

2 Peter 1:1b-2

Introduction

Last week we saw how Simeon Peter identified himself as “a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ” and how this points us to the honored stewardship that he was entrusted with in the household of God. Peter is writing to us as someone who was with Jesus and who was directly commissioned and sent out by Jesus to teach and to preach the brand new, never before revealed realities of the New Covenant and the Gospel of the kingdom. Only a few men at the very beginning of the history of the church were ever given this honored stewardship. And yet for all this, it’s still true that this was “only” a stewardship – a sacred trust that God sovereignly allotted to those who were His “bondslaves.” Can the apostle boast in his apostleship? Not at all! Because the very essence of his apostleship is a stewardship entrusted to one who belongs not to himself, but one who is—body and soul—the property of another. It’s for this very reason that Peter goes on to say, in the second half of verse one:

I. 2 Peter 1:1b — To those who have been allotted a faith of equal standing with ours...

Did you hear in these words the incredibly high honor and privilege that’s ours? The faith that we have in Christ is a faith of equal standing and equal privilege with the faith of the apostles themselves. This doesn’t mean that we’ve been given the same stewardship that they were given so that we’re all apostles of Jesus Christ. But this does mean that the faith we have in Christ accomplishes in us a *salvation* no less powerful, and no less complete, and no less glorious than it has accomplished in the Apostles Paul, and Peter, and James, and John. I wonder: When do we ever fully realize the great treasure that we all possess as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ?

Peter, right at the very start of his letter, is reminding us of this treasure that we have not only so we can see our infinite riches and privilege, but also so we’ll be careful to *guard* this treasure from every enemy – at all costs. Our subjective faith in Christ is rooted in the objective doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (*our* faith is rooted in *the* faith), and so therefore one of the chief dangers to this faith that we possess is the danger of false teaching. It’s this false teaching that’s the major concern of this letter, and so that explains why here at the very beginning, Peter is encouraging us to see the priceless, inestimable value of the treasure that we have – this treasure that we must be careful and diligent to guard. The faith that we have is of equal standing with those who walked and talked with Jesus, and who were commissioned and sent out by Jesus Himself as His apostles. I think of Jesus words to the Apostle Thomas:

➤ John 20:29 — “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

But there’s more that Peter wants us to see.

II. 2 Peter 1:1b — To those who have been allotted a faith of equal standing with ours...

This treasure that we have—this saving faith in Christ—is something of such infinite value that it was completely and totally out of our reach. Not a one of us could attain to saving faith because in ourselves we’re all dead in our sins and by nature children of God’s wrath, incapable of any spiritual good – incapable, even, of truly seeking after the *true* God (Eph. 2; Rom. 3). And so Peter reminds us that this saving faith in Christ *that we now have*, has been sovereignly allotted to us as a free, unearned and unmerited gift.

Both the ESV and the KJV say, “to those who have *obtained* a faith of equal standing with ours” (cf. HCSB; ASV). But this then begs the question, “How exactly did we obtain this faith?” Other translations say, “to those who have *received* a faith of equal standing with ours” (NASB; NIV; NRSV; NCV). This protects us better against the idea that faith was something at all within our own reach or that we’ve obtained faith in Christ by any of our own ability. Instead, faith in Christ is something we’ve received, and therefore something that God *gave* to us. So other translations speak of those to whom God has “given” or “granted” this faith (NLT; NET). The Greek word, here, is actually used only three other times in the entire New Testament (and only twice in the Greek translation of the Old Testament). In John 19 we read:

- John 19:24 — So [the soldiers] said to one another, “Let us not tear it [Jesus’ tunic], but **cast lots** for it to see whose it shall be.”

