

God's Message to Us in Second Peter

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Introduction

Today we come to the second epistle of Peter.

- As I mentioned to you last week, both of his epistles had to have been written before AD 68 because he was martyred in AD 67 or 68.
- We saw that his first epistle was a general epistle in that it was written to those he called **“the pilgrims of the Dispersion”** in a number of different provinces.
 - He says that they are **“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”**
 - God the Father chose them, God the Spirit sanctified them by uniting them to Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ to whom they are united is the one that they obey as Lord and whose blood cleanses them from their sin.
 - In this first letter, Peter then told them how they have an inheritance in heaven.
 - That is a marvellous thing to think about— it is an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that will never fade away.
 - And not only that, but God also preserves us for this inheritance so that our faith will never fail—we are kept by the power of God through faith... we have a seed of life (God's word of promise) implanted in us that cannot perish.
 - And then in the rest of the letter Peter essentially told them (and us) how to live as those who have this certain inheritance in heaven.
 - We are to see that we honour God as His children in the world, patiently bearing injustice that comes our way from a world that does not love God.
 - We are also to love our brothers and sisters, and to live in the beauty of godliness as those who are heirs of God's house—we'll be together forever as His children.

As might be expected, Peter has similar concerns in his second letter which was written to the same people (as can be seen from the fact that he mentions his first letter).

- Only, this time, instead of focusing so much on the pressures they have from those outside the church, he focuses on the pressures they have from those inside...
 - from false teachers within the church.
- We need to understand that not everyone who is baptised and professes to be a believer *is* a true believer.
 - It is very important for us to be sure that we true believers.
 - Jesus stressed this when He told the parables and when He said that not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” to Him will inherit the kingdom.
 - Paul also gave many warnings about making sure that we are in the faith. We also saw a lot of that in the book of Hebrews.
- Of course different epistles develop this teaching in different ways.
 - In Second Peter we will find that each chapter has a particular focus for us.

- In chapter 1, we are told that as believers, we are joined to Christ to give us life. Therefore, we make our calling sure by bringing forth fruit for God.
- In chapter 2, we are told to watch out for false teachers who lead their disciples on the path of destruction that they themselves are following.
- And in chapter 3, Peter assures us that judgment day will surely come, so we need to make sure that we continue in the way of God.

Let's go ahead and explore each chapter in more detail.

I. Chapter 1: As believers we are to bring forth fruit as those who are joined to Christ.

- A. If you are a believer, God has given you all that you need to bring forth fruit for Him.
- This is a marvellous thing.
 - 1. We who were dead in sins can now live for God through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Peter opens his letter in verse 1 by addressing **“those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”**
 - Your faith is the same as Peter's in that it is in Jesus Christ.
 - He is our righteous God and Saviour who gives us eternal life.
 - b. Peter explains that (vs 3), **His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...**
 - In Him, you have everything that you need to live for God...
 - In Him, you have become a partaker of the divine nature—not that you become a god, but that you have new life for God given to you by the Son of God.
 - By Him, you have (v. 4) escaped the corruption that in the world through lust (sinful desires) and are able to grow into ways that please God.
 - 2. We might illustrate by saying that, in Christ, you are now God's garden.
 - a. You came to Christ for forgiveness and cleansing from sin.
 - Because He represents us all, He was punished for our sins and we are credited with His righteousness.
 - That is how you were reconciled to God.
 - But it does not end with reconciliation.
 - b. You were also united to Christ for life and virtue.
 - And that is what Peter is especially concerned about in 2 Peter.
 - Christ is the garden, and by coming to Him, you were planted in Him so that now you can bring forth the fruits of new life.
 - That is the fruit that grows in God's garden.
 - You are now able to bear fruit that pleases God.
- B. Peter exhorts you to bring forth this fruit.
1. See how he describes it in 2 Peter 1:5-8: **But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue** [the word *virtue* means excellence in being what you

are—an excellent knife cuts well], **to virtue knowledge** [knowing good from bad], ⁶ **to knowledge self-control** [being able to do what is good], **to self-control perseverance** [being able to keep doing what is good under pressure], **to perseverance godliness** [to have a religious life, living for God and communing with Him in the means of grace], ⁷ **to godliness brotherly kindness** [so that you use your abilities to help others], **and to brotherly kindness love** [the committed love that aims for the highest good in the one that is loved]. ⁸ **For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

- To **abound** means that this beautiful fruit keeps on increasing.
 - Then, instead of being barren in your knowledge of Christ, you will be full of beautiful fruit that pleases God.

