically but we have the same fears and doubts and problems and struggles with unbelief.

Where is God, what is He doing, why doesn't He answer my prayers, why do things seem to be getting worse, why are there problems in the church? Unbelief can sneak up on us when we are tired or frustrated, when we are grieving or in pain, when things seem to be falling apart.

This letter is almost 2000 years old and yet every word of it is just as true and relevant today as it was when it was read in those churches in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. If we will open our hearts to it and ask God to speak to us through it, He will and we will receive food for our souls.

If we will saturate our hearts and minds with the power and truth of God's Word it will change our lives and fill us with grace and peace. This is God's Word for us today.

II Peter 1:1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

In every list of the disciples names in the Gospels, Peter's is first. No name except Jesus' is mentioned more often in the four Gospels than the name Peter. No disciple speaks as often or as much as Peter. No disciple is addressed by Jesus more than Peter. No disciple is rebuked as harshly or dares to rebuke Jesus like Peter. No other disciple confessed Jesus as boldly or denied Jesus as vehemently. Peter leaves the deepest footprint on the pages of the Gospels.

His name is known in every age and spoken in every church. Churches and schools and universities and hospitals bear his name. An island in the Atlantic, a city in Florida and the second largest city in Russia. It is a common first name in the several languages.

Peter, a simple, uneducated, first-century, Galilean fisherman. One man among billions scattered across this planet across the millennia. One simple life caught in the net of God's sovereign grace, a fisherman turned preacher, evangelist, apostle.

Simon Peter. This double name reflects Peter's double life. Simon is his old name, his birth name, his fisherman name. Peter is his new name given to him by Jesus.

It is good to remember what we were before Christ and what we are becoming by His grace. What a mark of humility and honesty and openness to use both names.

Most of us have a past, a life before Christ and after Christ. Most of us have things in our past we are not proud of, in fact things we are ashamed of, things we would just as soon forget and hope no one knows about.

But Peter holds out a more commendable approach. If we can acknowledge our sin, if we can be humble before others, we are then also in a greater position to acknowledge God's grace and give Him glory.

Peter's sin is spread across the pages of Scripture for all eternity. In fact his denial of Jesus is one of the few events mentioned in all four Gospels.

Peter bears the painful emotional and spiritual scars of his past life, of his denial, of how far he had fallen. But he who has been forgiven much loves much, so perhaps no disciple loved Jesus as much.

This letter comes to us with the voice and authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ. But notice Peter doesn't flaunt his authority, and in fact he make his apostleship secondary to his being a servant. He is living out our Lord's teaching when Jesus said to the disciples:

Luke 22:25-26 The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; ... But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become the youngest and the leader as one who serves.

By servant Peter is saying he is totally devoted to Christ, as one owned by His master. He is not ashamed to confess he is a servant of Jesus Christ, a confession that cost him his life.

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is the Gospel, this is what it means to be a Christian.

Notice what Peter says about this faith. He says our faith is equal to the faith of the apostles. Imagine that. How many of you ever considered yourselves to have anything equal to the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ? Peter put his spiritual standing on equal footing with yours if yours is in Jesus.

There is not apostle faith and everyone else faith. There is not Jewish faith and Gentile faith. There is not pastor faith and parishioner faith. There is not long time Christian faith and new believer faith. There is one Lord and one faith and one baptism, one God and Father over all (Ephesians 4:5-6).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the great leveler, it puts all of us on exactly that same footing, we all have equal standing. I know we look around here and compare ourselves with each other. But in the household of God all distinctions go away, there is neither slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female, Dutch or non-Dutch, rich or poor, educated or uneducated.

This got me to thinking how helpful it would be if this congregation were much more diverse, blacks and whites, people who were ex-cons, people who were really different from us, but who all loved Jesus. How good it would be if we could see all the ways we divide ourselves up become absolutely irrelevant and meaningless. What a taste of heaven it would be.

I am glad that there are no slaves in our church, but can you imagine living in a time when you could be worshipping next to a slave and realizing that your faith is equal to theirs, you are no better or worse? Like Philemon and Onesimus.

