

THE DESIRE OF PETER—AND THE POWER OF GOD

As you all here at church now know, God promoted Mac to glory this past Thursday, October 19th. Mac's last Sunday with us here at church was on September 24th. I remember—as some of you do—that Mac was not very steady on his feet that day. **None of us** knew that day would be the last time we would see Mac at church, though—and **I certainly didn't know** that that was the last time I would have a **conversation** with him. I was going to see him last Saturday at his home, but he was brought by ambulance to Wisconsin Rapids on Friday night. I was then going to see him in Rapids on Saturday, but his daughter said they were transferring him to Wausau that same day. My wife and I did stop to see him at the hospital last Sunday afternoon on our way up north. I talked to him, but he did not “talk back.” In other words, it really wasn't a conversation.

I can't help but wonder what the **conversation would have been like** between Mac and I if we **both knew** on September 24th that that would be our **last one**. If we had **known**—going into that Sunday—that that would be the last time for Mac to **talk to us** as a church family, I don't think anyone would have been upset with me if I had turned over the “mike” to Mac and let him **share** with us what was **on his heart**.

Mac **didn't get to do that**—but the apostle Peter did! Peter **knew** that the time of his departure was at hand, so God led him to write a letter we call the book of II Peter. Please turn there and follow along as I read II Peter 1:13-15. So here it is: Peter's awareness—somehow—that he was about to leave them and go to heaven! This letter, then, was his “farewell address,” similar to what **both** Paul—and Jesus Himself—gave.

What did Peter **leave them** with? What was his “dying wish” to the believers he wrote to—and ultimately to us? Big Picture, I believe it is this:

“Pursue spiritual growth to protect against error—and to be prepared for Christ's return.”

Last week, we focused on verse 1 and learned **who** wrote the letter—and who the letter is written **to**.

First, the writer. Who is the author of this letter? We see in the first half of vs 1 that it is Simon Peter, a servant—meaning bond-slave—and an apostle of Christ.

Second, the recipients. Who is the letter written **to**? In the 2nd half of vs 1, we see Peter is writing to **believers**—those who have “like precious faith” (meaning saving faith)—that Peter and the other apostles had.

--**How** do we get saving faith? It is **obtained**—meaning received. In other words, it is **divinely-given**—not **humanly-earned**!

--**What** is saving faith based on? We see towards the end of vs 1 that saving faith is “through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

--There is only one way to become righteous—meaning **right in God's sight**—and that is **God's** way. God requires that our sins **be paid for**—and that we be declared **perfect**. But we **aren't perfect** and can't be considered perfect **unless the perfectness of a perfect person** is credited to us! And that is exactly why **God came to earth** in the form of a man! **Our sin was put on Jesus** and He paid our debt...and **Jesus' righteousness**—His perfectness—is credited to us! What a marvelous—for us—**exchange**!

II Cor 5:21 “For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we **might be made the righteousness** of God in Him.”

This morning, we will be focusing on verses 2-3 where we see Peter's desire for them—and the power of God.

1. Peter's desire for the spiritual growth of believers

How do we know that Peter's desire is for believers to grow spiritually? We know based on three things:

1) **who** he is writing to; 2) **what** he is asking for; and 3) **how** he asks.

A. **Who** Peter is writing to

Vs 2: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto **you**...” “Who” is the “you” referred to in vs 2?

The **same people** he referred to in vs 1! Who is he referring to in vs 1? Those who have obtained like precious faith—meaning **believers**. We also know that Peter is writing to believers based on the following verses:

--In 1:5, Peter tells them to **add** to their faith. To **add to it**, they had to have faith in the first place.

--In 1:10, Peter refers to them as “brethren.”

--In 1:12, they are said to be “established in the present truth.” That would not be said of an unbeliever.

--In 3:1...and 3:14...and 3:17, he calls them “beloved”—another reference for believer.

So Peter is obviously writing to believers.

B. What Peter is asking for

What is Peter asking for? What is it that he **desires** the believers—meaning us—to **have or do**? His desire—according to vs 2—is that “Grace and peace be multiplied” unto them.

Somewhat of an **unusual request**, isn’t it? **Why** do I say that? Because he wanted something increased in them that they **could not increase** on their own! Here’s what I mean.

What is **grace**? Grace is God’s **undeserved favor**. It is God **blessing us with blessings**. It is also God **enabling us to do something** that would be impossible for us to do on our own.

But how **can we** multiply something that is a **gift** from God? **We can’t**—at least not directly! And that’s why I say it is an **unusual** request.

The same can be said about **peace**. What is peace? We make peace **with God** when we trust Christ as our Savior and are forgiven of our sins. We see that truth in Rom 5:1 “Therefore being justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ:”

And God gives us the **peace of God**—a **contentment and trust in God** that everything will be okay—when we **choose not to worry** and instead bring our requests to Him in prayer. We see that truth in Phil 4:6-7 “Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And **the peace of God**, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

But again, **peace is just like grace** in that we cannot **conjure it up** on our own—it is something that **God gives**. Both come **with** our salvation—but both are needed in our **daily living** for God **after** our salvation.