2. When you grow this fruit, it proves that you truly are in Christ.
 - a. If the fruit is not there, it shows that you have forgotten that in Christ you were cleansed from your sins.
 - To forget that suggests that you may even be blind... that you never really came to know Christ at all...you are (verse 9) **short sighted even to blindness.**
 - b. If this fruit is abounding, then it makes it clear that you are in Christ and are on your way to heaven.
 - So Peter says: **Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**
 - How else could you have fruit if not from union with Christ?
 - If you are bearing fruit as one who is planted in Him, you will never stumble.

C. How important this is! What could be more important?

1. Peter avows in 2 Peter 1:12-14 that he is not going to let them forget this as long as he lives (as he puts it, for “**as long as I am in this tent.**”
 - Even though they already knew that they should bear fruit, Peter says that he is going to keep on reminding them again and again.
 - And not only will he keep on reminding them as long as he lives...
2. He is also writing this letter so that they will have a reminder after he dies.
 - That is what he is getting at in verse 15: “**Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.**”
 - Peter knew, and the church knew, that what he was writing was scripture.
 - When the churches got letters from the apostles, they knew that these letters had divine authority and they cherished them and shared them.
3. You can tell that Peter knows that his letter will endure as scripture because of what he says in verses 16-21 about the character of his writings.
 - In verse 16, he says that he and the other apostles did not follow cunningly devised fables, but were eyewitnesses of Christ’s majesty.
 - They heard the Father declare that Jesus was His beloved Son (v. 17).
 - They saw the glory of Jesus revealed on the mount of transfiguration (v. 18).

- Peter explains that prophecy (such as he writes) is reliable because the interpretation that he and the other prophets and apostles give concerning what they saw was not based on their own private interpretation... verse 21: **“for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”**
 - To be *moved* is to be *borne up* or *carried along* by the Spirit so that what they wrote was God’s Word—it was God-breathed and inerrant.
- The immediate point is that we should do what Peter says in this letter and make our calling and election sure by bearing fruit in Jesus Christ.
 - This call does not ultimately come from Peter, but from God.
 - Peter is a true prophet who speaks as he is moved by the Holy Spirit—words that bring about fruit through Christ.

TRANS> But we must beware of false prophets in the church.

- That is the subject to which Peter turns in chapter 2.
 - In this chapter, Peter tells us to:

II. Watch out for false teachers who lead their disciples on the path of destruction that they themselves are following.

- Their teaching does not lead you to Christ so that you will bear fruit.
- A. They claim to belong to Christ, but they deny Him as Saviour.
1. Look at what Peter says about them in 2:1: **“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.”**
 - When Peter says that the Lord *bought them*, he doesn’t mean that they are personally redeemed—but that they are professing members of the church that He has purchased or redeemed.
 - They have the mark of baptism upon them, but they do not have saving faith. Therefore, they bring swift destruction upon themselves.
 - We find an abundance of such false teachers in the Old Testament. Just read the book of Jeremiah!
 - Jeremiah told of the coming exile, but the false prophets denied it.
 - As a result, Jeremiah was persecuted and the false prophets were honoured at the time.
 - But Jeremiah’s writings are the ones in our Bibles because Jeremiah’s prophecies were the ones that all came true.
 2. Sadly, Peter tells us (2 Pet 2:2) that *many* will follow their destructive ways.
 - There are always people in the church who have never come to Jesus for cleansing even though they have the mark of baptism on their flesh.
 - Because their hearts are not renewed by the Holy Spirit, they are attracted to false teaching.
 - They can stay in the church, but still follow their sinful passions.
 - Peter explains that **they exploit you by covetousness.**

