

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

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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.

He [Peter] says God has granted...

...to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (Chapter 1, Vs. 3b)

You could translate that, His glorious, moral character. Excellence is referring to His moral excellence. It's just another description of His righteousness...based on the righteousness of Christ. Verse 4:

For by these [His glorious moral character] He has granted [royal gift, generously given] to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Therefore, on the basis of the righteousness of Christ—you haven't earned it, you haven't deserved it, you haven't performed for it—but on the basis of God's mercy, He has given it to you. And what has He given you? This new life in Christ that comes with His precious and magnificent promises—promises that give us hope.

We already looked at some of those promises earlier. There's nowhere where God promises that life will be easy. Peter is about to die for his faith. There is nowhere that God promises everything's going to make sense, everything is going to work out; there is never going to be heartache. As a matter of fact, the Bible couldn't be clearer that that's not likely the way your story's going to go. It's going to be hard! What He does promise is, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He does promise, "I will never take you through anything that's more than you can handle." He does promise, "I will forgive your sin." He promises, "There is no more condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." He promises "I will make you a new creation." He promises that "The old things are past and new things have come." He promises that, "There will be life after death." He promises a new heaven and a new earth. He promises that, "The new heaven and new earth will be the fulfillment of everything that our souls long for today." He promises that He will redeem our stories, our hurts, our heartaches. All of us have legitimate longings and desires that we would love to see realized in this world, but the promise is someday they will be realized and fulfilled in every way. He promises He will come back and that your future is more magnificent than words could describe today. He promises that what He started in you He will finish. And He promises that this is all on the basis of His grace and mercy.

Peter told us in 1 Peter Chapter One that, "By the mercy of God you have been born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Christ, in order to obtain an inheritance, an inheritance that is so sure, it's already reserved in heaven for you—an inheritance that can't be corrupted, it can't be diminished, it can't be lost." And we await the return of Christ where we will experience the fullness of our salvation and the fulfillment of these precious and magnificent promises forever—all of that—freely given, as an act of God's mercy and grace.

He says in verse 4: so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature. Very unique language...Peter language...the different New Testament writers say it a little differently. Jesus said, "You must be born again." That's not a tweaking; that's not a makeover, not merely a ticket to Heaven. That is as radical as it gets. Somehow, you are actually born again. It's the language Peter picked up in 1 Peter, "By the mercy of God, you have been born again to a living hope." It's radical!

Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ." Crucifixion implies death. Who died? I did! My old self died. Paul says in Romans Chapter 6 that when we trusted Christ as Savior, my old self died with Christ. It was crucified with Christ. He died my death. My old self was buried with Christ. My old self is dead. How dead is he? He's so dead, we buried him! He's gone—and he's not coming back! Paul goes on to say, "I have been resurrected in the newness of life in Christ. I have become a new creation in Christ. Old things have passed away. All things have become new." I have now become a partaker of the divine nature...a partaker of the very nature of Christ Himself. "I am new: I am a new creation in Christ!"

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It is just simply not true that you now have two natures. As long as you think that way, you’re going to live that way. You’re going to get stuck in Romans 7 and have this ongoing battle between the two natures. Your nature is your core; it’s your essence. Paul says in Ephesians, “You were darkness; now you are light.” Not you were in darkness—you were darkness. Now you are light. You can’t be both. Something died. It died and was buried. What died? My old self. I am now a partaker of the divine nature. I am a new creation in Christ. The sin that kept me in bondage is no longer what defines me. I have been set free. I need to understand this is the new me! I am a new creation in Christ, a partaker of the divine nature—something that God has started in me and will complete at His return!

The second part of verse four says ...having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. What is he talking about there? He’s talking about the lust. There are places where the New Testament talks about the lust; it talks about the temptation. Both are a reference to Genesis 3—that the ultimate temptation, the ultimate lust I have is to be my own god. Every other temptation, every other lust flow out of that. All of us have legitimate longings and desires. We have this deep something within us that we long to see fulfilled. We wrongly conclude the best way to fulfill that is for me to function as my own god. I think if I take charge, that is the most likely way that these longings and desires will be fulfilled. But there is a huge problem with that. I am totally inadequate for the job. I cannot function as my own god; I simply am not equipped to be God.

Therefore, it’s not a life of fulfillment and satisfaction and joy. It is a life of heartache. It is a life of despair. It’s a life of disappointment—again and again and again. I am disappointed with my inability to deliver the goods. But when I trusted Jesus as Savior, I surrendered to God as God, with my belief that ultimately the only one that can satisfy these longings and desires of my soul is Jesus Himself. The verb tenses in verse four are aorist tense verbs, which means at a moment in time. The moment I trusted Christ as Savior, I became a partaker of the divine nature, and at that moment I escaped the corruption of this world and its lust. In this life we experience a taste of the fulfillment of those longings and desires. Those longings and desires will not be fully realized until the new Heaven and the new Earth, when God ushers in the fulfillment of His kingdom—these precious and magnificent promises that deliver everything that my soul has ever longed for forever.

