

# 2 Peter 1:1-4 – Experiencing the Reality of God

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Open your Bible please to second Peter. If you have one of the Bibles that we just handed out to you, there should be a bookmark that is marking 2 Peter. It's on page 590 for those of you who have got a Bible from us, 2 Peter, and we're going to read through this morning the first four verses of the chapter so follow along with me as I read. It says:

*<sup>1</sup>"Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. <sup>3</sup>His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup>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, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." (ESV)*

Stop there, please. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we delve into this study and this entire book of 2 Peter, we pray, Father God, that you would open our hearts to hear your voice and that we might learn and grow and increase in our understanding of the things of the Lord. We pray, father, that you would speak to each person here today and that you administer grace and insight from your word, that we might grow, Lord, that we might mature, that we might lay hold of the things in this life that are true, and set aside, Lord, that which is false. We ask this Father in the name of Jesus our savior. Amen. Amen.

Well, this as you know, is the second letter that Peter wrote of Simon Peter, who interestingly enough, uses the Hebrew spelling of his name as he begins this letter. Now, if you have a different Bible translation than the one I'm reading, which is the ESV, this morning, your Bible may say just Simon Peter and that's fine, but you'll notice again that the ESV begins by saying Simeon Peter, and Simeon and Simon, let me just tell you, it's not a different person. It's the same man. It's the same. It's literally the same name. It's just taking it from two different languages.

Simeon is the Greek pronunciation. I'm sorry I said that wrong. Simon is the Greek pronunciation, and Simeon is actually our pronunciation of the Hebrew transliteration of his name.

You guys, are you familiar with that word, transliteration? You know what translation means, but a transliteration is where you take every single letter and translate it to a different language, so it may not be how we look at it, and it may not be how you pronounce it at all.

It comes out looking like Simeon to us, but actually the Hebrews would have said something quite different, right? They would have said Shimon, right? His name was Shimon, and so when you transliterate that into English, it comes out as Simeon, or if you want to, you can just call him what other people used to call him, and that was Cephas, which is the Aramaic version of his name, which of course means, rock.

And unless you're not properly confused, up to this point, let me just tell you that this is a very small taste of what it must have been like to live in a multi-language, multi-cultural society where everybody's name had four different versions or more, depending on who you're talking to, whether they speak Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic or whatever.

But the pronunciation of Peter is not the important thing. Peter goes on to identify himself, which is the important thing. And he begins to identify himself, as you'll notice in verse one, as a servant, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Now, I need to stop and pause for a moment on that word servant, because frankly, the ESV, and there's nothing incorrect about the way the ESV translates this word, but this is the Greek word, Doulos, and many of you are aware of this word, and it means bond servant or bond slave.

And you guys will remember that a bond servant is someone who willingly submits to their master and gives up any future possibility of being set free because they have recognized how good their master is. And the background for this is found in the Old Testament, in fact in the book of Deuteronomy. Let me put this on the screen for you so we can see it together. It says:

**Deuteronomy 15:12, 16-17 (ESV)**

*"If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman is sold to you (and people were sold because of debt), he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear (meaning piercing the*

*earlobe) into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same."*

This was the background of a bond servant or a bond slave, someone who said, I've got it good. I love my master. I don't ever want to go free. I want to be his for the rest of my life. And that's the way Peter saw himself as a bond servant. And frankly, I think that's the way that we ought to see ourselves as well, a Doulos, a servant for life of the Lord our God.

Next, you'll notice Peter identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and the word, apostle, very simply means, "one sent forth." That's really the simple explanation. And then Peter begins the second letter. We find him talking about two very important things about our faith. Faith is a critical issue, but he's going to bring up two things about our faith that we need to pause and think about, and they're both found in verse one. Look with me again in verse one.

The first is the statement which is seen in the address of this letter. In other words, to who he has addressed this letter and it says, *"to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours."* You might highlight those words in your Bible.

A faith of equal standing. That's a very important phrase and I'll tell you why. With those words, we emphasize one of the things that, frankly, I love about Christianity and that is that there's no elite group of special people that look down upon the masses of common folk. We are all one in Christ. We are together equal in Christ.