- They appeal to your sinful desires and the discontentment that you have in your flesh—the discontentment we all struggle with.
- Instead of denouncing sin, they make excuses for it and find ways to change the message.
 - A clear example in our day is with sexual immorality.
 - False teachers in the church will tell you that it’s okay to have sex outside of marriage—that it is okay for men to have sex with men and women with women.
 - We see that even in mainline denominations.
- They will also appeal to your pride and tell you that Jesus wants you to know that *you* have what it takes to do great things for God...
 - instead of telling you that you are a wicked sinner who can only bear fruit through Jesus Christ.
- Or they will come as prosperity preachers who tell you that God wants you to be rich and successful instead of telling you that if you follow Him, you will have much tribulation in this world.
- People see those who are in the church following these false teachers, with the result that the truth is blasphemed (as Peter says in verse 2).
 - People judge the church based on what these false teachers and their followers are doing.
 - Peter says that **their judgment has not been idle** and that **their destruction does not slumber!**
 - In other words, they are already being judged. Judgment begins with the household of God.

TRANS> But don’t lose heart!

B. Peter explains that God will judge them (and is already judging them), but that He will preserve us (if we are indeed in Christ). He will make a distinction.

1. Peter gives us examples of how God’s judgment works.
 - a. V. 4: He judged the angels that sinned, casting them out of the light of His glorious presence to be held in chains until the Day of Judgment.
 - b. V. 5: He judged the whole world in the great flood of Noah’s day, yet saved Noah who was one of only eight people that were spared.
 - c. V. 6-8: He judged Sodom and Gomorrah, but spared Lot and his daughters.
2. This shows that the LORD knows how to preserve His people today.
 - Verse 9 says: **“then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,”**
 - It does not mean that we will not have to deal with church closure and failure, and even with calamities that befall the church—but the judgment we are spared from is being turned over to deception.
 - We are kept by the power of God through faith so that we continue to bear fruit in Jesus Christ.

- C. Peter describes the false teachers and *their* fruit in 2 Peter 2:10-22.
1. Look at how he describes them:
 - a. He says in verse 10 that they walk according to their own lusts and desires following uncleanness.
 - They almost always gravitate to covetous behaviour, especially sexual immorality.
 - You know the temptation of the flesh—if you are not planted in Christ, you have nowhere to turn. You are helpless against the power of temptation.
 - b. He says (still vs 10) that they despise authority—they speak evil of those who represent the Lord.
 - They complain about the church leadership, even when it is godly (they set up a grumbling corner), and draw off others into rebellion.
 - c. He describes them as predators (wild beasts) in verses 12-17 who speak evil of what they don't understand for their own personal gain.
 - This is not saying that we should not speak evil of heretics... Peter is doing that here—but this is talking about heretics speaking evil of God's servants so as to get them to follow them instead.
 - They want their support, they want their money, they want their affirmation.
 - In verse 14 Peter says they feast with us, but with eyes full of adultery—often literally so—they are looking to see who they might draw into their perverted embrace for selfish sexual gratification.
 - d. Peter explains that these predators promise everything (that is how they get disciples to follow them) but in fact have nothing to give you at all.
 - In verse 17, He calls them wells without water... promising life-giving water to help you grow, but they are in fact clouds that are blown away without ever giving rain—verse 17 says: **“These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”**
 - They speak **great swelling words** to allure disciples, appealing to their lusts (vs. 18)... but (v. 19): **while they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.**
 - Indeed—Peter explains that upon professing Christ, these who are now false teachers had a joyful beginning with transformed lives...they escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ...
 - but because they were never truly united to Christ, their true nature soon dominates them so they never truly bear fruit in Christ.
 2. It is very important to understand the nature of their judgment in this present time—the judgment is already upon them.
 - a. It is not so much that they suffer hardship in the world... but that they are turned over to their own deception and lust.
 - Peter illustrates how they go back to their old ways in verse 22: **But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”**

- They may even enjoy great prosperity in the world and seem to go unchecked while the true sons of God are chastened.
- b. Their success and prosperity actually makes them worse.
 - The longer it goes on, the more confident they become that God will never judge them.
 - As Solomon says in Eccl. 8:11: **Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.**

TRANS> This can be discouraging to you who are truly following Christ.

