

CBC 17 May 2020 - 1 Peter 1:22 – 2:3

Hello brothers and sisters. We're continuing to read from 1 Peter. We're starting from 1 Peter 1:22 and will continue to chapter 2:3.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.^[a] ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For,

"All people are like grass,

and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;

the grass withers and the flowers fall,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever."^[b]

And this is the word that was preached to you.

2 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The central call of this passage is the call to love. Now pause there, because if you've been following this series it may occur to you that already we had *faith* in v3-12. How our faith is tried and refined. And then we had *hope* in the verses through to v21; how we set our hope on Christ. And now we have *love*. So we've had faith, hope and love. That sounds rather like Paul doesn't it? But Peter believes in these things too because these are the basics of Christian living.

Now in this passage with its call to love, Peter gives us a What, a Why and a How. He tells us what we should do and why we should do it. And then at that point when we're saying "Help, how can I do it?" he gives us how God equips us to do it. A what, why and how passage.

Let's start with the What. What should we do? Simply, we should love one another deeply.

That's the natural fruit of our conversion and growth. Peter says, verse 22, that we have obeyed the truth, which is another way of saying we believed the gospel. He doesn't mean that we're saved by works, he's simply recognising that this is not simply intellectual assent that leaves us unchanged. Faith involves repentance; it involves bowing to Jesus as LORD and obeying the truth. That's why Peter speaks of our conversion as obeying the truth and why unbelief is disobeying the message in 2:8.

Incidentally, it's worth just reflecting on that. The New Testament often describes our faith in terms of obedience, in terms of following Jesus. Why that's worth remembering is that

people sometimes say to us things like this, "Oh, you're so lucky to have faith. I wish I had faith like you." And they say it as if their unbelief is some unfortunate affliction but they just can't help. But if they're going to say "Oh, you're so lucky to have faith," they may just as well say in Biblical terms "Oh, you're so lucky to be obedient." Hold on a moment, Jesus calls them to follow him and if they are unwilling to do it that's not a question of luck, that is their choice. If they are unwilling to submit to him that's why they will be condemned, not because they were unlucky.

Peter says to us "Very well, you've become a Christian. You've obeyed the truth and I can see that because [v22] you're developing a sincere love for other Christians."

What does he mean by sincere love? He means a love that is beyond social niceness. A love that's beyond the hypocrites mask that we so often see in society. We've all seen the kind of thing: empty words spoken because you want something from someone or because you want to be seen as a loving person. Peter says there's no room for that in the church. Only for a love that is born out of gratitude. For God loved us so much that now we feel love for others swelling up in our hearts. It's like he's saying "It's happening, I can begin to see your hearts fill up with love, but," he says, "don't stop there. Love one another deeply, from the heart."

When he talks about loving one another deeply, he's not talking about gushing sentimentalism but about costly action. The love of the Bible isn't about maximum emotion but maximum commitment. It's love at full stretch. It means that I don't sit back waiting for someone to design some kind of care program that I can join. Rather, it means proactively looking for ways to love people. I'm on the lookout for those opportunities to find out about others and what their needs are and then to try to meet them. It might end up with me mowing a lawn or some baby-sitting. Or praying for somebody or reading the Bible with them. There are all kinds of ways to love deeply.

Does that describe you?

Would your life in the last week show a whole trail of evidence that you're somebody who is on a mission to love your brothers and sisters in Christ? One of the things I find most striking about this is that Peter is writing to Christians who were suffering. Because what happens to us when we suffer? The temptation is to turn inwards rather than outwards, to batten down the hatches, to go into survival mode. Peter doesn't see loving one another as something that we just do when the sun is shining or when we're having a good time in life. No this is the Christian Life, every moment. Difficulties don't change this call on our life to love one another. "Well," we say, "that is a big ask." Why on earth should we do something so hard and difficult? That's what he goes on to explain.

What we should do is love one another. Now here is why. We should love one another because God has made us a family, verse 23, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." Peter is reminding us that becoming a Christian isn't like joining a club or simply signing up for National Trust membership or something like that. Becoming a Christian is something supernatural. It's

being born of God into a new family. The thing that makes Christians family all the world over is that we've been born of the same seed. That's why Christians can't be loners. If I'm related to Christ I'm related to other Christians. They are my brothers and sisters whether I like it or not. And so for me not to love them would be profoundly unnatural. It would be a sign of a family that is broken and dysfunctional. We need to grasp this family principle because we all know people that we find hard to love. People with whom we have nothing in common. People who sometimes drive us crazy. Our love for them has nothing to do with their personal qualities. Peter says it has everything to do with what God has done in their lives. He has made them our brother our sister. If the Lord Jesus Christ was prepared to die for this person in order that he could call them my brother my sister. That is why I will love them. Hebrews 2:11 has these astonishing words. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. What?! Jesus knows my heart and yet he's not ashamed of me? That is amazing grace, but it's what the Bible says. So we must learn to think of our fellow believers not as they are in themselves but in terms of what God has made them by His grace. God loves all his people and so must we.