We also know it is Peter’s desire based on...C. How Peter is asking

The point I’m making here is simply this—Peter **is asking, not commanding!** The verb “be multiplied” in the Greek is not an imperative—meaning it is **not** a command. Instead, it is an **obtainable wish**. It is a **desire** that he has for them, and he is **appealing** to their will! And this desire for their growth is **not a one-time request**—he repeats it throughout his letter!

--He **begins** the letter wanting them to increase in grace and peace—and he **ends the letter** on a similar note. **II Pet 3:18** “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...” It’s **not just** at the beginning and the end, though!

--In 1:5, he wants them to add virtue to their faith

--In 1:8, we see that he does not want them to be barren or unfruitful

--In the end of 1:10, we see that he does not want them to fall

--in 3:11, he wants them to be holy and godly

--In 3:14, he wants them to be without spot and blameless

Peter’s heartbeat is for them to **pursue growth**—to work at it—not for them sit in the canoe doing nothing!

God desires that we grow—we see that through these words from the apostle Peter. But how do we have grace and peace multiplied to us when **God is the giver** of both? What is **our role** in obtaining these things?

He gives us the answer in the second half of vs 2 “through the **knowledge** of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” I’m calling this... **2. God’s design for our spiritual growth**

God through Peter plainly tells us that the way for us to have grace and peace increase in our lives—another way of saying “spiritual growth”—is “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” Vs 3 ends in a similar way: “through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” So God’s design for growth—**the means** by which grace and peace are multiplied in our lives—is through the **knowledge** of God.

But what is **meant** by the knowledge of God? The English word **knowledge** appears 7 times in the book of II Peter—and 5 times in this chapter alone (vss 2,3,5,6, and 8). In verses 2,3, and 8, “knowledge” comes from the Greek word “ep-ig’-no-sis.” It means a “knowledge gained through first-hand relationship” (HELPS Word-studies; Bible Hub). Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words has this insightful definition: “a greater participation by the **knower** in the object known.”

Let’s apply these definitions to vs 2. Grace and peace will be multiplied to us through us having a first-hand **relationship with God**. We need to learn things **about God** through His Word, but it is not just about collecting **facts**. It is us—the **knower**—participating more in our pursuit of **knowing God** personally.

What will that **look like**? It involves talking to Him...and walking with Him...and experiencing life with Him. It will involve bringing our **problems** to Him—as well as our **praises**! It will require—as Fanny Crosby wrote—that we “commune as friend with friend.”

It also requires **humility**. I’ve shared this with you once before, but it was quite some time ago. A Christian counselor by the name of **Paul David Tripp** wrote the following in a book entitled, *How People Change*: “God has not called us to a life of ‘I have spiritually arrived’ or ‘I am just waiting for heaven.’ Rather, He calls us to a life of constant work, constant growth, and constant confession and repentance.” (pg 6).

Important reminder, isn’t it? We have not arrived; we **need God’s daily grace** and forgiveness. In my mind, it works like this:

--We read in the Bible that we are supposed **to do** certain things (like those listed in vss 5-7)

--We **attempt to do** those things in our own strength and power and realize we can’t.

That **inability** should lead us to confession... and repentance...and a plea to God for help!

--'God, I’m not the witness for you that I should be—please help me!'

--'God, I have this terrible temper—please help me!'

--'God, I have this destructive habit in my life—please help me!'

What happens when we do that?

--According to Hebrews 4:16, we “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

--And according to I Peter 5:5, God “giveth grace to the humble.”

Although **God** is the one that grows us spiritually—He is the giver of grace and peace—**our failure** to grow is **not** God’s fault. It is **ours! We are the ones** who fail to follow His design for growth. **We are the ones** who fail to pursue knowing Him. **We are the ones** who neglect the relationship—not Him!

How thankful we should be that no matter what our past, there is mercy with the Lord!

Psalms 86:5 “For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and **plenteous in mercy** unto all them that call upon thee.”

Let’s think through the progression of Peter’s thought that we’ve looked at so far. **From vs 1**, we know Peter is **writing to** fellow believers—those who have put their trust in Christ and Christ only for salvation. **In vs 2**, we see that his **desire** for believers is that they increase in **grace and peace**—gifts from God—and that they can do that by **cultivating their relationship** with God. **In vs 3**, he reminds them that...

3. God’s divine power accomplishes our spiritual growth

We certainly know God’s power is what causes growth in the **physical** realm. Please know that I’m not denying the fact we can “make ourselves grow” if we eat 3 meals a day at McDonald’s! What I’m talking about is the reality that God’s power **gives life**—and God’s power **produces growth**.

Those of us who are gardeners—or who impersonate gardeners—know that to be true, don’t we? We can plant a seed, but we can’t make the seed **sprout**—or the plant **grow** once it does sprout! Jesus even mentions our lack of ability to cause a plant to grow in a parable He told. Mark 4:26-27 “And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; ²⁷ And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed **should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.**”

But even though **people** can’t cause a plant to sprout or grow—**God can!** Not only does God’s power bring life and growth in the **physical** arena, that is also true in the **spiritual** realm.