- But now let's look at chapter 3:

III. In chapter 3, Peter assures you that the Day of Judgment will surely come.

A. He tells us again that his goal in writing is to keep this before God's people after he is gone.

1. In verses 1-2, he tells us that he has written both First and Second Peter for this purpose.
 - 2 Pet 3:1-2: **Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior...**
 - And what were those words that were spoken by God's messengers?
 - That through Christ we have forgiveness of sin and eternal life (new life of fruitfulness) with an inheritance waiting for us in glory.
 - And what is the commandment of these prophets and apostles?
 - Just what Peter has been saying—that we are to come to Christ for eternal life and continue in Him that we might bring forth the fruits of eternal life.
 - We must remember that what Peter and the other apostles and prophets wrote is always right.
 - God spoke through them and God's word always comes true.
2. False teachers call into question that God's judgment is really going to come.
 - a. In verses 3 & 4, Peter says that this is to be expected.
 - **Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."**
 - Such scoffers are always around.
 - They are with us today. They say, "It has been two thousand years. Why do you still believe that Jesus will come?"
 - When Jeremiah told them that Jerusalem would be destroyed, they said, "Never! God would not destroy His own house!" But He did.
 - Jesus Himself told us that when He delayed His return, unbelievers among His professing disciples would scoff and turn away from Him.

- b. Peter points out that those who claim that all things continue as they were from the beginning seem to forget all about the flood.
 - With the flood, we have historical proof of the fact that when God says He will bring a judgment that will wipe out the whole world, He means it!
 - Flood stories in which only one family survived can be found in ancient historical records from all over the world.
 - Peter accuses the scoffers of deliberately forgetting this.
 - Verse 5-7: **For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶ by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷ But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.**
3. Peter assures us that the LORD is not slack concerning His promise.
- a. He does not operate on the same time table as we do.
 - As an eternal being, **one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**
 - b. He is waiting until He has gathered all of His dear sheep into the fold.
 - He is not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to salvation.
 - Verse 9 says: **The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**
 - Jesus will not return until all that are appointed to salvation have come to Him. As He said in Jn 6:37-39: **All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.**

TRANS> Delay does not mean that the promise has failed.

- B. You see how Peter describes the coming judgment as a “purification by fire.”
1. We already read verse 7 where He said that **the heavens and earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.**
 - God cleansed the earth of wickedness by a baptism with water in the day of Noah, but at the last day, there will be an even deeper purification by fire.
 2. In verses 10-13, Peter describes it as a complete meltdown out of which will emerge a new heavens and a new earth (vs 13) in which righteousness dwells.
 - This is God’s promise.
 - Jesus Christ will come as a thief in the night (v. 10) **and the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with a fervent heat... both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.**

- But it is not that they will be no more.
 - That is not how God works.
- It will be a fire of purification from which the new heavens and new earth will emerge, filled with the people that He has redeemed.
 - All that is in Christ will remain and everything else including the wicked will be enveloped in the fires of God's judgment forever.
 - The redeemed will inherit the earth with Jesus Christ as their head.
 - But this will not happen until God has gathered them all in to Christ.

C. Knowing about this coming judgment ought to shape our lives!

1. If God is going purify the earth and leave only that which cannot be burned up—Christ and His people and a refined heaven and earth without the curse,
 - then what ought to be our focus?
 - Surely just what Peter has been talking about in this letter!
 - We ought to focus on bringing forth the fruits of eternal life—to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverance godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love.
 - These are the fruits that will remain.
 - This is where we need to devote our attention.
2. Thus in vs 11-12, Peter challenges us with these words: **Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?**
 - In verse 14, Peter tells you to look forward to His coming and be ready for it, but realise (as verse 15 says) that the delay is for the purpose of our salvation... of gathering in all who are appointed to salvation.
 - We need to seek fruit not only in terms of personal growth, but also in seeking to gather in all of Christ's sheep to Him.
3. When you boil everything down, there are only two ways to go.
 - Peter has shown us this from the beginning of his letter.
 - Either you are planted in Christ and you bring forth the fruits of eternal life by His divine power and grace...
 - Or you fall from your own steadfastness and follow the false teachers to the denial of Christ and to destruction.
 - Peter's closing words call us to reject the way of the wicked and to be planted in Christ where we bear fruit that endures forever:
 - 2 Peter 3:17-18: **You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.**
 - This is how you make your calling and election sure.