

14 Feb 2021 - Eddie Larkman - 2 Peter 1:1-11

Good morning! Stay safe! Have a safe journey! Those are words that I often say to people who have been visiting Kathy and myself, especially if they come some distance and now they are leaving us. You'll probably say similar things to those who have visited you. Well the Christian Life is one long journey and I want you brothers and sisters to stay safe and to have a safe journey. We're all on a journey.

I wonder how you're finding it? How was it for you this week? It's not always easy is it? That's why many who profess faith in Christ end up falling by the wayside.

Now we're beginning today a new series of studies in Peter's second letter. We could call it Peter's last letter because Peter knows that he's going to be dying soon and he's leaving us a last will and testament here. His great concern is for Christians who are battered, who are mocked, who are tried by the world, who are confused by teachers, who are daily wrestling with the sin that still lives in their hearts. And he's asking, "Will they stay on course, till the end?" That is his big concern and I understand that as a pastor. He has the concern of a spiritual father. You'll understand it if you're parents. You know that you're struggling to bring your children up in the knowledge of Christ but you send them out to school or they go off to university and you're thinking to yourself, "Will they stay on course?" That's Peter's concern for us in this letter. He wants us to be grounded and be grown because those two things are the recipe for stability in the Christian life.

"That we should be grounded" is that we should know the truth and have a firm grasp on it. Also that we should be growing, that we should be experiencing these truths in our lives changing us from the inside out and that, more and more. That's why the most famous verse in this letter is the very last verse of the letter. In it he's saying to these Christians the way to be stable is to grow in the Grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the truth about him and the personal experience of these things. Keep going, keep growing, that's the way to stay on course.

I'm calling this series "Heading for home" because that's where we're headed and it's where we want to keep our eyes fixed. It's where we want to keep going forward to. You know, it's the fact that Peter knows he's going to be dying shortly that gives this letter particular urgency. He writes this letter as a last will and testament, he wants to leave behind the assurance that our faith in Jesus is well-founded.

I wonder if you ever ask yourself, "Is it all true? Can I be sure?" Well Peter is somebody who knows because he was there. He was an eyewitness, he was one who lived with Jesus, walked with Jesus and he saw for himself all the events that are the Foundation of our faith. It's so that his witness would not be lost that he writes this letter as a final testament and it's what we're going to be studying for the next few weeks. May God use it to give us a safe journey home.

Now turn with me to chapter 1 and we're going to read the first eleven verses of Peter's second and final letter. Chapter 1 and verse 1:

1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

Simon Peter a servant - notice his humility - and an apostle - notice his authority - they go hand-in-hand: humility and authority. What that means is that here we're really getting a letter from the king. It doesn't matter that the letter is handed to you by the king's secretary. It's still a letter from the king and that's what we're getting because he's an apostle of Jesus Christ.

To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

And who is he writing to? Well it's a general letter to Christians and though we weren't the first readers, we're included amongst them.

² Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is short-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Brothers and sisters, Christian life is a journey we are heading for home. Just look at the structure of this passage before we get into the meat of it. See where it starts and where it finishes; the top of tail of the whole thing. It starts there in verse 1 by telling us the Christians are those who received through Christ the gift of faith in him. That's where the Christian life begins. And then at the other end of the passage, verse 11, you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom at the end of your days. There is the Christian journey: begins in conversion and ends in glory. It is all centred around Jesus who is described in verse one as God and Saviour and then in verse 11 as our Lord and Saviour. So you've got three different themes there:

- to be a Christian is to trust Jesus as your saviour ;
- it is to obey Jesus as your Lord ; and
- it is to worship Jesus as your God

And to go on doing these things more and more all through your life. Now that, my friends, is a joyful way to live and it is a fruitful way to live. Those who live that way are heading for home, which is why it's the title of our series.

Now if you want a safe journey what Peter sets out in the first eleven verses is the roadmap and it's full of Christ. It begins by celebrating what Christ has done for us, that's the first four verses and then as we go on in the journey we are growing in Christ - that's verses 6-7 - and at the end we are welcomed home by Christ - that's verses 8 through to 11.