We are all saved by the same faith. There is one faith and it's an apostolic faith. If you are a Christian you have the very same faith as Peter and Paul, as James and John. We will all have equal standing before the throne of God.

Don't demean or belittle your faith. You have received a gift and it is a great gift, of apostolic proportions.

There is one faith, one Gospel. And what is the Gospel? What is the center of the Gospel? Look at our text for this morning. It's right there. In fact it is so plain you might not even see it. Our text is made up of three short sentences and Peter hid the Gospel at the end of all three sentences. I had never noticed this until this week.

II Peter 1:1-2 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*:

2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of *Jesus our Lord*.

Jesus is the Gospel, the Gospel is Jesus. There is no Gospel apart from Jesus. Jesus is the center of the Gospel.

And the essence of the Gospel is that we are made right with God through the righteousness of Jesus. Our faith is not grounded in ourselves or any goodness in us. The only way for a sinner like me to be reconciled to a holy God is for the sinless,

righteous Son of God to die for me and for God to accept His righteousness as my own.

Is the fact that Jesus Christ is your only righteousness before God precious to you? Does the fact that this faith enables you to stand before God without guilt or shame or condemnation mean everything to you? Does the fact that by this faith you have been delivered over from any fear of death and have the hope of eternal life fill you with gratitude?

Does the fact that this faith is a gift of God's grace given to you out of His love for you make it all the more precious to you? Does it give you peace and comfort in life and in death?

The word obtained here is only used three times in the NT and every time it refers to lots, meaning something gained not by effort or work or being deserved. It came by God's choice, not by our effort, so there is no room for boasting.

Implications and application.

Verse one is filled with humility, with sweet humility. In this manner Peter has made the Gospel most precious.

He is Simeon Peter, a man with a sinful, broken, flawed past that has been raised up by Jesus to be an apostle. But Peter doesn't let his position or status go to his head, he prefers to be known as servant.

If someone asks you who you are or what you do, what effect would it have if we said, "Well, I am a teacher or business man or accountant or secretary or farmer or carpenter or mechanic or supervisor or homemaker, but most of all and most importantly I am a servant of Jesus Christ."

But even being a servant of Jesus Christ is not grounds for boasting because we are only that by the gift of faith given to us because of a righteousness that is not our own but from Jesus.

Peter was a big, loud, extroverted, boastful man. He made some big claims only to fall and fall hard. He was humbled by the Lord and now is a man who walks with a limp, but a limp now used by God.

Peter knows well the man he was before Christ and the man he is now because of Christ, and he gives all the glory to God for the grace he has received.

This is a man who knows guilt and grace and because of grace he doesn't have to hide his guilt.

I don't like pride in others and I hate it in myself. So when I meet a man like Peter I am drawn to him. This is who I want to be like. This is a man I can listen to, this is a man I can learn from.

Peter is a man who fell dramatically and deeply, and he now comes to us to strengthen our faith and our walk with God.

Peter at the end of his life wants to speak out of his own experience to help us. Jesus gave two specific commands to Peter about what he should do after Jesus ascended back into heaven.

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And *when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*"

John 21:17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "*Feed my sheep.*"

This letter is Peter being faithful to what Jesus told him to do. This letter is written to us to strengthen our faith, lest we too should fall.

And remember Jesus' promise to Peter, that He was praying for him. He fell but was restored. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father praying for us and when we fall we can be restored and reconciled through repentance and forgiveness.

And when we fall and are restored we are in a better place to strengthen the faith of others.

Come hungry, come open, come praying for God to open the eyes of your hearts to receive His good gifts for us. Come hungry for God's grace to us in II Peter and come hungry to God's grace to us at this table where fallen and repentant sinners receive the gift of Christ's righteousness. This is the Gospel, this is Jesus, His body and His blood for us.

Holy Father, thank you for this letter from a man like us, a man who fell so far and so hard, and who received so much grace. Take his life and writing and by your Holy Spirit apply it to us that we can walk in your will and in your way.