

1. Everything we need for Life and Godliness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 August 2008

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 0 0] Now, perhaps we could have our Bibles open, please, at 2 Peter, and we'll have a moment's prayer before we begin.

Father, we tremble before your word. Who is sufficient for these things? And so I pray that you will take my words in all their weakness, that you will use them faithfully to unfold the written word, and so lead us to the living word, the Lord Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Everything we need until the Lord returns on this particular evening, everything we need for life and godliness. That's the NIV translation of verse 3.

His divine power has given to us everything we need for life and godliness. I know that some of you will have visited the city of Rome, and you'll have explored many of the wonderful monuments and sites there.

On a mellow autumn day, last autumn, Thelma and I visited the Circus Maximus. It was a beautiful day. It was peaceful. And yet we couldn't help but think of the awful scenes that took place there when Nero launched his persecution on the church in the 60s of the first century.

[1 : 3 3] Because that was the place where many Christians were tortured, murdered, martyred horribly. Perhaps even Peter himself, who almost certainly was martyred during the reign of Nero, along with Paul.

And Peter, we are told, was crucified upside down. There is no absolute authority for this, but there is a persistent story that he asked this to happen because he felt he wasn't worthy to die in the same way as his master.

Now, it has to be said, though, that his second letter hasn't fared very well in the church. This has been a much neglected and much despised letter. Nineteenth-century commentators describe it as the least valuable of the New Testament writings, and in brackets, apart from Jude.

We'll be looking a bit at Jude next in two weeks' time. We'll look at chapter two because there are parallel passages. It's not liked by many commentators because of its tone of denunciation, particularly in chapter two.

And others tell us it wasn't written by Peter at all. It was written by someone claiming his name. Now, frankly, that's an example of academic snobbery.

[2 : 5 3] Scholars tell us a former fisherman couldn't have written a letter like this whose Greek is so polished and eloquent. It's rather like the same kind of nonsense that some people say an actor-manager from Stratford couldn't possibly have written the glorious plays that we call the plays of Shakespeare.

It must have been somebody important like the Earl of Southampton. I think we can forget all about that. It's amazing, these kind of edifices, that they're built on nothing that can conceivably be called evidence.

We're going to take this as a genuine letter of the Apostle Peter and as the final word of Peter. If you glance ahead later on in the chapter, verse 14, I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

Peter knows he is about to die. Peter knows his life and ministry is almost over, and he's writing this letter to encourage, to strengthen the Christians of his own day and of the days to come, saying we have everything we need in Jesus Christ until he returns.

If you want to study the letter in more detail, there's a very fine Bible speaks today by Dick Lucas and Chris Green, and that will help you to get into the letter in more detail.

[4 : 14] But anyway, let's look together then at these verses. He had written his first letter to warn people of persecution, the fiery trial he talks about in chapter 1, which was going to happen to them and indeed happened to him himself.

But in this second letter, he's much more concerned about another danger to the church, the danger of false teaching. That's what he's particularly concerned with in this letter, a continuing danger, and I think you'll agree a danger especially to the church in the West.

We are not persecuted, but we are certainly subjected to a whole flood of false teaching and dangerous teaching. And what's the answer to this? Well, his answer is very simple.

The answer is to proclaim the gospel. How do we defeat error? We defeat error by preaching the truth. This letter is driven by the word grace.

Verse 2, May grace and peace be multiplied to you. And then at the end, in verse 18, Grow in grace and knowledge. Notice how Peter describes himself in verse 1.

[5 : 23] He is a servant. Now that does two things. First of all, it shows humility. Jesus is Lord. Paul, Peter is servant.

He is not coming in his own authority. He is coming in the authority of Christ. But that is the other thing. The servant of God, in the Old Testament, is someone who has a particular message from God.

Like Moses, for example, is particularly the servant of God. David is as well. So if someone comes as the servant of God, they are coming with the word of God. And he is also an apostle, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And next week, we're going to see how he's going to tell us that the words of the prophets and the apostles together are the word of God. Probably as I say, writing from Rome, his first letter, he says, from Babylon, which was the term that many of these early Christians used to describe the city of Rome, particularly in the book of Revelation.

And he's near the end of his life. One of the early church leaders, Clement of Rome, who may possibly be the Clement mentioned in Philippians 4, tells us that he was martyred under Nero.

[6 : 34] So that's the first thing then. Peter is writing this letter to the Christians to warn them against false teaching, to warn them to proclaim the gospel. And the second thing is this. Peter is standing almost on the boundary of the apostolic and the post-apostolic age.