In other words, there's no second-class citizen in the kingdom of God. You may feel like a second-class citizen. Your feelings betray you. You are not. Peter makes it very clear here and assures his readers and us as well, that our faith is of equal standing to his own.

And so you got a guy like Simon Peter, who's a pillar in the church, and he says, your faith, my faith, the same. Okay. I love that. I love that we are co-equal in Christ. But the second point that he emphasizes about our faith is in that phrase that goes on to say that our faith is, *"by (or because of) the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ."* Now the word, righteousness, often refers to good works (righteousness, righteous acts, or righteous deeds). That's not what he's using it as here.

The word, righteousness, can also be translated justice, or if you will, fairness, and that is how Peter is using it in this particular passage. Your faith is the

byproduct of God's fairness. Literally His justice, and he's speaking of it in the sense of fairness in that everyone is given the same opportunity to come to know Christ, to be complete in Him, and to have total forgiveness of sins.

Do you guys understand that? What that basically means is that on the day when all mankind stands before Jesus on the day of judgment, nobody is going to be able to say you weren't fair. I didn't get a fair shake.

I get questions all the time from people wanting to know, what about people who've never heard the gospel? What about people who've lived in such and such? It's interesting to me, that people are all concerned about people who have never heard the gospel, and yet, number one, they're not willing to do anything about it. Number two, that doesn't apply to them, and yet they want to know what about those people.

Well, the Bible says that it is through the fairness of God that we all have been given an opportunity for faith. God is perfectly just, perfectly fair, and nobody is ever going to stand before him and say, I didn't get a chance, and that means nobody. So that's the point that Peter is making here. Ours is a faith based upon the utter fairness of God, and he cannot be otherwise. God cannot be other than fair.

All right, the next thing I want you to notice is found in verses two and three. Look with me again in your Bible where he says, *"may grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge (circle that word) of God and of Jesus our Lord."* And then in verse three, he says, *"his divine power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge (note that again) of him who called us to his own glory and excellence."*

These two verses contain two of the seven references in this very short letter that Peter uses about knowledge, but you need to understand something about the word, knowledge. The Greek language contains essentially two ideas of knowledge that we would translate knowledge in the English, because we don't have a word, or a single word, to kind of encompass both of them.

And one of them is the Greek word, gnosis, and it means knowledge, literally something that you've learned. It's intellectual knowledge. Somebody told you something and now you know, that's the Greek word, gnosis.

But there's also a Greek word, epignosis, and that is the word that Peter is using here, and it's a word that describes experiential knowledge. It's hands-on knowledge if you will. It's the kind of knowledge that is implied when we read

scriptures that say, taste and see that the Lord is good. That's not talking about learning it from somebody else. That's not talking about sitting down in a school or a classroom where somebody says to you, God is good, and so you've learned intellectually God is good. It's the ability to literally take the Lord, receive that goodness of the Lord, to taste and see. Now he uses that phrase in the Psalm (taste and see), but you can't taste the goodness of the Lord. But the word is used to describe experiential knowledge. Okay? So that's what Peter's talking about.

We're going to investigate these couple of verses here about what he's telling you and me, concerning experiencing, knowing God through experience, and how it benefits us. But before we do that, I want to just clarify something because some of you might be kind of going now, wait a minute, pastor Paul, I've heard that experience can be a bad thing.

And you're right, it can be. Not all experience is a good thing, and the reason is because some Christians base their faith purely on experience, right? In other words, if it happened to them, they believe it. That's what we literally refer to as an experiential faith, or even experiential Christianity.

Let me give you an example of how a conversation might go like that.

Somebody says, "Did you go to church today?"

"Yeah, I went to church today."

"Did God show up at church?"

"Oh, yeah, he sure did."

"Well, how do you know God showed up at church?"

"Well, because first of all, during worship, I started crying and I couldn't stop.

And second of all, I saw three people fall backwards onto the floor, and then finally the whole room started clucking like a chicken!"

That's an extreme example, but you understand what I'm saying. It's all about what happened there, what we experienced, that tells me God was there. And people walk out of church, and they go, "Oh, that was a great service. God was there. I got tinglies all over," sort of a thing.