Christ fills the journey but it begins with celebrating what Jesus has done for us. Look at verse 3: this Divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him. We call this 'by his own glory and goodness'. My dear brother, my dear sister, God is giving you in Christ everything you need for this journey. What, everything? Yes, really. He means it, glance quickly and see how much God is giving you. First he is giving you faith. If you look, you'll see that, if you're a Christian, it's not because of something you've done but because of something God did for you. He

gave you a saviour, Jesus, and he gave you faith in him. You received this faith, says Peter. And notice that the faith that you've received is every bit the same faith that Peter received.

"[You've] received of faith as precious as ours"

No distinction between believers in this. Whether you're an apostle, whether your Christian in Corsham Baptist Church, you've received the same precious faith.

Then see what else God has given you: He's given you grace and he's given you peace, verse two. If you feel a failure as a Christian don't forget Peter had failed and messed up badly. But he had experienced the grace of forgiveness and the peace of God that comes through Jesus Christ.

And we have those things too, the same as Peter: the same grace, the same peace. And he wants us to experience more and more. What has God given you? He's given you faith. He's given you grace. He's given you peace. He's given you a personal relationship with him, verse 2, because you've been granted the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Not just knowing *about* him; the word in the original language means a personal knowledge, a personal relationship with him. Don't you think that's plenty? Faith, grace, peace, the knowledge of God. Oh! but He's not stopped there! No he's giving us his great and precious promises, verse four. And the Bible is packed with them. Collect those promises, live out of them. Life without God is a very dismal thing in this broken world so look at life through the lens of the promises of God. That makes all the difference.

Some of you may remember we had a dramatic production here a couple of years ago, on this very stage. I think it was called "Reckless abandon", it told the story of a group of young American missionary families, who were in Ecuador trying to reach a stone age tribe with the gospel. The five husbands speared to death leaving widows, leaving young children. One of those men who was killed was Nate Saint, the original jungle pilot. He left a wife, left a family and Marge Saint, in the week's that followed that terrible incident, in her grief, she said "God took from me the dearest thing I had on earth, and the future is as bright as the promises of God." Isn't that a remarkable thing to say?

Now that is what we're being told here. God has given us His great and precious promises. Can I ask you my friend what have you got to anchor you in this life when a crisis comes? What can you have that in the midst of the most terrible things that can happen to you, gives you stability and hope and joy in the crisis. What you have got is all the promises of God, if you will take them and look at life through them. And those promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. Especially the promise of the gospel that enables us, in the words of verse four, to share in the Divine nature and to escape the corruption or the decay of this world. That doesn't mean that one day we're going to become gods. It means that we share in God's life rather than in this world's death and decay. We are gifted with the eternal life of God himself.

What a great start to a Sunday morning. What a great way to start a week! God in Christ has given us everything we need by his Divine power so we can live a life of godliness. He's given us faith. He's given us grace. He's given us peace. He's given us a personal relationship with Himself. Given us great and precious promises. Do you know what it reminds me of? That wonderful hymn that we love to sing ; "Great is thy faithfulness". Remember the words of the chorus: "all I have needed Thy hand hath provided." Whatever you're going through at the moment, do not believe Satan's lie that God has no resources for what you're facing. Whatever you are facing there is absolutely sufficient help and sufficient hope in Christ.

Now, do you think on these things? Do you take a few moments each day to remind yourself what God has done for you already? To let it soak into your soul. Are you celebrating what God has done for you?

That's the way to have a safe journey. Celebrate what God has done for you in Christ, celebrate those things every day.

That's how to travel well and then as your journey unfolds, on that foundation, since God has given you everything you need for a godly life, make every effort to grow in Christ - that's vs 5-7. God has given you all you need for a godly life so now make every effort to grow a Christian character, to be like Jesus. Never stop growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Go on. And then Peter gives us a sampling of Christ-like qualities. I don't think it's a complete list but it's a sampling. And I don't think it's meant to be some kind of ladder in which you've got to take the steps in this order. It's not as though Peter is saying, with the last one being love, that until you've managed to master knowledge there's no point having a go at love. They all belong together, what Peter's saying is don't leave any of them out. Work on Christ-like qualities and Peter says make every effort to do this.