As the apostles neared the end of their ministry, their great concern was, how is the church going to remain apostolic? How is the gospel going to be guarded and passed on?

And so many of the New Testament letters, I mentioned Jude, 2 Timothy, at the end of Paul's life, 2 John, are concerned with just this problem of false teaching.

Positively, to encourage spiritual growth, and negatively, to warn against false teaching. So, let's look then at these verses.

All, everything we need for life and godliness. I want to look at it in three parts. First of all, verses 1 to 4, I'm going to call God's generous gift.

[7 : 39] His divine power has granted to us everything we need. Secondly, the way to use that gift in verses 5 to 9. And thirdly, the assurance that God promises in verses 10 and 11.

So, first of all, God's generous gift. Now, notice Paul, sorry, why am I calling him Paul? The guy's name is Peter.

Peter is an apostle he is a servant. But look what he says in verse 1. To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours.

What's God's generous gift? God's generous gift is, first of all, he has given to every Christian the same faith as he has given to the apostles. There are no first and second class citizens.

If you are a Christian, if you're a new Christian, if you've just been a Christian for a few weeks, a few days, a few years, you have been given the same faith as the great apostles. You've been given the same faith as Peter, the same faith as Paul.

[8 : 47] So, how does the church remain apostolic? The church remains apostolic as new people are added to it. As new people listen to the apostolic gospel, believe in it, come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and as they are added, they are built up as living stones, and the church keeps on growing.

That is how the church remains apostolic. Now, you can see the connection. Only if we preach the true gospel will people be converted, because only the true gospel will bring people to Christ.

But as they are converted, and in turn, as they share that gospel, as that gospel goes out wider and wider, the apostolic church continues. It's nothing to do with laying hands on people and passing it down through the generations, as every new Christian comes to Christ, as every new believer is born again, the apostolic church continues.

So, if you are a Christian, particularly if you are a young Christian, you are a living proof that this is the true gospel, because this gospel has saved you. This gospel has made you a new person.

And that faith, we are told, is given, in verse 1 again, by the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Now, notice this phrase, God and Saviour.

[10 : 09] It used to be said when I was young, I haven't heard it much recently, I'm glad to say, that some people accept Jesus as Saviour, but don't accept Him as Lord. Now, that is frankly nonsense.

You cannot possibly accept Jesus as Saviour without accepting Him as Lord. It's only because He is Lord and God that He can be Saviour. It's only because of who He is that He can be your Saviour.

In Him, we have everything that God has to give. In Him is grace and peace. In Him is God Himself.

So that's what Peter, that's the first part of this marvellous gift. We have the same faith as the apostles. I said if you're a young believer, if you're an old believer and are beginning to get rather tired and rather jaded and rather finding the way difficult and grinding and harsh.

This is a promise for you as well. You have the same faith as the apostles. You have been given the grace of God which not only saved you but keeps you and will keep you until the day of Jesus Christ.

[11 : 23] And the other part of that gift in verse 3 is His power and His promises. His divine power has granted to us everything. Is the power of Jesus Christ sufficient to defeat our enemies and bring us to glory?

That's the question that often arises, isn't it? He has not only called us, He has not only saved us but He has given us promises that will keep us going.

And these promises are staggering. He has called us to His own glory and excellence 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.

Think about that. This is a staggering phrase. Partakers of the divine nature. That does not, of course, mean that we become demigods or anything like that because this is a gift of grace.

But it means that in through the power of the Holy Spirit in us we have been given the very life of Christ Himself.

[12 : 30] The very life that He lived in His earthly life. The very life that He sends us through His risen power by the Spirit. What Paul says in Romans 8 in different words, He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son.

As we continue in the Christian life, we have not only been called but we are gradually being transformed into His likeness.

We have been adopted into God's family. There is a negative side to this as well. Having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by sinful desire.

Now, corruption does not mean our physical bodies. Corruption means the sin which still exists and still clings to us and still tries to drag us down.

In other words, we have been given the strength to live in the present knowing that that will bring us into the future. The great and precious promises. Now, promises aren't just the individual promises.

[13 : 37] Earlier generations of Christians were fond of their promise boxes. These little boxes with a gold pair of tweezers and you pulled out a little scroll every day with a promise.

Now, I'm not wanting to mock at that because it did help many people but if we simply have isolated snippets of promises we are missing the wonder and the fullness of the gospel.

