

Introduction:

A. *Illus.*: Years ago someone gave me this old Bible. The publication date is torn off, but on one of the first pages there is this inscription: “G. C. Thorp. June 22nd 1861. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy Youth.*” Thorp was probably the grandfather of Walton Thorp, the cattle rancher for whom my father worked. This Bible was given to G. C. Thorp just as the Civil War was beginning. I wonder if this could be valuable? It’s in great shape. Gold filigree, clasp, the pages are clean. But here’s the thing with a Bible: it’s value isn’t in its condition but in its use. I did notice that some verses were marked, like these from II Timothy, so that adds some value.

But when it comes to a valuable Bible here’s one that’s a treasure. It belonged to my Aunt Hilda, who got it after she retired from the mission field in 1979. She wrote in the cover, “*The Bible will never be a dry book to those who use it as the source of living water.*” The pages throughout are full of evidence of the treasure it was to her, something evident in her life till she went home to the Lord.

A Bible isn’t necessarily valuable because it has lots of writing in it. It is valuable when it has molded our thinking and behavior through the Holy Spirit. What would your Bible say about you?

B. This week we begin a series in 2 Peter, a short letter which I’ve never preached before, and only rarely studied. Peter wrote two epistles, which we have creatively titled 1 & 2 Peter. “Peter likely wrote this letter shortly before AD 65, the date when, according to reliable early tradition, Nero martyred him while persecuting Christians in Rome. Peter possibly wrote from Rome, and he sensed that the time to

fulfill the Lord’s prophecy about his death was near.” [NIV
Zond. Study Bible]

- D. According to Peter’s first letter he wrote to Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, in several Asian provinces. They were Christians under pressure of persecution but also under the dangerous influence of false teachers who were undermining the faith of many. So in this letter he is urging believers “*to make our calling and election sure.*” To hang on tightly to our faith because there are dangerous threats.
- C. Today I want to look just at the first two verses—the kind of introduction we often blow past when we read. **In these two verses I see three reasons why we need to study this letter, as we should all of Scripture.**

So, to begin, “*Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.*” That simple introduction tells us that...

I. JESUS CHRIST COMMISSIONED THIS LETTER FOR US

Illus.: Almost 45 years ago now, I wrote for the president of Trinity. Actually, I wrote *as* the president of Trinity. In those days the president wrote a column every couple of months for the Evangelical Free Church magazine to build support for the school. But *really*, I wrote it. Here’s the important thing, though: *he* approved it. I was authorized to write for him. So when people read what *I* wrote they were reading what *he* wanted to say.

- A. We embrace this letter because Peter, the author, is authorized by the Lord. **Simon**, of course, was his given name but Jesus gave him the name Rock, Petros, **Peter**. When Peter said to Jesus, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,*” Jesus replied that he would build his whole church on the rock of that confession. Later, after his resurrection, Jesus told Peter three times, “*Feed my sheep.*”

And that is what Peter is doing in this letter—feeding Jesus’ sheep.

He is also “*a servant... of Jesus Christ.*” All believers are servants, of course, but Peter’s service was teaching Jesus’ disciples. He preached the first sermon after the resurrection, vividly setting forth the crucified Christ as the Savior. Near the end of 1 Peter he wrote, “*To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s suffering who will also share in the glory to be revealed.*” 1 Pet 5:1 So it is with the authority of an elder and a witness of Christ’s suffering that he writes to us. He is fulfilling his duty to Christ, and it is our duty to pay attention.

Finally, he is an “*apostle of Jesus Christ,*” meaning (in this case) that he was one of the twelve who were with Jesus. Down in v.16 he writes, “*For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*” As an apostle, Jesus Christ entrusted to him and the other New Testament writers who saw the risen Christ the holy task of writing down what Jesus said and did, and to express the doctrines of our faith that grew out of what Jesus did.

- B. This letter, then, as small and out-of-the-way as it seems, demands our attention, thought, and obedience as Christ’s disciples. The words were written by Peter but, make no mistake, Jesus speaks to us here.

