

Sermon Series on 2 Peter. 'A Perambulation Through (2) Peter'

Sermon No. 2. Date:18/9/16. Preacher: Rev. Adrian Hallett

Readings: Rom. 3:21-26; 2Pet.1:1-11. Title:'Precious Faith'

We continue our 'Perambulation Through (2) Peter'. 'To perambulate = 'To walk round in order to inspect'. We're walking through 2 Peter to 'inspect it' - to get to know this epistle, that we might understand this important letter and why Peter wrote it.

We noted last week that 2 Peter was written so that Christians would know how to deal with false teaching/false teachers – from *within* the church.

We learnt something of Peter's methodology... how he went about this. He builds up the faith of his readers.... he wants to strengthen their faith, and he does this by checking the foundations of their faith.

He wants them to be strong in their faith.... certain of their faith. He want them to know the truth, so that they can recognise error.... recognise false teaching/teachers.

So last week we looked at how the Christian faith has always been under attack.... how the foundations have been eroded away.... how weak and ineffective the church has been in standing up against false teachers and has too often opened its pulpit to false teachers.

So we began to consider the emphasis that Peter gave us.... that there is only one faith. Only one way that any of us, regardless of who we are, can be made right with God – through repentance and faith in the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.... Jesus Christ, who took the punishment for our sins, that you and I deserve.

But one faith in another sense – the faith of the apostles, and we reminded ourselves how the faith of the church is built upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles.

I ended last week by saying that we were going to look at this 'one faith' in a little more detail. What exactly is this 'one faith'? What exactly is this gospel that Peter is talking about? What is it that he is so excited about? What exactly is this 'precious faith'?

Let me read the first two verses of 2 Peter to you again.

Does anything stand out to you? Well, in just two verses, Jesus Christ is mentioned three times. Now here is something very basic and obvious, but something that very often is overlooked – forgive me for stating the obvious, but I trust all of us here know and believe that Jesus Christ is absolutely central to the Christian faith.

It may well be obvious to you and me, but let me assure you that we are living in the days when many do not believe that or accept that and will even deny or suppress that claim.

Yes, Peter is stating the obvious, but it is something that needs to be restated over and over again. Jesus Christ is absolutely central to the Christian faith – there is no Christian faith without the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the point Peter is emphasising.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. I remember going to a funeral of a friend of ours a few years ago – a Christian friend who had a strong Christian faith. In the address the vicar gave, he spoke a lot about my friends 'strong faith'... he emphasised many times how important his faith was to him. But not once was the name of Jesus Christ mentioned. The congregation weren't even told that it was 'the Christian faith'. Because it was a funeral held in a church, presumably people would have assumed that he had 'faith in God' – but what 'god'? What kind of God?

I remember thinking, 'I wonder what the unbelievers in the congregation make of all this? Faith, but what faith? Who or what was he trusting in?' I'm sure there would have been some in that congregation who would have liked to talk in terms of their having 'faith' too. But sometimes it can be a sort of 'faith in faith' type of belief. They needed to hear the difference between their vague, uncertain faith and the saving faith of my Christian friend.

What an opportunity to share the gospel! But sadly, an opportunity missed. I don't think in this case it was deliberate on the part of the vicar. I knew the vicar – I think, as it is so easy to do, he overlooked the obvious. He was so familiar with the gospel himself that he had forgotten to state that Jesus is central to the gospel message and he had just 'assumed' that his hearers would have known what kind of faith he was talking about.

In other cases it can be deliberate. When people look at the state of the world, you will sometimes hear such things as, 'We need to get back to religion'. Or as

people become appalled at the rise in crime and the general decline in the behaviour of the young, they will say 'We need to get religious education back in our schools'. 'People need to come back to God', they say.

Very often this is said by people who had some sort of religious upbringing but who no longer see the need to go to church!

People are happy to talk about God aren't they? They are quite content to exhort people to have some sort of belief in God, even surrender themselves to God, but Jesus Christ is never mentioned. He is not regarded as essential or central to this call to 'return to God'. Most people who think like this believe that you can go direct to God.

That, of course, is the belief of the Muslim....that is the belief of the Jew. They believe in God, but see no need of Jesus Christ - they reject him – just regard him as a great teacher or prophet, but certainly not essential to their belief system.

I'm reminded of a Jewish friend of ours, with whom we had many conversations over a period of time about the Christian faith. In the end he said to us in no uncertain terms, 'I believe in God, I just don't need your Jesus Christ to get to him!'

The complete opposite of what Peter (a Jew!) is hammering home. The complete opposite of what the rest of the NT teaches! As Paul put it, '*There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*' (2 Tim.2:5).

You can't go direct to God – you need a mediator – you need Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who himself said, '*I am the way the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me*' (Jn.14:6).

Belief in God is not sufficient. What do the scriptures say? '*Even the devil believes – and trembles!*' Didn't do him much good!

Belief in God alone is not enough to make us a Christian – to have a belief in God as creator and God as Father is not in itself enough to make us a Christian. We need the Christ of the apostle Peter.

Peter can't keep away from the name of Jesus Christ – three times he mentions his name in the first two verses. What is the essence of the Christian faith? The

person of Jesus Christ. He's the foundation of your Christian faith is what Peter is reminding his readers of – that's what we are being reminded of this morning.