Listen to what Wesley said. All those days, he says, I can scarce remember to have opened the Bible but I came upon some great and precious promise.

This is the important bit. And I saw, he says, more than ever that the gospel in truth is but one great promise from beginning to the end.

In Christ are, as Paul says, all the promises of God are yes and amen. Christ himself is the great promise. Not just individual snippets of promises but the whole plan of salvation.

[14 : 36] So as Peter writes to those Christians, many of whom were, like himself, facing death by martyrdom. All of them are frightened, all of them worried, all of them fearful.

And he tells them that you have become partakers of the divine nature and to you have been given precious promises and the power of God to keep you in this world and bring you to glory.

But secondly then, he goes on in verses 5 to 9, the way to use that gift. The danger about saying what I've said in the last 10 minutes or so is that we can then sit back.

It's an awful phrase, let go and let God. Once again, a phrase I haven't heard very often recently, which is good because that's a very dangerous phrase.

Let go and let God. That's simply unbiblical. Peter says because Paul, Peter says because God has given you these promises, this must show in our attitudes and lifestyle.

[15 : 42] Incidentally, Peter does mention Paul in chapter 3 and says he's written things that are difficult to understand. We'll come to that when we come to it. One thing I always find is that whatever else people remember about a sermon or a talk, they always remember the mistakes.

Helps to keep one humble, doesn't it? Anyway, Peter says essentially faith isn't enough. Now, Peter is clearly not talking about the faith.

He's not talking about the gospel. He is talking about personal faith. Verse 5, for this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith, your personal faith.

Now, the word supplement means originally something that a rich sponsor would do, kind of rich guy who would give a generous donation to help some project.

And that's what Peter is saying. Peter is saying, God has given you the gift of faith. Because remember, faith is a gift. Faith is not of ourselves, but is the gift of God.

[16 : 48] Add to your faith. And he's talking about rounded Christian character. Add to your faith virtue. I think the word goodness is probably a better translation here because goodness means what God created us to be.

In other words, live as God made you to be. And add to virtue knowledge. Now, these false teachers whom we're going to be meeting in chapter 2 offered knowledge.

They offered esoteric knowledge for the elite. They loved little groups who were better than other people, who knew things that other people didn't do. Paul said, I'll get it right some of those days.

Peter says, I'm glad I've got five times because I may manage to get it right by the last one. It's rather like the thing I've never been allowed to forget when at Easter I told people it would be mince pies at the end of the service.

Anyway, knowledge is saving knowledge. Knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. not esoteric knowledge. Self-control. Steadfastness.

[17 : 57] Just keeping on going when things are tough. That's what Peter is talking about. And steadfastness with godliness. Godliness every part of our lives for God. Brotherly affection.

Live as members of the family of God and love which is the heart of God himself. Now, you can see what Peter is doing. He's not saying you've got faith and you need to add something else to it.

He's saying much more if this is genuine faith it's going to show itself in all these virtues. Because all these qualities really are ways in which faith expresses itself.

Because faith is not some kind of abstract thing. I often hear people saying I place an awful lot of emphasis on my faith. Well, I hope you don't.

I place no emphasis on my faith at all. My faith is very fickle. My faith is very weak. My faith was left to me would never bring me to glory at all.

[18 : 58] Faith is a gift of God. And as we live the life of faith then it expresses itself in these ways. And it has results. First of all, it means we are increasingly effective.

Verse 8, if these qualities are yours and increasing they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful. Now, one of the things that Peter is going to say about the false teachers in chapter 2 is that they lead to barrenness.

They lead to ineffectiveness. They lead to death, in fact. Peter is saying here, if you increase in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ that will make you an effective Christian.

Gospel living will produce fruit that lasts. It will produce mature believers. So that's the positive effect. It also has a negative effect.

Verse 9, whoever lacks these qualities is so near-sighted that he is blind. Near-sighted essentially means we can't see very far ahead and blind means that we can't see at all.

[20 : 00] In other words, if we live this kind of Christian life that is gospel living, then we will be effective, then we will have vision then we will see the way ahead.

If we're tempted away to a new gospel, we've got to ask ourselves some questions, haven't we? Do we know a better saviour than the one who saved us? Do we know a more powerful gospel, one that rescued us and brought us from death to life?

Do we know a better Bible than the one that is opened here week by week? Where are the growing liberal churches? churches? Where is the signs of growth in people who are not preaching the apostolic gospel?

