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The Second Epistle of Peter

*Standing Firm on God's
Promises Until Christ Comes*

July 9, 2017

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 1

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter

Faith and hope. Two essential qualities for every Christian. Not just some generic “faith” like you hear bantered around all the time (“people of faith,” “community of faith” – yuck!) but the faith and certain hope that Christ gives us. The faith and hope that have as their object Christ Himself and His promises to us.

Our faith undergoes severe trials. Our tri-fold enemy (the world, the flesh, the devil) is always at work trying to get the Christian to deny his Master and to jettison his hope. We look

around us and we see a world that is not only in a mess, but which is spiraling more rapidly out of control every single day. The thing looks hopeless. The promises of God appear to be without substance – something only a fool would keep clinging to.

Well, things have not changed when it comes to these trials. Way, way back in the first century AD, Christians were struggling with the same tests.

- The temptation to turn away from other Christians, to drop out of the fellowship in the church
- The temptation to reject Christ's promises as nothing more than clever myths foisted upon the foolish
- Doubting that the Bible (the Scriptures) are really the Word of God
- The temptation to believe the lies of false teachers who parade as Christians
- The temptation to throw away our faith and hope in the face of the claims of “scoffers” who

mock the whole idea that there is anything else but this physical, present world which surely is going to last forever

It was in the face of these temptations that the Apostle Peter wrote still another letter to his Christian brothers and sisters. That letter is here in our Bibles entitled Second Peter. As you have already seen as you listened to it this morning, Peter wrote it not long before his earthly life ended. Church tradition holds that Peter was executed by Roman authorities, hung upside down on a cross.

Now, remember what we said when we began our study of Peters First Epistle – *that this is God's Word, written by a man who personally knew Christ, who was witness to Christ's transfiguration on the mount, who was witness to the resurrection of Christ, and who knew what it was to be sorely tempted even to the point of denying Christ.*

Peter was a man who KNEW he would die a martyr's death. Christ told him so and you can read all about that in the 21st chapter of the Gospel of John. And all of this gives tremendous credibility to Peter's words here. All he needed to do to avoid further persecution was to admit that the whole thing about Jesus was a fraud. That there was no resurrection. The

whole thing was a lie invented by Jesus' disciples.

But Peter didn't cave. Not even in the face of execution. Because he knew it was all true, and here we have him writing to us to tell US not to cave either, no matter what weaponry the world, the flesh, and the devil fire at us. *The gospel is true! Christ is indeed the Son of God. He really did die for our sins on the cross and He really did rise again. And there is more. More to come. Because Jesus is coming again.*

Let's take some time this morning to take a general overview look at some of the main themes we are going to hear as we go through this letter verse by verse.

Knowing God

Peter speaks very often about the Christian's relationship with God with this term – *the knowledge of God*. For example:

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

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Just as we have been learning lately in the Sunday School class, the Christian is known by God and knows God. This speaks of an intimate relationship, just as we might say we know our best friend in contrast to knowing about someone.

Many people today who profess to be Christians know about Christ, but they do not necessarily know Christ. This is a vital distinction – an eternal life or death matter – and Peter emphasizes it strongly.

Precious and Very Great Promises

In connection with *faith and hope*, we see that Peter speaks over and over again about the wonderful promises of God which we set our faith and hope upon:

2 Peter 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

2 Peter 3:4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

2 Peter 3:13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

And Peter gives us detailed insight into the specifics of the Promises of God. *Most Christians do not really grasp what the promises of God are, even though Peter says they are precious and very great. As you can see here, they involve far more than Christ on the cross for our sins so that we can go to heaven (which is pretty much the extent of what most Christians know). The new heavens and a new earth are at the heart of these promises and only when you understand this will you sit up and say with Peter, 'yes! That is a precious and very great promise!'*

Perseverance

Because our enemy is always at work

trying to destroy faith and hope, Peter also devotes large parts of his letter to encouraging and exhorting us to persevere. For example:

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

2 Peter 1:19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

2 Peter 2:20-21 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

2 Peter 3:11-12 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, (12) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will

melt as they burn!

And why do we need these reminders to stir up our perseverance and faith and hope? Well, because of another theme Peter gives a large part of this letter to – false teachers. In fact the entire second chapter is devoted to this theme as well as a good part of the third. So many Christians today are willfully blind to these warnings:

False Prophets and Teachers

2 Peter 2:1-3 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2) And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (3) And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2 Peter 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than

after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. (22) What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

We will spend much more time looking at these verses as we proceed through this letter, but for now I want us all to notice something very, very clearly and carefully:

The false teachers and prophets Peter is talking about here are not pagan idolaters like some Baal worshipper of the Old Testament. No. They are people who have made some profession of faith in Christ! Peter says they even 'escaped the defilements of the world' but were then entangled in them again. The large majority of false teachers the New Testament warns us against are people who claim to be Christians.

How effective are they in their efforts to deceive? Well, Peter says –

“And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

Are we seeing this today? Of course. Many people who claim to belong to

Christ follow these wicked “church” leaders (a counterfeit church of course) and as a result the gospel of Christ is blasphemed and ridiculed by the unsaved. This is a very common scheme that the devil has used since Eden. Listen to it again:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you,

Denial of the Return of Christ

All tied in of course with the themes of false teachers, the temptation to give up our faith and hope in the promises of God, is the specific attack of these enemy agents on the promise of the coming Day of the Lord when Christ returns to judge the world and establish the new heavens and earth.

Peter gives us strong cautions to take great care lest we be deceived:

2 Peter 3:1-4 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, (2) that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, (3) knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with

scoffing, following their own sinful desires. (4) They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

Do people today live as if there is no tomorrow? Yes. As if there is no Day of Judgment when they must stand before the Lord? Yes. Do we even find people who claim to be Christians denying these things? Yes. Are Christians taking Peter's warnings seriously so as not to be deceived? Well, in many cases, no.

The Word of God as Our Anchor

There is still another important theme in this letter that is vital for us to take careful note of. Here are some examples:

2 Peter 1:19-21 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, (20) knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. (21) For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 2:5-7 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; (6) if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; (7) and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked

2 Peter 3:1-2 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, (2) that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,

Do you see it? Peter is constantly calling on us to look to Scripture as the anchor of our faith and hope. The Word of God that cannot be shaken. Pay attention to the prophetic word, he says. Scripture is not man's word and myth, but the product of God's own Spirit. Remember the Scriptures. Remember how God dealt with people in old times. Remember what the Lord Jesus has said. Give careful heed to His Word given to you through His apostles. The longer I am a Christian, the less I look to the writings of men and find myself trusting only

Scripture.

Are You Growing?

Peter's last words in the letter are a repetition of the very purpose he wrote it –

2 Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. (18) But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Immerse yourself in His Word and by doing so, grow in the knowledge of the Lord. As you grow, you will stand more and more firmly against the errors of the wicked, your feet will stand even more firmly on the rock of the promises of God, and on that Day you will have run the race well.