Let me share how that conversation ought to go.

"Did you go to church today?"

"Yeah, I did."

"Did you sense God's presence in church today?"

"Well, sometimes I do and sometimes I don't, but I know he's always there with us because He promised in His word that He would be."

Do you see the difference? Our faith is based on God's promises. It is not based on how we feel, or how we, or someone else, reacts to what happens to be going on in the room. It is based on God's word, and we put our faith in Him related to that. Now that we've gotten that out of the way and we've cleared up the negative aspect or side of experience, now we can go on and look in these two verses, two and three, and we can find out what they're saying to us.

And again, I want to remind you that Peter is talking about experiencing the reality of God's presence in your daily life. Okay? And he's going to talk about the benefits of that. So knowing that's the kind of knowledge that he's talking about, knowledge that speaks of experiential knowledge, now we can look at these verses again. In fact, what I want to do, is I'm going to put these verses up on the screen and I'm going to paraphrase them. This is, so guys, don't quote this to anybody because this is just Paul's paraphrase, okay? This is what I believe Peter is saying.

## **2 Peter 1:2-3 (Paraphrased)**

*May grace and peace be multiplied to you as you experience the presence and goodness of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, as we daily experience the power and goodness of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,*

And I want you just to take note and catch the two things that Peter says here, that because of our daily experience of the reality of God's presence, there's going to be two specific things that are going to happen in our lives.

I think I have a slide for this.

**(slide)**

- Grace and peace multiplied
- God's divine power for life and godliness

Grace and peace is going to be multiplied in your life, and God's divine power for both your life and for godliness, which is the opposite of sinfulness, okay, is going to be present in your life as you operate in the reality of his presence and experience that presence on a daily basis.

That's what Peter is saying, all right. Now it's important that we know what Peter is saying because it's also important to understand why we see this so little in the body of Christ today. Personally, I think it's sorely lacking because from, I don't know, from what I can tell, most of the Christians I talk to are not walking in God's grace. They're not seeing grace and peace multiplied in their lives. And they're not walking in the reality of his divine power, giving them everything they need for life and godliness. It's just not happening in so many Christians' lives.

And I have to ask myself the question, why is that? And I believe the answer is because too many Christians have an intellectual knowledge of God. In other words, they believe something because somebody told them, but they have not experienced Him themselves. It is all up here (head). And people ask me all the time, how can you get it from here (head) to here (heart)?

That's said to be the longest 18-inch journey in the universe, to go from the head to the heart. You have to understand those are two different kinds of knowledge. It's not just a matter of getting it from here (head) to here (heart). This is intellectual knowledge. The rest is relational, experiential understanding.

It's experiencing the presence of God daily in your life. So the natural question arises then as to why very few believers are experiencing God. Why are people only walking around with head knowledge related to God?

"Do you believe there's a God?"

"Yeah. Why? Somebody told me that."

Well, my belief is that it all comes down to one thing that we lack. I think there's a, I think I, I shouldn't say it that way. Let me back up. I think there are a lot of reasons, but there's one that I want to really focus on this morning with you. I can sum it up in one word and I'll put it on the screen:

**(slide)**

**EXPECTATION**

It's expectation. I think it comes down to expectation, and in case you need a little refresher on what expectation means.

**(slide)**

## EXPECTATION

a strong belief that something will happen.

It means a strong belief that something will happen, to have an expectation. Let me show you how one of the most beloved characters in the Bible expressed this, and that's David. He wrote:

### **Psalm 5:3 (NIV84)**

*In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my request before you and wait in expectation.*

I'm quoting this out of the NIV because I love the wording of this because it's so beautifully captures this idea of not just praying, but expecting. And then the next question you have to ask is, what was David expecting, right? Because expectation is one of those things that can bite you as well. I don't know if you're aware of that, but there's a lot of Christians who walk around very discouraged because God didn't meet their expectations.

You talk to people, and you may be one of them. I prayed about something, and God never answered, and the reason was because I put my expectations here and God didn't meet them. My expectation was for, I wanted this, and God didn't meet my expectation.