It's not about asking "Do I find this person easy to get on with?" but rather "How can I act in love towards them?" When somebody enters the room - maybe not many people are at the moment with covid-19 - but in normal circumstances when somebody enters the room and it's somebody that we find difficult or awkward what do we do? We instinctively move to the other end of the room don't we? We move further away. But love moves closer to the person, moves towards them as God did to us in Christ because we are a family now. Do you remember this song? I think it goes back to the 60s: "He ain't heavy, he's my brother". In Christ that's more than a song. In Christ those words really mean something. It means something colossal actually because in Christ we are a forever family. Human families come from a perishable seed and so they perish. But what Peter says is that we have been born again of the imperishable seed of God's word, which lasts forever and so we are a forever family. Peter underlines this with a wonderful quotation from Isaiah chapter 40. Isaiah was speaking to people who have been in lockdown not just for weeks but for decades in Babylon. They were taken prisoner out of their own land in Israel, taken all the way to Babylon. They were held there as captives and they were thoroughly demoralised. Everywhere they look they see defeat, they see disaster. And yet God sent them this tremendous word through the prophet Isaiah. And God's word to them was "Yes, humanly speaking all is death. But God's word rules and there's going to be life.

Peter quotes these words because he wants to remind us of that enduring, life-giving word that is never crushed by death, cannot be crushed by death. And so this word produces an enduring family and basically Peter is saying to us: "Learn to love one another because you're going to be together for a very long time." When we hear Peter giving this high call to love one another despite all our differences and to speak of a forever family, we know that his heart is in heavenly places. But notice this, his feet are still very much on the earth at the same time. Peter knows that just because we've become Christians, that is not going to instantly turn us into the perfect family. He expects that there are still going to be plenty of faults found in us, within Christian churches. But we mustn't ever become comfortable with those faults, resign ourselves to them, say "Oh well that's just the way I am." That's not

gospel. That's not grace. The grace of God is given to transform us. We mustn't be a people that look at these things and say there's nothing we can do. The grace of God is there to help us get rid of those things in our lives. That's why Peter says in 2:1

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."

I wonder are any of those things still found in your heart? Peter knows they exist, knows that these things destroy human relationships. After all he only has to think of some of the scenes between the disciples. Peter knows those things are still there. You see here is the truth, the awful truth, that we all have to face: We do love the Lord, yes we really do, and yet often we are very poor examples of His grace. The battle to be like Christ is still being fought within our hearts, we are His enemies. Think of how hard it is that we are called to love our enemies and yet we struggle to love even the people that we say that we love. We struggle to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. There is so much immaturity, chronic immaturity, in our hearts. How are we ever going to grow up as the family of God? Peter has told us what to do: to love one another. He's told us why to do it: because we are God's forever family. But the calling is so big we want to say "This is too much, what can I do? I can never be a person that will love like this. Please will you help me?" "Of course," Peter says, "He will help you. He knows your weakness and he's already made provision for it."

Here is how. Chapter 2 verses 2 and 3 says:

² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The pure spiritual milk Peter is referring to is God's word. He's been speaking of the life-giving power of God's word to bring us to new birth. And now he reminds us that that same word nourishes us so that we can grow as Christians. Provided of course that we're drinking God's word pure, not adulterated or watered down. That's why I pray for God's help in teaching the scriptures and try to teach them as accurately and as clearly as I can. Think of this image that Peter is using: the baby craving milk. For a baby milk is not an optional extra, it's what keeps the baby alive and makes it grow. Makes it grow astonishingly actually when you think about this tiny scrap of life. One minute it's tucking in at either breast or bottle and then the next thing you know it's running out at Twickenham with a rugby ball under its arm. How does it happen? By God's grace. Peter says that is the way we are to see God's word in our lives as Christians. It's not an optional extra, it's what keeps us alive and makes us grow. So Peter urges us to crave God's word the way that babies crave milk. Some of you know only too well how babies crave milk. That's why you have bags under your eyes as you watch this video. That's why you're running on adrenaline rather than sleep. Thankfully God never needs sleep so he's not fazed when millions of Christians turn up all at the same time saying "Feed me!" Actually our Father loves it when we have huge voracious appetites for His word. Nor is He ever worried because His word won't run out, it endures forever. As Peter says, verse 25, "The word of the Lord endures forever", it's inexhaustible. Feasting on

God's Word, not nibbling, *that* is how we grow strong in the Lord. Strong enough to love one another, warts and all.