Now is that surprising to find Peter saying make every effort? I was saying to the group on the preaching course the other night that one of the great things about consecutive Bible exposition is it forces the preacher to deal with what the text actually says. Now we all have our own ways of putting things and I tend to put the emphasis on all that God has done for us. So I read this "make every effort" and I want to say to Peter "hold on a moment, my brother, you're turning a Christian mission into some kind of man-centered faith. You're saying it's all up to me!"

And Peter says, "Lord give me strength with this Eddie Larkman. It's only 60 seconds ago that we were in verses 1-4, celebrating all that you've already done for us. It's not a man-centered faith at all. It started by the power of God, continued by the power of God and every step is completed by the power of God. His divine power gives you everything that you need."

BUT, you must co-operate with what God is doing, make every effort. But not in your own strength, no, make every effort *in his Divine power*.

Phew! That's a lot to get your head around isn't it, do you fancy a break? Oh come on then, let's go on a trip to the seaside. Here we are on the promenade, see the way the sun is shining off the waves, isn't that beautiful? Can you hear Charles Trenet singing "La mer"? What a wonderful scene this is. Oh look out there, three boats:

- There's a rowing boat ;
- There's a sailing boat and the wind is filling the sails ; and
- There's a power boat with that lazy blighter lying back as his servant takes the wheel.

So of those three boats, which is the best image of the Christian Life? Is it the rowing boat, or is it for sailing boat, or is it the powerboat? Now brothers and sisters, aren't you glad you're not all in church this morning having to put up your hands to vote for this boat or that boat, cos when I give you the answer you can say, "Oh yeah, I knew it was that one all along".

Let me tell you. It's not the rowing boat - that's the true grit version of the Christian life - "It's all up to me". And it's not the powerboat either - that's the let go and let God version of the Christian life - I'll just lie back and do nothing, God will do everything. No, the best analogy out of those three is the sailing boat. God gives the boat, God gives the wind but we have to raise the sails. But we don't do even that in our own strength, we do it by his Divine power. Don't make the mistake of thinking that in the Christian life God's done His bit, he's got me started, now we don't need God anymore, now it's up to me I take over. It's not like some kind of relay race where God has passed the baton on and said "Now you finish the last leg." Not at all, we do what we do in co-operation with God in dependence on His strength. We could not raise the sail if God did not give us the willingness to do so.

Some years ago in my previous church I used to visit a widow. Her husband had died when I'd been there just six months and so I visited her for the best part of twenty years. I used to love visiting this elderly lady for three reasons:

- She was a lovely lady, so full of God, she always talked about how good God had been to her ;
- Secondly, she loved people, was always interested in others not just herself and her ailments.
- And the third reason was that she loved to feed me cake!

And I enjoyed every minute of those pastoral visits. But one sticks in my mind, she said something so simple. I don't know why she had to do it, but she had to move this enormous armchair from one side of her living room to the other. And I said to her, "However did you do that?" because she was so frail. "Well", she said, "I just prayed, 'It's You and me Lord', and I moved it a bit, then I stopped and prayed again 'It's You and me Lord' and moved it a bit further." And I thought "That's it, she's got it, 'It's you and me Lord'." She didn't get to the end and go "Didn't I do well", she got to the end and said "Thank you Lord." That is the true Christian response. Nor did she say "Go on Lord, you do it. You levitate the chair across the room." I don't doubt His power to do these things but she understood that the means was 'You and me, Lord'.

Do you remember the opening lines of Psalm 127?

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labour in vain.*

The house there was the Temple. Who built the Temple? The Lord built it? Does that mean the builders stayed in bed? No, no, the builders had to apply themselves but they had to apply themselves beside God. If they tried to do it themselves it would never happen. And at the end they say 'Thank you Lord.'

It's the same with this sermon. I would love it if God would do all the work. If I could just say "Well Father, since you've provided everything I think I'll just spend this week in bed". "No Eddie", says the Lord, "you get out of bed, you study to be a workman approved by God, you work hard to handle the scriptures well." And that's how the sermon gets produced, it's me saying every step of the way, 'It's you and me Lord'. Will You help me to stay at my desk, to concentrate, to work hard? And He does.