Because unless the apostolic gospel is being preached, there's going to be no life, there's going to be nothing but blindness, nothing but barrenness and nothing but death. And it's so interesting, and we'll come back to this in chapter 2, that this kind of liberal teaching, which was regarded as liberating, regarded as the teaching for people who were intelligent, that simply emptied the churches.

It's because people find it so unsatisfying. So how do we treat that gift that God has given us? We treat it by growing, by learning, by developing in our faith.

[21 : 27] Peter has a third thing to say. It's one thing to say God has given us a gift. It's another thing to say we need to use the gift. But the question that so many people are tormented with, and all of us sometimes worry about from time to time, is are we actually going to make it?

Is it going actually to sustain us right to the wire, right to the finishing line? Peter is going to say much more about this, but he deals with it in verses 10 to 11, the assurance that God gives.

Therefore, brothers, he says, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fail.

I think Peter is saying two things here. He is saying, first of all, that now we need to persevere. Since we have been called, since we have been chosen.

Now, when Peter says, make your calling and election sure, he isn't meaning that we find some other assurance that's not in scripture, some other assurance that's not related to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

[22 : 33] what he's saying is, so live, so open your heart to the word of God and your lives to the spirit, that you will increasingly have this assurance in your hearts.

Remember, the spirit is given as the down payment, as the deposit, showing us that the whole payment will be made. So we persevere now. He says, if you practice those qualities, you will never fall.

Now, it's very important to realize what Peter means here. Peter is not saying we won't make mistakes. Peter is not saying we'll never get it wrong, because we often do fall.

The important thing is not that the child of God falls, but that we get up again when we fall. But Peter is meaning something very different. Peter is meaning something more, what Jude says in his letter.

Remember the great doxology to him who is able to keep you from falling. And falling there doesn't just mean making mistakes, getting it wrong. Falling means falling away, apostasy, turning our back on the faith.

[23 : 39] Peter is saying, as Jude says, there is one who is able to keep us from apostasy. There is one who is able to keep us from falling. Since he's called us, since he's chosen us, he's not going to change his mind about you.

Before he called you, before he chose you, way back in eternity, before the worlds were made, and he chose you, he knew exactly everything you have done up to this moment, and more, he knows everything you're going to do throughout the rest of your life.

He's not going to turn away, because he knows it all already. And that's what we need to be sure about. Our assurance does not depend on our faith, but on God's faithfulness.

Our faith is important, as we've said, but ultimately it depends on God's faithfulness. And who is God? He is one who is able to keep us from falling. So he says, persevere now, be all the more diligent, keep on going.

But the second thing he says in verse 11, in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. perseverance now and a wonderful welcome then.

[24 : 54] The imagery here is very appropriate for current days. This is a picture of an Olympic runner being welcomed at the end of a race. A rich welcome.

There will be richly provided for you an entrance. When we arrive in heaven, we won't have to sneak in, as it were, in the back door. There will be a wonderful welcome.

I wonder if you've ever gone to a party or something, at someone's house, you're not terribly sure if you're welcome or not. You sort of hang around wondering if you really ought to be there. That's not going to happen when we come to the eternal kingdom.

When we come to the eternal king, the red car will be wonderful beyond all imagining. The authorized version here has a wonderful phrase, there will be an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom.

when we arrive, there will be people waiting for us, excited, saying, look who's come. Isn't this wonderful? That's what Peter is saying, more wonderful than we can imagine into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[26 : 04] Remember, this is written by a man who knows that he's perhaps only weeks from his own death. This is written by somebody who has, through his experience and through his trust in the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, has realized that Jesus is indeed able to keep.

So, we've been given a wonderful gift. We have a gospel. We need to respond to that gospel. We need to see the church growing and ourselves growing. Above all, we need to keep looking for that wonderful assurance, the abundant entrance, knowing that when we reach there, forget about all those jokes about St. Peter and the pearly gates.

It will be a wonderful welcome. Whoever you are, if you're a child of God, you'll be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And the more firmly we believe that, the more effective we will be in our day-to-day living and in our church testimony together. Amen. Let's pray.

In this way, there will be richly provided an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[27 : 20] Father, we praise you for the words of your apostle Peter, for his faith, for his perseverance, as he himself is nearing that goal. And we pray that in our daily lives, as we go back to the routines, to the triviality, to the joys, to the sorrows, to the challenges, that we may indeed go as those who have a gospel, who have been given great and precious promises, that that may make us effective in our day and generation.

Amen.