Do you crave this spiritual food? Many of us did when we were first converted. I remember being converted while I was at school. From that moment on there was a New Testament in my pocket being pulled out at every moment, at every break between lessons. I was reading it. I was marking it up. I was sharing the things I was reading with my friends. Maybe you had an experience like that. Maybe you remember a time when you craved the word of God perhaps when you were first converted. Since then maybe your appetite has been spoiled by eating too much of the junk food of this world. Perhaps you've forgotten how good He is? Peter adds, v3,

"... now that you've tasted that the Lord is good."

It's that initial taste that leads us to want more. Peter there is alluding to Psalm 34:8.

"taste and see that the Lord is good."

In that context the tasting that David was referring to wasn't just any old experience of God, it's taking refuge in God. It's salvation. Now how clearly have we as Christians tasted His goodness if we have been rescued from sin and death? Do you see what Peter is doing? He's not laying a burden on you, he's not saying I know this is going to be a real chore, it's so horrible isn't it having to read your Bible but you've got to do it I'm afraid. That's *not* what he is doing. His message is "Taste and see that the Lord is good. Come on, let's enjoy God more and more!"

Now how do we do that? Because the delight of scripture is straight from God. When we feed on His Word we begin to taste the Lord himself. Let me say this to you clearly but I mean it lovingly, I'm not meaning it judgementally brothers and sisters, please believe that. But I've got to say this to you because I care about you, I care about how you live now and I care about how you are going to spend eternity. If you think studying the Bible is boring maybe it's because you haven't done very much of it and so you've never developed a taste for it. Or, God forbid, even developed much of a taste for God himself. In that situation, get on your knees and beg God to increase your appetite. Pray for God to give you that taste. Say "Father, your word is so good but my taste is so awful that I feed and all sorts of junk instead. I'm attracted to other things more than I'm attracted to you. Oh God have mercy on me, change my heart, improve my taste. Give me a big appetite, help me to grow." Ask God to give you that taste. Ask Him to restore that taste if you've lost it. You see if you're not feeding on God's word it's no wonder that you struggle to love difficult people. If you are trying in your own weakness you're not going to get very far. The only way to grow strong in Christ is by the food that God has given to you for that purpose. So don't push those meals away, wolf them down.

A couple of years ago I read a book that Tim and Vicky lent to me. It was a book by Simon Ponsonby called "Different, living a holy life." I scribbled down a few quotations as I am wont

to do from books that I read. Here's something that he wrote about David Livingstone, the famous missionary to Africa.

"During one period of his ministry he was so exhausted by his unstinting efforts that he had a physical breakdown. He was covered in ulcers, his teeth fell out, he was confined to his hut for 80 days and could not lift a pen to write a letter. Nevertheless, in the period of enforced rest he read the Bible through four times."

Most Christians won't read the Bible four times in their lifetime. Is it any wonder that this man devoted to his God and his God's word should be used to open up the whole African continent for the gospel. I don't know how you get on with Bible reading. Since I had cancer a few years ago I've been eager to put on a spurt thinking that the time available to me may be limited. I've been reading through the Bible three times in a year and thinking that I've been doing quite well. When I read of Livingstone, desperately ill, but reading through the Bible 4 times in 80 days I find myself thinking "You know Eddie, you're really a bit of a slacker!" Crave pure spiritual milk, says Peter, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. Don't look at other's faults, look at your diet.

Well that's Peter's message. What should we do? Love one another deeply, he learned that straight from Jesus. Why should we do this? Because God has made us forever family. How do we learn to love like Jesus? By growing up in our salvation as we feast on God's word. Is that how you live? Let's take a long hard look at ourselves, not at our neighbour, at ourselves. Are you someone who walks towards other Christians or someone who walks away from them. Are you learning to walk towards then as you mature in Christ? Let's pray.

Father, we have tasted your goodness. Keep us amazed that you should love us, thrilled that you have made us your forever family. Keep us growing and teach us by your word and spirit to love one another as you in Christ have loved us, for your glory's sake. Amen.

As usual I've got some questions for you for reflection and action. Usually I give you two but you've been so good I'm going to give you a bonus one this week.

1. What do you find most challenging about sincerely loving your brothers and sisters in Christ?
2. How would your love for others grow if you gave yourself to remembering and enjoying the gospel? That's a great question because when we find other people challenging what most of us tend to do, if we're conscientious, is to think "I've got to love this person so I must just try harder, I must scrape up my courage, I must dig deeper in myself." What would happen if you focus on how much God has loved you and in enjoying his love for you? What would flow out of your heart then?
3. Finally, what will you do this week to feast on God's goodness in this word?

God bless you brothers and sisters.