



## **BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair**

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If religion was the way to God, every one of us would have every reason for despair. By religion, I mean the man-made, works-based, performance-oriented attempt to somehow merit favor with a holy God. Religion is not filled with hope. Religion is filled with despair. It's a daily reminder of all the ways we don't measure up. Every year thousands and thousands and thousands of people walk away from religion. They are wounded, they are discouraged, and they are disillusioned, and they are convinced there is no way they will ever measure up to God. But the Gospel of Jesus is radically, utterly different, and it is filled with hope.

That's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 1. Second Peter is probably a couple of years after 1 Peter, same recipients. Peter is probably now just months out from his execution—so A.D. late 66-67. Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified by Nero and this is getting pretty close to that moment. His concern is once he is dead, the false teachers will come in and will lead these people astray. The false teachers are not the secularists; they are not the atheists. They are the religionists that bring a message that sounds sort of right, but very subtly leads people away into disillusionment and destruction. Chapter 1, verse 1:

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, (\*NASB, 2 Peter 1:1a)

So, Peter identifies himself as the writer. In the first century it wasn't unusual to have two names. Simon would be the Jewish name; Peter would be the Greek name, and he identifies himself as a slave of Christ. There is a Greek word that refers to a household servant. This is not that word. This is the word that clearly references a slave. Peter does not write as a Christian celebrity; he writes as a slave of Christ. With that is the understanding that he has determined to be obedient to the Master, and he also identifies in this letter, he is very clear: It will cost him his life!

He also identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ—apostle in the very technical sense: he was one of the twelve. He did hear the message of the Gospel directly out of the mouth of Jesus Himself. This goes to Peter's authority; it also goes to his credibility. The false teachers got their information somewhere else. Peter got it directly out of the mouth of Jesus. The recipients:

To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: (Vs. 1b)

First, notice that the recipients are those who have received the faith. These are not people who earned it; these are not people who deserved it. These were not people who fulfilled religious requirements. As a matter of fact, the term received is a Greek word that carries the idea of something distributed and freely received. The faith they have was simply received. He tells us at the end of that verse, it's on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. One really interesting thing he says is that it is the same kind as ours. It could be translated value as ours.

Historically, the Jews and the Gentiles hated one another. It's hard to really articulate the depth of the emotion and hatred that separated the Jews and the Gentiles. Whatever racial tension we feel in our country, it is not close to the depth of the disdain and hatred between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews considered themselves the spiritual elite. They were the only ones who had access to God. They considered the Greeks to be pagans, and there was a deep tension between them. Paul tells us in Ephesians Chapter 3 that one of the radical outcomes of the message of the Gospel is now the Jews and Gentiles are one in every way before God. So, Peter's statement is radical. The faith of these Greek pagans was equal in every way to that of Peter's—not just to the Jews. Peter was one of the twelve. He was one of the inner three, a hall-of-famer, and yet, before God, what Peter had was no more than or less than the faith of these Gentiles who had now experienced new life in Christ. That's really quite a radical statement.

We in our culture, in our country, feel this tension. It's among races but it's also between political views. There's just a lot of ways we are divided—and I think most people would say we'd like to see that come to an end. We'd like to figure out some way to come together, but we have no real idea of how to do that. In many ways we would say it's actually getting worse, not getting better. The problem is the secular worldview has no basis by which people come together. As much as they want that, they have no foundational belief that provides that. That's equally true of an atheist worldview. They may be really good people, but they have no basis in their worldview by which people come together. It's equally true of a religious worldview. Religion around the world doesn't bring us together; it divides us. It always has. But what is remarkably different is at the core of the Christian worldview is this radical belief that because we all stand in the righteousness of Christ, there is no one more than, there is no one less than. We stand together and equal before a holy God because we stand in the righteousness of Christ. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, if you live in a mansion or you're homeless. It doesn't matter if your skin is black or white, you're Indian, Asian—it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you're male or female, if you're old or young. It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian for fifty years or if you accepted Christ last night. It doesn't matter—none of that matters. None of us stands before God on the basis of our own performance, on the basis of our own religious activity. We equally stand in the righteousness of Christ—therefore, no one more than, no one less than.

Now honestly, isn't there a tendency to think those around me are like the spiritual elite, and I'm kind of like a spiritual loser...maybe the "B" Team? If that's how you think, you have fallen prey to the lies of the false teachers. One of the remarkable truths of the Gospel—no matter who you are, no matter what your story, no matter what you have done—if you've accepted Christ as

Savior, we all stand equal in every way in the righteousness of Christ, before a holy God. That's what Peter said about the recipients.

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(2 Peter Chapter 1) Verse 2:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

Grace and peace are a familiar couplet; we see it occur often. But it's always helpful to stop and think about what's being said there. There is no possibility for true peace unless you have a deep, rigorous, courageous understanding of grace. If you don't think grace is scandalous, you don't get it. The reality of grace is this is true of me on my best days; it's equally true of me on my worst days—that I stand right before a holy God because I stand in the righteousness of Christ. On those days where I don't represent the Gospel well, on those days when I wish I hadn't said that...I wish I hadn't done that...I wish I hadn't treated someone that way...I come home disappointed and discouraged, and know that I did not represent Jesus well today. On those days I still put my head on my pillow in peace, thankful that my standing before God is not based on my performance; it's not based on my ability to do good works. I stand righteous before a holy God even on my worst days, on the basis of God's grace. When I have a deep, rich, rigorous theology of grace, it allows me to live my life in peace. That's why that couplet is together again and again and again.