That word for “casting lots” is the word that we have here in Peter. In Luke chapter one, we read:

- Luke 1:9 — According to the custom of the priesthood, [Zechariah] **was chosen by lot** to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

Once again, this is the same word that we have here in Peter. In both of these verses, which priest enters the temple, and which soldier gets the tunic has to appear to us to be completely random. The point of the lot is that it falls out to people totally irrespective of anything at all in them. And yet, even so, we know that in the secret providence of God, every decision of the lot is “from the Lord” (Prov. 16:33). From our perspective, the drawing of lots reflects a completely random means of *choosing*, and yet the choice of the lot always ultimately reflects the sovereign decree of God. And so Peter says of Judas in Acts chapter one (using, once again, the same word):

- Acts 1:17 — He was numbered among us and **was allotted** his share [lot] in this ministry.

So, the point of this word in our context here in Peter is that this saving faith in Christ *that we now have*, has been sovereignly allotted to us—to us whom God has sovereignly chosen—as a free, unearned, and unmerited gift. We could translate the Apostle Peter’s words like this: “To those who have been granted by God’s sovereign choice a faith of equal standing with ours...” I think of what Paul says in Ephesians chapter two:

- Ephesians 2:8 — For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this [—this salvation, including the faith through which this salvation comes—*this*] is not of you [*ek su*]; it is [—this salvation, including the faith through which it comes—it is] the gift of God.

One commentator puts it well: “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. He appointed, as it were by lot, that Peter’s readers would receive such faith.” (Schreiner) And so also, today, if any of us here have saving faith, we should be able to confess from our hearts that this is only because He has appointed, as it were by lot, that we should receive this freely given gift of faith – a faith that was otherwise entirely and hopelessly beyond our reach.

Isn’t this a ground for the truest and deepest kind of humility in every possible aspect and facet of our lives? And now let me ask you: Should this reality make us value less the treasure of this saving faith that we have? Shouldn’t it cause us to do the very opposite – to cherish and to guard this freely given gift more highly than any other treasure that we have in this world? This is what Peter wants us to see – that this treasure that we have—this saving faith in Christ—is something of such infinite value that we should want to devote our lives to guarding, and nourishing, and strengthening, and protecting this faith, at all costs. In particular, if we don’t understand the infinite value of the treasure we have, we won’t be careful and diligent to guard this treasure as we should in the face of the danger of “false teaching.”

III. 2 Peter 1:1c — To those who have been allotted a faith of equal standing with ours **by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:**

What does it mean that God grants to us saving faith *in*, or *by*, or *through* (Gr. *en*) His righteousness? Wouldn’t it make more sense to think of God granting us saving faith *in/by/through* His mercy and grace? In other words, if God grants us saving faith in His righteousness, does this mean He’s just being “fair,” or giving us something we deserved? This must never be! So what, then, is God’s righteousness?—And what does it have to do with the saving faith that we’ve all received?

In the Old Testament, the righteousness of God refers many times to his faithfulness to “do *right* by His covenant.” The Free Dictionary says that to do right by someone is “to act... in a way that... meets the approval of someone else.” So in the Bible, God never, ever fails to act always in a way that’s in perfect keeping with the covenants that He establishes with us – He never, ever fails to do right by His covenant. Now, since all of God’s covenants with us are ultimately redemptive and saving covenants, there’s a sense in which we can say that God’s “righteousness” is the ground of His “salvation.” We can even say that God’s “righteousness” *is* His “salvation and God’s “righteous acts” *are* His “redemptive, saving acts.” Isn’t that a wonderful and marvelous thing – that our *salvation* as sinners can be in this way the glorious display of God’s *righteousness*? When God delivers and saves the people that He has sovereignly chosen and entered into covenant with, He’s doing right by His covenant. This doesn’t mean that God is accountable to a standard outside of Himself because even the covenant itself is just the working out, in time, of God’s own eternal plan and purpose. In other words, to say that God always does right by His covenant is, in the end, the same thing as saying that God always does right by *Himself*. And so this saving “righteousness” of God, rooted as it is in His gracious covenant, is for us from beginning to end pure mercy and grace! Listen, now, to these verses (cf. Ps. 22:31; 65:5; 85:1–13; 88:12; 89:14–16; 103:17–18):