Now look at his salutation, which is a little hard to understand: “*To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.*”

II. THIS LETTER IS PRIVILEGED COMMUNICATION TO EVERY BELIEVER

- A. One thing Peter is telling his fellow believers is that the gift of faith which we enjoy is exactly the same gift of faith that saved Peter, even though he knew Jesus personally. His readers “*have received a faith as precious as ours.*” Peter had been the first disciple to realize, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*” He saw Jesus revealed in all his majesty on that mountain. But what made his faith eternally precious was that he trusted Jesus Christ to save him just as we do. **Our experiences with Christ do not match Peter’s but our faith in Jesus as our Savior is as precious and priceless as his was.**
- B. Do you see the word *received*? That Greek word tells us implies that both our faith and Peter’s were gifts, handed to us by Christ. All we did was *receive* it.

I was reading recently about the paradox that someone who is having difficulty trusting in Christ can ask God for help. Ask the God who she has difficulty believing in. But that is how it often works. There have been a lot of people whose faith got its start when they prayed, “*Lord, if you’re there, show me.*”

But however it is that we have our precious faith, it was *given* to us and all we had to do was *receive* it.

- C. Notice next the name here: “*our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” Jesus is “*our God*” because “*in him all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form.*” Jesus is “*our... Savior*” because he died and rose again to atone for our sins and to give us everlasting life. And Jesus is *Christ*—the Messiah, the Anointed One—because God has chosen him as the triumphant king over his beloved people.

- D. I puzzled over this phrase, “*To those who **through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ** have received a faith as precious as ours.*” I’d expect to read, “*through the **mercy of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,***” but I didn’t understand how our faith came as a result of Christ’s *righteousness*. What I learned is that God’s sense of justice and what is right assures us that he gives the same gift of faith to all who receive salvation. One writer calls it his “sheer fairness.” Peter had no advantage over us.
- E. **Jesus Christ, who is both God and Savior, gave you and me our precious faith just as he did for Peter. This is what binds all believers everywhere together. Peter wrote this letter, under the authority of Christ, to strengthen our grip on our “precious faith”** because there are those who might otherwise tear it from our hearts.

So the letter is *from* Simon Peter *to* those who share with him our precious faith. And now, in v.2, the greeting: “*grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*” “*Grace and peace be yours*” is a familiar NT greeting. In the Greek culture, a greeting of *Grace to you* was akin to our “*good day.*” But Christians injected that familiar word with the gospel when they greeted each other: *Grace to you*. Likewise, *peace* was the traditional Jewish greeting, . *Shalom. May you know the rest and blessing of God.* What stands out here is the *means* to having those God-given gifts *in abundance*.

III. KNOWING CHRIST BETTER THROUGH SCRIPTURE WILL MULTIPLY OUR EXPERIENCE OF HIS GRACE AND PEACE

- A. Grace and peace are the birthright of all believers. They are our *benediction*—our blessing words. **Grace-gifts** of God we do not deserve and cannot earn, all beginning in the gift of salvation through Christ. And **peace** that passes all

understanding. Peace that rests even in the storm. Peace that no matter what we must face in this life, *it is well with my soul.*

- B. These twin gifts can be ours “in abundance”—multiplied many times over. Could anyone be richer than the person who has grace and peace in abundance!?
- C. How? “*Through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*” In this case Peter is speaking about both God the Father and God the Son. We can know each of them, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Peter doesn’t mean merely knowing *about* God the Father and Jesus the Lord. He means knowing them. **The better we know the Triune God, the richer our experience of God’s grace and truth.** So which would you rather do? Earn more money or know God better so you can accumulate more grace and truth?

This letter, as all of Scripture, is one way we can know God and Jesus our Lord better. Obeying God helps us know him better. Treasuring Scripture helps us to know him better. Becoming wise to the wiles of false teachers helps us to know God better. Holding fast to our hope of Christ’s return helps us to know God better. Peter ends this letter, “*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.*”

Conclusion

This letter, like every other part of Scripture, is to be taken seriously. Did your mom ever grab your cheeks, one-handed, pull you right up to her face and say, “*Are you listening to me?*” That’s what this book does, because what is in here is serious business.

I urge you to take this book seriously. Read it yourself, several times. See it as a safeguard for your “precious faith.” See it as a way to know God better and thus to see grace and peace multiplied in your life. See it as a way to sharpen your homesickness for heaven.