But there's more!

When Peter says, *'To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours'*. That's Peter's way of phrasing the great doctrine of Justification by Faith.

Now don't misunderstand me – it is right to come back to God and believe in God. But the question is, 'how do I do this? He is pure and holy. He is light and in him there is no darkness at all'. How can I be 'right' with a God like that? How can I, sinful, self-centred, rebellious, be acceptable to this holy God? What is this 'one faith' – this gospel? What was it that Peter and the other apostles preached around the world? What was it that turned the world upside down in such a short space of time? Here's their message in a nutshell:

1. Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the only begotten Son of God.
2. He came to earth for one purpose – to bear the sins of man himself.
3. In Christ, God has dealt with the sin of mankind – he has done away with it.

That in essence, was the message proclaimed. It was a simple message, an uncomplicated message. And what was the required response to that? Believe and act upon it and say:

1. I have no righteousness of my own.
2. I accept the righteousness that God gave me in Christ.
3. I am unworthy and sinful. I repent of my sins and accept the righteousness that God clothes me with in Christ.
4. I can stand forgiven and accepted before this awesome, holy God.

That's justification by faith – that's the message Peter preached and that is the foundation of our faith – this *'precious faith'*.

That is the unchanging gospel.... that is the message to be preached and proclaimed in every age and in every generation.

We have to say to so called 'sophisticated modern man', belief in God is not enough. We have to say 'you cannot save yourself by your own efforts. It is futile to think that you can make yourself acceptable to this holy God by your 'good works'. It is impossible to earn your salvation – *'it is the gift of God'*.

But we have to tell them the good news too. We have to tell them that that is not the end of the story – thankfully! God has done something wonderful for us in Christ. He has made a new way of righteousness – *'the righteousness of God by faith'*.

In other words, there is a way to get rid of sin and its guilt and its power. Here is a new nature.... a new life and positive righteousness, and it's all the gift of God!

He is offering a new way back to himself in and through the Lord Jesus Christ and him crucified. That's the faith Peter is talking about. That's the faith we and his readers are grounded in. That's the faith that Peter is all excited about. Justification by faith – no wonder he calls it *'precious faith'*.

This word precious is a favourite word of Peter's. He uses it six times in his two epistles. *'Precious'* – something incredibly valuable.... something of infinite value... something beyond price... priceless.... something of more value than even life itself.

I remember an old school friend of mine. Left school with one O level, but became an incredibly wealthy man. Made his first million but then lost it all when he lost his manufacturing plant through the Cyprus troubles many years ago. Started again, formed another very successful company which was floated on the stock exchange. A very, very wealthy man who had everything... anything that money could buy. He'd got it made, until one day he was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer. Now he stood to lose everything. Suddenly his health was the most precious thing to him. He did everything he could to arrest the cancer. Money was no object... he sought the advice of the best oncologists... he even went to America to receive a advanced form of treatment. He came to question the value of wealth or anything else, if he lost his health. His health was the most precious thing...it was beyond price.

I wish I could say there was a happy ending to the health problems of my old school friend. Sadly all the money he spent, all the treatment he sought was to no avail. He died. And what was even sadder was the fact that he died not knowing this *'precious faith'* that Peter is talking of. As far as I know, he died trusting in his 'good works' and the god of Freemasonry which was talked about at his funeral.

For my friend, his health was (understandably) the most important thing in the world to him. The point Peter is making is that this faith is so, so precious, more precious than our health, more important, more precious even than life itself – priceless!

The question we should be asking ourselves this morning is, 'just how precious is this doctrine about Christ our righteousness to us?' Does it thrill us? Are we in awe of this generous, gracious God. Do we recognise that it is the most precious thing? Do we see the futility and the arrogance of trusting in ourselves? Do we recognise and acknowledge this without this precious faith we face only the judgement and wrath of God? Do we bow down and worship God for this '*precious faith*'?

As I close, let me give you a simple illustration that somebody gave me many years ago. It helped me understand this righteousness that God gives us in Christ.

Here's a crumpled piece of paper... it represents my life. I've messed up... I know I've not been perfect.... done things wrong.... things that I am ashamed of. I know I need to sort my life out. No matter how hard I try, no matter how often I try and smooth out the 'crumples', I just can't get rid of them. No matter how hard I try, no matter how hard I try and cover up my faults and failings and sin, my life is still a bit of a mess, and that is what God is going to see in me. Now when I come to Christ, when I put my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, when I'm born again by the Spirit of God, I'm hidden in Christ. (Put the crumpled paper into my hand and clench it). Now God doesn't see my messed up life. I'm in Christ.... I am clothed in his righteousness, the righteousness of Christ.

Justified – so that God sees me as 'just as if I'd' never sinned. Sanctified, the promise that the Holy Spirit is working in us to make us more like Christ. And glorified, meaning that the day will come when we shall stand in the presence of God in a perfect state and ultimately to live with God and Christ for ever and ever.

This is the foundation of our faith – how strong and secure are your foundations? Everything we need is to be found by faith in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Without him we are lost and nothing, but in him we are complete. He is my all, he is your all, '*Christ is all and in all*'. Precious, precious faith indeed!