- Psalm 51:14 — Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your **righteousness**.
- Psalm 143:1-2, 11 — Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your **righteousness**! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you... For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In your **righteousness** bring my soul out of trouble!
- Psalm 31:1 — In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your **righteousness** deliver me!
- Psalm 35:24, 28 — Vindicate me, O LORD, my God, according to your **righteousness**, and let them not rejoice over me! ... Then my tongue shall tell of your **righteousness** and of your praise all the day long.
- Psalm 40:9-10 — I have told the glad news of **righteousness** in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. I have not hidden your **righteousness** within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.
- Psalm 71:15-16 (cf. 71:1-3, 19, 23-24) — My mouth will tell of your **righteous acts**, of your deeds of salvation all the day, for their number is past my knowledge. With the mighty deeds of the Lord God I will come; I will remind them of your **righteousness**, yours alone.
- Micah 6:5 — O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal [crossing of the Jordan River], that you may know the **righteous acts** of the LORD.
- Micah 7:9 — I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his **righteousness**.
- Isaiah 41:2 (NASB) — Who has aroused one [Cyrus] from the east whom He calls in **righteousness** to His feet? He delivers up nations before him and subdues kings. He makes them like dust with his sword, As the wind-driven chaff with his bow.
- Isaiah 45:8, 13 — Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down **righteousness**; let the earth open, that salvation and **righteousness** may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the LORD have created it... I have stirred him [Cyrus] up in **righteousness**, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward,” says the LORD of hosts.

The righteousness of God is revealed in the covenant to be the merciful and gracious salvation of God. What an awesome miracle this is! When we come to the New Covenant in particular, we see that at the heart of the New Covenant is God's determination to grant the new birth and a true saving faith to all His people – to all His elect whom He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 9:15; Mat. 26:28). So, can you see what this means? It means that even the sending of Christ into this world to be the Savior of the world was an expression not only of God's infinite mercy and grace, but also—equally—an expression of God's righteousness. So we read in Isaiah chapter forty-two:

- Isaiah 42:6-7 — “I am the LORD; I have called you [my servant] in **righteousness**; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the

nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

And then, in Isaiah fifty-one:

- Isaiah 51:5–8 — My **righteousness** draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool, but my **righteousness** will be forever, and my salvation to all generations.

So now let me repeat what I said before and then draw another application: At the heart of the New Covenant is God’s determination to grant the new birth and a true saving faith to all of His chosen people.

- Jeremiah 31:31–34 — “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. . . For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

What God is saying in these verses is that in the New Covenant—when the New Covenant comes—He Himself will grant to *all* His chosen people a genuine, saving faith which will bear the fruit of a genuine faith-righteousness. So, can you see what this means? It means that even the granting of saving faith to us is an expression not only of God’s infinite mercy and grace, but also—equally—an expression of God’s righteousness – of God’s unfailing faithfulness to do right by His covenant, which is itself the working out of His own eternal plan and purpose. Now maybe we can understand, and then exult in what Peter writes to us:

IV. 2 Peter 1:1c — To those who have been allotted a faith of equal standing with ours **by the righteousness of our God and Savior JESUS CHRIST:**

Did you hear that?—"By the righteousness of our God and Savior **Jesus Christ.**" Jesus *is* the righteousness of God, not only because of his sinless moral perfection (his holiness and purity), but also—just as importantly—because He *is* the revelation of God’s salvation – of God’s faithfulness to do right by His covenant, according to His eternal plan and purpose. And do you know what this means? The righteousness and salvation of God revealed in the flesh must be the very same thing as God Himself revealed and manifested in the flesh. The New Testament writers all understood this, and so very rarely did they feel the need to actually call Jesus, “God.”