He says this is about the knowledge of God—a key term in 2 Peter. This term knowledge is used eleven times in three short chapters. The English is kind of misleading. To us, knowledge means information—so I have to have a lot of information about God. That's not what the term means. It's a term that has much more to do with intimacy and relationship. As a matter of fact, it's the term that was used to describe sexual relations between a husband and a wife. It's this idea of experiencing a relationship with God—something that is real, something that is life-giving and life-changing, that is a result of this gift that God freely offers. Verse 3 kind of unpacks a little more of this relationship:

...seeing that His divine power has granted [which means a royal gift, generously given] to us everything pertaining to life and godliness [could be translated the godly life] through the true knowledge [this experience of this relationship with Him who called us] ...

What Peter says is the outflow of this experience—this relationship, this life with Christ—is that we have been given everything necessary to live out this Christian life. That God, on the basis of His divine power, has granted us everything necessary to live this godly life that is an outflow of this relationship with Jesus.

Now this is critical to understand. When the false teachers come along, what makes their message appealing is they convince you you're lacking something; you're missing something,

and what you need to unlock your Christian life is what they offer. That's what makes the message appealing. So, it's critically important to understand there is nothing you lack. You don't need an experience; you don't need more of the Holy Spirit; you don't need more of God. There isn't some mysterious key that unlocks your Christian faith. There's nothing that you need...that you lack.

Often when you go and look through the section of Christian books, many of them promise there is a secret, there is a key, there is something that mysteriously unlocks the Christian life and will finally give you what you're looking for. That is high risk because it easily leads you astray. The truth is you lack nothing that you need. We might say it this way. If you lack anything, it may simply be the understanding that you lack nothing...again...if you lack anything, it may simply be the understanding that you actually lack nothing. It is possible that you simply don't know that, and you need to learn and understand more of what you have in Christ.

Part of my responsibility is to help you understand what is true of you in Christ. I can explain it; I can try to help you understand it—but I can't believe it for you! We kind of have a partnership here. I'll try to explain it clearly so you might understand it but you have to have the courage to believe that God tells the truth, and that what you need, you already have, granted to you by the divine power of God.

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Cara: You did an excellent job of teaching God's Word, Bryan, but knowing you, I'm guessing you would say not to take your word for it, that we should be engaging in God's Word so we can confirm what we hear is true.

Bryan: Cara, I can't believe you just said that. You should believe every word I say. No, it's a great point. You're 100% right. So, at our local church, at Lincoln Berean, we work really hard to equip people how to study your Bible and to be self-feeders and so they can discover the truth for themselves. The other thing is, one of the reasons I'm so committed to expository preaching is when you just topically pluck verses from all over the Bible, it's hard to tell if that's actually what those verses are supposed to mean. There's great accountability in exposition, where everybody follows together and there's a true sense of context. So, people hold me accountable by following along. And is that really what the text says? So, I expect to be held accountable. I think that's a really good point you make.

Arnie: So, Bryan, you said that as Christ followers, we've been given everything we need, that there's nothing that we lack. But a lot of people I know that are Christians are just desperately struggling, and they feel that they're so ill prepared, and they would just break out in tears if you said, well, God's given you everything you need. So, where's the breakdown?

Bryan: Yeah, so I think that's a great question. I think the breakdown is they either don't know the truth or they don't understand the truth. So rather than just trying to artificially modify their behavior, the issue is they need to know and understand the truth. So again, if you think about the fact that so many Christians have become so much more biblically illiterate, it's going to show up in the way we live life and we're going to be pretty disappointed with our Christian lives.

Arnie: Well, and you're going to think Christianity doesn't work. [Yeah, absolutely.] That's what I did. [Yup.]

Cara: So today you mentioned that if you accepted Christ as Savior, you're equal in every way to other Christians, so I want to talk to you about that for a second. Because I think it's important and it's a hard concept for some people to grasp. So, the guy on death row who gives his life to Christ – is a convicted murderer - God sees as equal to Paul or Peter.

Bryan: It is utterly scandalous. And if you don't feel that way, you still don't understand grace. So, the person that has accepted Christ last night stands just as righteous in the presence of God as someone who's been a Christian for 50 years. It's not based on us or our performance. It's based on the righteousness of Christ. It is hard to understand, but that doesn't mean it isn't true. The Bible is very clear about that.

Cara: And that unfairness is sort of the definition of grace, right? [Yeah.]

Bryan: Yeah. That's what makes it so scandalous. [Yeah.]

Cara: If we truly follow that concept, it seems that it would prevent a lot of petty bickering in the church. It would also make it more inviting for people outside the church then.

Bryan: Yeah, so change the culture inside's going to make it more inviting to people from the outside. So, I think understanding and believing the truth of the grace of God is not only life changing for me and how I view myself, its life changing for how I view my fellow believers. If we could do more celebrating of one another and less fixing of one another, I think the church would be a better place.

Cara: Do you think that is because we tend to view the sin before we see the sinner?

Bryan: Yeah, maybe. Or maybe we just lose sight of the fact that before a holy God, if this person has truly trusted Christ the Savior, they stand righteous and accepted. [Right.] We don't see ourselves that way, so we tend not to see others that way.

Cara: Right. It's hard to delve out grace until you need some for yourself. [It is. Exactly.]

Arnie: So, in today's passage, Peter identifies himself as a slave of Christ, which just is something that most of us can't relate to. Talk to us about what that phrase really means.

Bryan: So, Jesus is the master and Peter is the slave. That would have been vivid language in the first century Roman world. It's a full statement of obedience, of submission, and really the opposite of the problem that routes all the way back to Genesis Three is, "I'll be my own God. I'll run my own life." And being a slave to a master is the opposite of that.

Cara: So, it's pretty easy to flip flop that then and start treating Christ as a slave.

Bryan: I think we do that quite a bit. I would say submission does not come easy for a 21st Century American consumer Christian. It's just very challenging.