

1PETER 5:12-14 CBC 27.9.2020am

Our final study in 1Peter – I hope you’ve learned with me much about living the Christian life in the world we live in. It’s wonderful to see Peter, who often failed as a disciple, being transformed by God’s grace as he got older so that he became a rock. And now, out of all God has been working in his life, Peter wants to encourage us. He’s lived the gospel, and he says, “It’s all true! And it works!”

That’s the message Peter has for us, and he sums it up as he closes this letter. So v.12: “*With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God.*”

You might smile when Peter says his letter is “brief” because it’s probably longer than most letters we write. But it’s brief considering the subject matter – what he calls “*the true grace of God*”! The grace of God is inexhaustible, and the task given to Peter to encourage other Christians is lifelong (“*Feed my sheep!*” Jn 21:15-18). In that context, this letter is only a taster of a great subject and a lifelong ministry, but we’ve still had a feast.

And here’s Peter’s summing up, the bottom line: that we should live in “*the true grace of God*” – the glorious riches of God’s kindness, mercy, goodness and provision for us in Christ. That’s what Peter has been sharing with us in this letter.

He’s reminded us of God’s grace to us in the past: how Christ died for our sins once for all to bring us to God (3:18). That’s the firm foundation on which we stand. And he’s told us how grace gives us a glorious future, an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (1:4), because God has called us to His eternal glory in Christ (5:10).

But chiefly he’s been urging us to see that between past grace and future grace there’s grace for today, whatever our circumstances: grace to live in society, in the workplace, in the home, in our personal relationships, among unbelievers – grace to live anywhere, grace for any struggle. There’s grace for your hospital appointment ... that difficult conversation ... your marriage ... your singleness ... your old age ... your struggle with temptation ... the thing that keeps you awake at night with worry ... Say to yourself, “*There’s grace for this!*”

That grace is celebrated and applied all the way through 1Peter. It can calm your fears, give you courage and hope. And that’s the note on which Peter ends. It sums up his message. Peter says: What I’ve been trying to communicate to you is that you are people to whom God has given His amazing grace. Do you really believe that for every struggle of heart and every circumstance of life, you’ve been given grace? Your reason for courage and hope is His grace.

“*But how can I be sure?*” – Peter’s personal story is a powerful witness; and the whole letter is packed with evidence (Peter describes it as “*testimony*” that this is the true grace of God). So go back and read this letter again and again! But even in these closing lines there’s powerful evidence that the grace of God is true and sufficient – Look with me at the last two verses and you’ll see glimpses of God’s grace almost in passing, yet behind them are big ideas – solid ground to build your life on.

1. Grace to sustain us in difficult times and places

v.13: “*She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings*” – probably not Mrs Peter, but Peter’s local church sending greetings to brothers and sisters in Christ.

But Babylon? At the time Peter was writing, the place called Babylon in the Old Testament had become a virtual ghost-town and there's no reason for Peter to have been there. It's almost certain that "Babylon" is Christian code for ROME. Babylon in the Bible is more than a place; it's a symbol for this world's kingdoms organized without reference to the kingdom of God. And in Peter's day, the centre of the kingdom of this world was Rome. So he's probably writing from Rome – and already in Rome – even in Rome – there's a church. That's the power of God's grace. No place is too hard for the gospel.

And it's striking, because it's from Rome that the persecution of the church is about to explode. And here's Peter encouraging us to stand firm in the face of opposition. Our instinct might be to say, "*It's all right for you to say that*" – but Peter was at the centre of the persecution, and knew already from the prophecy of Jesus that he was destined to die by crucifixion. So we can't dismiss Peter – he had the mark of the cross on him. So he's writing from Rome and bearing witness to the power of God's grace to draw people to Christ and to keep them. The gospel works! Even in Rome! Let's not imagine that little Corsham is too hard for God's grace.

2. Grace to restore us when we fall

We all know how Peter denied Christ and later was restored by the Lord himself. But Peter isn't the only person in this passage who fell and was restored. John Mark was a second kind of Peter. As a young man he went with Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey, and dropped out part way through. We don't know why – but in Paul's language, he "deserted" (Ac 15:38). So Paul wasn't willing to take him on the next mission trip, though later they were wonderfully reconciled and Paul speaks highly of Mark in his letters.

But here we see Mark with Peter, and now Peter can say this man who'd had a reputation as a deserter has become "*my son Mark*" (v.13) – a son in the gospel. It seems that Peter mentored Mark, and tradition links them in the writing of the second gospel. And here's a reminder that we don't have to be as well known as an apostle to be restored by God's grace, as though God only does that for special people. He did it for Mark too. And as Mark and Peter worked together to produce the second gospel, we might reflect that some of us have come to Christ and grown in Christ because these two people were restored.