Make every effort in His divine power.

That is Peter's message, through faith in Christ you have received new life. Now walk in the strength that He gives. But do not *ever* reverse that order, otherwise you've got another gospel, which is no gospel at all. We don't make every effort in order to earn God's favour. We make every effort because we have God's favour. We eagerly co-operate because of God's love for us in Jesus. The more we see of His love, the more we love Him and want to obey him. Not out of fear, but out of joy. But even then we know that we are such fickle creatures that we'll not make any progress without His help.

Consider that Christian over there that I find a pain in the neck. You've told me to go and love him and I don't know how I'm going to make it but "It's you and me Lord". As we make every effort in the strength that He supplies we will be fruitful and we'll finish our journey well. There'll be a harvest from our lives - that's v8 - If you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's so much emphasis in the world on being an effective and productive person. Well Peter's telling us that as your character becomes more like Christ, you will be. But if you don't work on these virtues then v9: the picture of someone who has not grown, of someone who is short sighted and blind that they've been cleansed of their past sins. Surely all of us want to be in v8 and not in v9. Where have you been this past week? Have you been in v8, more and more working at Christ-like properties in His strength or in v9 heading for a failed harvest.

Make every effort to grow through the strength that God gives and you will have a harvest says Peter. And not only a harvest but a homecoming too.

Therefore v10, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. That's a paradox isn't it. God's election and human responsibility sat side by side and they're not even fighting. People say to me how do you reconcile these things? I don't need to reconcile them, do you see them fighting there on the page? You say how did they get together as friends? I don't know. I look at some marriages and say how did those two get together?! You may look at me and Kathy and say that! But I can see that they are together and they're getting on well. The secret things of God belong to God and the things He has revealed is God's sovereignty and human responsibility sit together as friends. And not sat at opposite ends of the bench but snuggled up together, the best of friends, even as lovers.

Our debates over these things are such unhappy things, because everywhere in the Bible they are causes of rejoicing and celebration. They are the root of our security. Romans 8:30:

“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

An unbreakable chain. So we should never seek to diminish the sovereignty of God in salvation. But, hear this, we must not frame our doctrine of God's sovereignty such that we are afraid to say what the Bible constantly says on every page about human responsibility. And we must not frame our ideas about election in such a way that we are embarrassed of what Peter says here or we find ourselves thinking 'I wish you hadn't put it that way Peter'. Peter's phrase is 'Make every effort' v5 and v10. It's no use me thinking so much about the secret counsels of God on eternity that I'm not paying attention when God says Edde, I want you to do this. Take all of God's word seriously. Don't let security spill over into complacency. Faith without works is dead as James would say.

Election comes from God alone, but behaviour is the proof of it. Make sure you're the real thing says Peter. Where's the evidence? Have you grown? Are you growing still? As you grow you can know that v11 is true of you; that you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The New Living Translation says you will receive a 'grand entrance'. That's a paraphrase but it hits the nail on the head as to what Peter is saying here. You know we get excited about mere holidays, especially when we've been in lockdown. Yes holiday's are great, but what Peter says is that God has something ever better, far better, in store. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Well, brothers and sisters, that's how to have a safe journey through the Christian life: Constantly celebrating what God has done for you. Make every effort to grow through the strength that He provides and then your life will be fruitful, you will reach home and a warm welcome.

Has this letter been describing how you live? Is that the pattern of your life? Is that how you've been living this week? I know you make tremendous efforts in other parts of your life; to bring down your best time for the marathon or the 10k or whatever it is. To make progress in your career. You give of your best. What Peter is saying is give your best efforts to follow Jesus in the strength that He provides.

Let us pray.

Thank you, Heavenly Father, that you have given us in Christ all that we need for life and godliness. Help us by your Spirit to celebrate the riches of your grace and to grow by your strength so that our lives may be fruitful and we might be welcomed into your eternal kingdom.

Think about this, discuss with whoever you are with or on a Zoom call afterwards. What it would look like for you to make every effort to grow as a Christian. Be practical. Mark a few steps out, resolve on a few things. That's it brothers and sisters. God bless. Bye for now.