In fact, one of the reasons they avoided this was to maintain the trinitarian distinction in “persons” between the Father (often referred to simply as God) and the Son (especially viewed in his humanity). We see this in the very next verse of 2 Peter:

- 2 Peter 1:2 — May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

The New Testament writers didn’t need to explicitly call Jesus “God” because they were already just as clearly saying this very thing whenever they proclaimed that Jesus was, in His own person, the righteousness of God and the salvation of God.

- Matthew 1:21 — You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.
- Acts 4:12 — There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
- Acts 5:31 — God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Only *God* can be “the righteousness of God.” Only *God* can be “the salvation of God.” This is why the true and full deity of Jesus matters so deeply to us – because it’s essential to the glory of God and because without it there is no salvation of sinners. Peter understood this, and so in our passage this morning, we have one of the few places in the New Testament where Jesus *is* actually called, “God”—“To those who have been allotted a faith of equal standing with ours *by the righteousness of our God and Savior – JESUS CHRIST.*”¹ See how Peter confesses that Jesus is God not as a dry and academic “proof text” for use only in winning arguments! Instead, Peter confesses that Jesus is God in the context of exulting in God’s saving righteousness – the righteousness by which our God and Savior Jesus Christ has Himself granted to us saving faith.

Conclusion

Saving faith, brothers and sisters! A faith that’s of equal standing with all others who have ever been saved, or ever will be saved – including even the great “giants” of the faith, such as the

¹ Some argue that there is no reference here to the deity of Jesus. However, only a severe theological bias can deny the clear meaning conveyed by the Greek grammar. Peter clearly means to identify Jesus as *both* “Savior” *and* “God.” The Greek literally reads: “**by the righteousness of the God of us and Savior Jesus Christ.**” If Peter had wanted to *distinguish* “God” from “our Savior Jesus Christ” he would have duplicated the article (“by **the** righteousness of the God of us and **the** Savior Jesus Christ”). Additionally, notice that there is only one “our” (“*of us*”), and it comes after “God” and before “and.” Just as a single article governs both “God” and “Savior,” so a single “our” governs both “God” and “Savior” (“by the righteousness of **the** God **of us** and [~~the~~] Savior [~~of us~~] Jesus Christ”). Finally, Peter uses this identical Greek construction in three other places where he clearly means to identify Jesus as *both* “Savior” *and* “Lord.”

2 Peter 1:11 — In this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [of the Lord of us and Savior Jesus Christ].

2 Peter 2:20 — If, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [of the Lord of us and Savior Jesus Christ], they are again entangled in them and overcome...

2 Peter 3:18a — Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [of the Lord of us and Savior Jesus Christ].

In the end, this is all just a long, roundabout way of stating the obvious. When Peter says, “by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,” he is calling Jesus “God.”

apostles and the prophets of old. A faith that accomplishes in us a salvation no less powerful, and no less complete, and no less glorious that it has accomplished in the Apostles Peter, and James, and John, and Paul. A faith that justifies completely, and sanctifies wholly, and glorifies forever.

Saving faith! A faith that was utterly and hopelessly out of all our reach, but has now been sovereignly granted to us – as it were, by lot (not randomly, but wholly irrespective of anything at all in us).

Saving faith! A faith that has come to us by the saving *righteousness* of our God and Savior Jesus Christ – by God’s own faithfulness to do right by His covenant, which is the working out in time of His own eternal plan and purpose. And so it’s by this righteousness of God that He reveals—in all its splendor—His infinite mercy and grace.

When we come to fully understand this treasure that we have—this saving faith that is ours—will we not gladly devote ourselves to guarding and protecting this treasure at all costs – especially from the danger of false teaching that in every generation arises within the church? Will we not seek to *nourish* and *feed* this faith and thank God daily for His unspeakable gift? Will we not seek to *exercise* our faith in the reading of God’s word *and* in obedience to God’s word? When we come to fully understand this treasure that we have, will we not always be calling out to God in saving faith, casting ourselves upon His sovereign, saving righteousness?