The remarkable truth of the Gospel is that this is not offered on the basis of your works. It’s not on the basis of your performance. It’s not on the basis of your religious activity. It is on the basis of God’s grace and mercy—that because we were lost in our sin with no hope, God sent His Son to make payment for our sin on the cross. As a result of His death, burial and resurrection, He offers us salvation—a radical new birth, freely...freely as a gift.

It's critically important to understand it doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter what's been done to you. You might be the nicest person in the room; you might have the ugliest story in the room. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, doesn't matter the color of your skin...doesn't matter! God offers you salvation...freely as a gift...if you're willing to have the courage and the faith to believe!

One of the great celebrations we have together as the church is baptism. Baptism is the public identification of people saying, "I have chosen to follow Jesus." If you have trusted Christ as Savior, and have never taken this important step of obedience, I would strongly encourage you to do that. It's a way of publicly identifying that, "I choose to be a follower of Christ!"

There is this remarkable, scandalous reality to God's grace—that it doesn't matter this morning who you are, where you've been, what you've done or what's been done to you. It doesn't matter! God offers every single person salvation freely, as a gift—a salvation full of hope, full of everything that your soul longs for—and it's yours freely—if you choose to receive it. That is the Gospel truth!

Our Father, we celebrate this almost unimaginable truth. That all of us in our stories were sinners worthy of condemnation. And yet on the basis of this gift, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, on the basis of Your grace and mercy, we stand right before a holy God. Because we stand in the righteousness of Jesus, receiving this gift that is so full of hope! Lord, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Arnie: Bryan, thanks again for another great message. Help me a little bit more to understand this idea of sharing God's nature. How does this all make sense to you?

Bryan: Yeah, so I think biblically, it's an amazing thing that we are partakers of the divine nature of Christ. It's a radical new birth. Peter says in First Peter; we're born again to a living hope. So, I believe that's true, but I don't think the Scriptures teach the result of that is that I never sin again. As a matter of fact, it's fairly clear I do. And God's made a process for confession of sin. But there's that tension between what's true and how I live. And I think what closes that gap is the more I understand and believe what's true, then the more I live like it. So, it's a lifelong process of understanding and believing in order that I might live out what I think is already true of me in Christ.

Cara: We touched on this yesterday that God has actually granted us everything we need to live the Christian life. We give up truth of the Gospel. We start looking for secrets in that better Christian life, but in doing that it seems to me we're giving up a great deal of freedom then.

Bryan: Yeah, so I think this is really common. Everybody's looking for the magic bullet, for the secret, the key that unlocks the Christian life. And I think that makes us extremely vulnerable to the false teachers, because there's no shortage of people offering that, and then we just end up off track, which means we end up in bondage. So, it's like a 10-year-old looking for the secret to becoming a 20-year-old. It's like it just doesn't work that way. You have to learn, grow, mature.

It takes time. There's no shortcut. So, we understand, we believe, we live and there's no, there's no secret beyond that. That's pretty clear in the Scriptures.

Cara: Satan is very determined to lead us away from Gospel Truth. But how can we tell when we're being deceived by the liar?

Bryan: The only way to tell is to know the truth. So, He's a liar. There's this big cosmic war going on. He's determined to deflect the glory away from God and does that by lying. You'll never keep up with the lies. So, the only chance you have is to know the truth and the truth sets you free.

Cara: Well, I think the lies are so big too. I mean that God can't be trusted. I mean, that could go leaps and bounds over. That's why you have to know what is true, that He can be trusted and God's not a liar. I think that's the thing that you shared with us, that anytime I'm afraid or, what am I calling God, a liar? [Yeah.] Yeah.

Bryan: Yeah. I do find it really helpful to keep coming back to the question, does God tell the truth? [Right.] And then I choose whether I believe that or not.

Arnie: But it's still, it's really complicated. I remember as a new believer, I was in an argument with somebody about a false teacher and he said, well, Arnie, both my daughters came to know the Lord through his teaching. It's complicated, but Bryan, I'm sure you see this all the time as a pastor, what kind of damage have you seen because of false teaching?

Bryan: Well, the damage is extensive. I mean if a false teacher quotes the Word of God, it is possible for somebody to hear that and God to use that, because somebody comes to truth, but I certainly wouldn't recommend that. But the damage is extensive in people's lives when they believe things that aren't true. It affects how they view themselves, how they view others, what they live for, what they think matters and on and on the list goes. I would suggest it is a huge problem.

Cara: One of the great promises you mentioned today from Philippians (Chapter) One (verse) six is that Jesus will finish the good work he has begun in you. That's an incredible statement. Not only has He given me salvation and a new life, but He's also given me a purpose that is completely unique to me.

Bryan: Yeah. So, it's a lifelong process, and we've talked about this before. Salvation is past tense, when I was saved, it's present tense, I'm being saved, which means God is continuing to do a work in me, and one day, ultimately will be saved, which is the completion of that Salvation. He's promised to finish what He started. And I can trust Him with that.

Cara: Good stuff.

Arnie: Yeah. It's really good.