So what am I talking about? What was David expecting when he says, I pray, I lay my requests, I lay my heart, I lay my needs, I lay my life before you and I wait in expectation. What was David expecting? David was simply expecting God to be Himself. And that means he was expecting God to be good. I didn't share at all with Brian what I was going to talk about here this morning in 2 Peter, but I noticed as he was praying, those exact words came out of his mouth.

And that always blesses me when the worship leaders just so connected to what we're talking about. He was praying about how we need to trust in the Lord's goodness even when we don't see it. In fact, I'll take it even further, we have to have an expectation of God's goodness. Why? Because He's good.

See, I think the reason we often don't expect is because we don't believe that He's truly good. And I have to storm the gates of heaven with my prayers to try to convince Him to be good because He's kind of cranky sometimes and He



doesn't always give me what I want, when I want it, so I have to really hound Him with this stuff and maybe, just maybe, I can convince Him and He'll say, well, okay. It's the relationship some people have with God. Very different than what David said. Look at Psalm 31:

**Psalm 31:19 (ESV)**

*Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!*

Isn't that just so different than what we often think or feel in our own walk with the Lord? Oh, how abundant is your goodness. I am overwhelmed by your goodness.

Well, I don't know, pastor, sometimes I just don't see it. Well, there's a point in all of our lives as Christians where we have to come to terms with the reality of God's word and whether or not we're going to believe it.

You see, if I'm going to put my faith completely in me, Paul, and my ability to observe and to conclude, well then, I've literally become my own god. But there's a point in time where I'm either going to believe that God is good or I'm not. David became convinced that God was good, and so he said, related to that convinced attitude daily, I lay my request at your feet, and I wait in expectation. And I don't know what you're going to do, God, but I know that you're going to be good. I know that you'll be good to me.

I just think that's really important when we begin to walk in expectation, when we begin to expect God to move according to His personality, according to His character, not necessarily according to what I've asked, okay, but according to His character, which is good. I'm going to begin to experience the blessings that Peter is talking about here.

I'm going to begin to experience these very realities that he's talking about in verses two and three. His divine power, giving me everything I need for life and godliness, multiplied grace and peace because I trust in the goodness of the Lord.

Now as we read verse four again, which is really the completion of a rather long run on sentence, Peter says, *"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, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."*

This verse is so packed full of information that we're going to actually use this as a springboard for our next study, because this is where Peter begins to talk about taking on the divine nature, and this is the blessing that we have as Christians. Guys, if we could really lay hold of this, we'd probably all get up right now and start whooping and hollering.

This whole idea that Peter is conveying to us, we have been given as believers the opportunity to literally tie into the divine nature so that we can escape the corruption of the world. And we're going to talk about this in coming studies the next couple, because this is where Peter is going to begin to deal with this whole issue of transformation.

That's one of the reasons, the title that you see up there for 2 Peter, "Partakers of the Divine Nature," is really the theme for the whole letter. That's not the title of today's message. It's the theme of the whole thing, partakers of the divine nature. That doesn't mean you're ever going to be God. You can get that one out of your head, but he does allow His character to be conveyed to us in a very real sort of a way so that as Peter says, we can escape the corruption of the world.

And man is their corruption in the world. I mean, good grief, we see it in our own lives. We see corruption in our own hearts. We see corruption in our own minds, and yet we're forgiven because of what Jesus did on the cross and how we've embraced that, but there's still that need of transformation. There's still that need of change. A lot of Christians ask the question, can God change my life? Can God transform my life?

Well, the answer is a resounding yes, and as we get further into this letter, we're going to talk about that change. We're going to talk about that transformation. We're going to talk about how you can truly change how God desires to do that.

One of the problems that I see with Christians is we get so incredibly impatient. We want it now. I got one particular gal who writes to me regularly from the other side of the country who's like, I want God to change me now, today! And I understand. I get it, but that's not how it goes. It's a lifelong process of transformation. It's going from step to step to step, and sometimes you even feel like you kind of leveled out for a while and then He takes you up to a new level of just transformation in your own life. And we're going to talk more about that, so stay tuned.