First, notice... A. The necessity of God's power

How do we know God's power is necessary for life and godliness? Because God gives us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." Everything needed for **life**—meaning eternal life; and **godliness**—meaning holy living—**must be provided for us by God**. God doesn't provide **half** of what we need—He provides **everything** we need. That means we can't give ourselves eternal life—and we can't make ourselves holy. God has to do it!

And let's not miss the order; we have to **have life**—we have to be born again—before we can have **growth**. I don't remember much from my Lutheran church catechism days—which I guess is permissible because that was 50 years ago—but I do remember one class we had. We were given a piece of paper and asked to **draw a line** representing what we thought our **Christian growth** looked like.

The point being made—if I remember right—is that Christian growth is usually **not a steady climb** at a 45-degree angle—it is an **up-and-down** "roller coaster" kind of experience. The reality, though, is that most of us in the class at that time **didn't even have** eternal life. An **accurate picture** of our spiritual growth, then, would have been a **blank page!** We need to have spiritual **life** before we can have spiritual **growth!**

God gives us everything we need for eternal life because we can't **save ourselves**—and He gives us what we need for godliness because we can't **grow ourselves**.

Next, let's consider... B. The availability of God's power

Divine power is for **all believers**—not just some. How do we know that's true? Because we have it here in the phrase "According as His divine power hath given unto us..." The "us" is believers! Just like **all believers** have the **same salvation**—and the **same blessings** that come with our salvation—we have the **same God** with the **same power** providing what we need for life and godliness!

Please note carefully what is being said here. Does the verse say, "God **gives us** His divine power?" **No; it doesn't!** It says, His divine power **has given us** what we need for eternal life—and for godliness.

What's the difference? Think of it like this. If God gave us more and more **divine power**, we would be healing the sick...and multiplying bread and fish to feed multitudes...and bringing people back to life! God does not **impart** His divine power **to us**—His divine power is what works **in us!**

So even though God does not give us His power so that we can be **independent** of Him, His power gives **every believer** what every believer **needs** to live a godly life. In other words, **no true believer has an excuse** for not growing in godliness. Why? Because God's ability—and willingness—to use His power to change and grow us **is available** to every true child of God!

Now let's think about... C. The priority of God's power

What is the **priority** of God's power? In other words, His divine power is used to give us **what?** All that pertains to **life**—meaning salvation; and **godliness**—meaning growth in Christlikeness/godliness/holiness.

It is **surprising to me**—and sad—that so many Christians **get this wrong**. Although they don't **say it**, the thought-process of many believers is this: 'God should use His power to make me happy...and healthy...and wealthy...and wise!' But that's **not God's priority for us!**

God's desire...God's goal...God's priority, is to **conform us** to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). Paul's prayer for the Galatians was that **Christ would be formed in them** (Gal 4:19). And Paul told the Corinthians that they would be **changed into the image of the Lord** by the Spirit of the Lord as they beheld—in God's Word—the glory of the Lord (II Cor 3:18).

Lastly, let's consider... D. The sufficiency of God's power

How sufficient is God's power? God actually answers that question—with a question of His own to the prophet Jeremiah! **Jer 32:26-27** "Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, ²⁷ Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?"

Is God **confused** as to how powerful He is and needs Jeremiah to help Him **understand** His power? Obviously not; it is a **rhetorical** question! In fact, **Jeremiah had declared** earlier in this same chapter that nothing was **too hard for God!** **Jer 32:17** "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and **there is nothing too hard** for thee."

The sufficiency of God's power then, is simply this—nothing is **too hard** for Him...and nothing is **impossible** for Him! That means **no one** is unforgivable—and no one is unsavable!

If God can save John Newton—a slave trader, drunk, curser of God and an abuser of women on the slave ships—He can do the same for us.

God not only **forgave and saved** John Newton, He transformed him into a man of God. If you are not familiar with the name, you are probably familiar with a famous song he wrote— “Amazing Grace.”

What about you? God’s desire—as seen in Peter’s parting words—is for us to be saved and to be godly.

Not only is that God’s desire, His divine power has provided all that we need—nothing lacking. So if we are not growing—and if we are not striving to be holy—the fault **lies with us** and not with God.

Some of us need to stop making excuses...and repent of our sin...and ask God for forgiveness and cleansing and strength to overcome what is **impossible for us**—but not impossible for Him!

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

1. First, take an honest look at your life and ask yourself these questions:

--How do you view sin in your life? Do you make excuses for it—or long to have victory over it! God’s divine power has provided all we need to live a godly life so stop making excuses!

--Are you growing as a Christian?

--Is the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering—evident in your life?

If not, maybe it’s because you aren’t a **true child** of God. A true child of God has the HS living within them—and nothing is too hard for God!

--Maybe you are trying to have spiritual growth when you don’t have spiritual life!

2. Second—if you are a child of God—how is your relationship with God? Grace and peace—the things we need for daily living—come to us as we cultivate our relationship with Him.

--If they are lacking, it is not God’s fault—it is yours! So work on your relationship with God. Commune with Him as “friend with friend.”