That's God's amazing grace! Have you fallen? There's grace for you! And if you've ever known the joy of being restored, could you be part of someone else's restoration? I wonder if Peter was especially drawn to Mark because he himself had failed? Is there a young person who has failed to whom you could become a father or a mother? Or an older person to whom you could become a true brother or sister? "*My son Mark*" – that's a wonderful demonstration of how people who fail at first can be restored and be used mightily by God. This is the true grace of God! It's powerful enough to work anywhere.

In fact, it gets better still when you include Silas (v.12) in the picture. He too is helping Peter with his ministry. And that's significant, because all those years ago, when Paul had refused to take Mark on another mission trip, it led to a falling out with his other mission partner, Barnabas, who happened to be Mark's uncle. So while Mark went off with uncle Barnabas, Paul headed in a different direction with a new mission partner – this man Silas!

So all these people have history with one another. Yet the true grace of God was so powerful in their lives that over the years they were all reconciled (1Co 9:6; Col 4:10-11; 2Ti 4:11), and now we've got Mark in the same room as Silas, the person who replaced his uncle on the mission trip. And they're the best of friends. Perhaps uncle Barnabas had died and Silas has become an uncle to Mark, just as Peter was a father in Christ to him.

Whatever, it's another evidence of the amazing grace of God. We all know that when strong personalities clash often they don't know how to stop the battle. They aren't big enough to get over the initial hurt. We've all met people who are emotionally sitting in prison, eaten up with bitterness over an argument they had long ago. Maybe they feel humiliated or that they weren't listened to. And they're living out their lives with the curtains drawn – withdrawing from the challenges of growing, of apologizing, of repairing relationships. They prefer just to re-examine their wounds. Perhaps you're one of those people. Peter wants you to know there's grace for you. He'd seen the grace of God restoring relationships that had been horribly broken. That's the true grace of God.

3. Grace to create loving communities

v.14 “Greet one another with a kiss of love.” I'm being only half-flippant when I say there ought to be a whole lot more kissing going on in our churches! Yes, it was a different culture – but what a remarkable thing that Christian slaves and masters would greet each other in this way in Christ! Yes, the men kissed the men and the women kissed the women. Yes, it was a kiss of love not a kiss of lust – that's important. And yes, if you applied this literally in some cultures, you'd destroy the church rather than uniting it in love.

But when we've made all those qualifications, don't miss the point that the true grace of God creates churches that are communities of beautiful love. Life in a fallen world is hard. Coronavirus is hard. Not being able to meet family and friends as much as we'd like is hard. Zoom meetings are hard. Live-streaming services is hard! The battles to get through the week are hard. Do you know what our church community consists of? People who are beaten up by the struggles of life. Hurting people. People who walk with a limp. That's us.

And the true grace of God makes us a family that loves and supports one another. Peter's letter is full of this:

- 1:22 “Love one another deeply, from the heart”
- 3:8 “Love one another, be compassionate”
- 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply ...”

Has Peter just described how you live? There are so many hurting people, and so many ways you can kiss someone in love without using your lips. A letter, a text, a phone call, a word of encouragement, a listening ear, a helping hand. Are you part of God's transforming work of love? Is that not just a reaction, but a commitment? Are you out there looking for opportunities to express love to the people God puts in your path? Every day there's an opportunity to love. Are you taking advantage of that opportunity?

We're not meant to be so busy, so preoccupied, that we haven't got time to care. In some ways it's such a little thing. Peter says, “Go and look for somebody to kiss.” If we all did that in some way for someone today – this week – think how much encouragement there'd be. And THAT, says Peter, is the true grace of God. Grace creates communities of beautiful love.

Conclusion: Stand fast in this grace! v.12

v.12: Peter says: Since this is the true grace of God, stand fast in it! Why would you ever look anywhere else? Grace that brings people to new life and establishes churches in the hardest places. Grace that restores people and relationships. Grace that creates communities of beautiful love. All the riches of God's grace have been given to you in Christ.

And that's why closes as he does (v.14): "*Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*" Real, lasting peace comes only as we grasp and apply this truth: that a God of awesome grace has made us the objects of His love in Christ. What a wonderful way to end a letter addressed to Christians who were facing trials: **in Christ, we have everything we need.**

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we are in ourselves weak and anxious, but Jesus is strong and mighty, full of grace and peace. Help us then to stand firm in Him by your Spirit, resting in your peace, and showing by our lives that you are indeed the God of all grace; for your glory's sake. Amen.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

How can you be an instrument of God's grace

- In strengthening the church?
- In restoring those who have fallen?
- In giving "a kiss of love" to someone who needs it?