

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2018**  
**Why Peter gave the exhortation**  
**2 Peter 1.12-21**

We are moving on from v 1-11, not because I have exhausted all that should be said, but because we need to understand why Peter has given his readers this exhortation to application, growth and maturity.

Before we go further, a quick recap of the territory we have covered.

Peter's exhortation –

The basis of it – what God has done in Christ.

The experimental truth of this mediated by the Holy Spirit illuminating the Scriptures and giving us enlightenment.

The truth acted upon by faith gives rise to godliness, Christ-like character, expressed in Christian love.

This process continuing will cause us to be fruitful – the blessing of assurance of our state, and the sadness of idleness leading to unfruitfulness which brings sad doubts and anxious fears.

I stressed last week the importance of engaging with the Bible and meditating on it. This includes hearing preaching and attending to it. For the past few months we have put this written version of the sermon on the web. Let people in the congregation know that it is here.

Turn to 2 Peter and read v12. Peter confesses that those he is writing to already know these things and what is more, are attending to them. If this is so, why is he going to the bother of telling them again what they know and are doing, is it not a bit pointless? In fact it is not. The rest of chapter 1 and chapters 2 and 3 tell us of dangers that were already on the horizon and some of which had already come.

**1.** Peter wants to leave the Church a written record of this important teaching, because things change. An under-emphasized truth is that every person in every generation has to come to faith. There is nothing in Scripture that tells us that the faith of our fathers will save us, even though it is desirable thing and a blessing to grow up in a family where there is Christian faith.

Peter himself tells us this in v1 of Chapter 1. Every Christian has come to, 'a like faith' with the apostles, faith in Christ alone as our savior, up close and personal. It does not work thinking that we have grown up in a 'Christian country.' The UK is now very far from being a so called Christian country. Many African Christians want nothing to do with the UK churches which they regard as backslidden and fallen into different degrees of error.

He writes, because as an old man, he knows he is fast approaching the time of his death, probably martyrdom, and he will not be present to instruct the people. This is

important because as time goes by, people and things, that in the past were highly regarded, fall foul of a new generation of historians, biographers and fashion. Let me give you an example of each. There are people today who want us to believe that the Holocaust never happened. As the survivors pass away, the argument is increasing. This always happens. Do you remember what Exodus 1.8 says? It says that a new king arose who knew not Joseph – the man who had saved Egypt from famine. This probably does not mean that there was no historical knowledge, but that the new king chose not to regard the history! I wonder if this is why history repeats itself, bondages, slavery, genocide and so on.

Every new generation of Biographers tries to outdo what has gone before, very often applying the lenses of the 21<sup>st</sup>. century to a past age. Perhaps you know of some person who was regarded as a hero in your school days, who is now vilified in some way. The other side of the coin is that yesterday's terrorist often becomes today's hero, and we have seen a few of those in recent decades!

Then there is the whole cult of fashion. I think that we have fewer rugged individualists today than formally. People tend to follow the herd today and don't want to be regarded as politically incorrect, ignorant, bigoted, or out of step. For example, even in some 'Christian' circles if you express dissatisfaction over the theory of Evolution, issues over the unborn, justice and the prison system, or lots of other things, you are looked at as if you just crawled out of a cave! All of these matters are big issues both philosophically and spiritually. At ground level these are issues that don't happen in a vacuum, but to real people, and sometimes we are the people! The time to think about them is not when they land on our door steps, but before, so we are not reacting but responding.

Peter is by implication, and later specifically saying that there is such a thing as truth in the world, and absolute truth at that. It is the truth of God.

**2.** Peter is putting this exhortation in writing, because even in the early days of the Church there were errors arising from false teachers and from old traditions resurfacing and trying to get a foothold once more. There were other dangers as well. In v5 of Chapter 1 Peter mentions the 'corruption in the world caused by evil desires.' It is a sad thing to say, but important to realise that there is no sin or corruption that a Christian is safe from this side of heaven. Even in my lifetime, never mind history, this has happened. It is not only Demas who fell away having fallen in love with this world, but scores of others have settled for the world at the expense of the next world. Sadly we have seen TV evangelists fall like skittles in all sorts of scandals regarding money, sex, and power. If any of us think we are beyond this, then, 'take heed lest we fall.' The only way to avoid temptation and sin is to follow Peter's advice and get as close to Christ, and become as Christ-like as we can!

The Galatian Church were reproved for returning to Jewish myths and traditions. The Churches in Revelation were counseled and rebuked over a variety of issues, and all of this was within about 50 years or less of the death of Christ. If you know any Church history, you will remember the first three centuries of the Church were marked by

persecutions and troubles. There were theological disputes as the questions were thrashed out about the nature of God in Trinity, the personhood and divinity of Christ, and even whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son, or only the Father. It was the date of Easter that was the last straw for some!

We need to remember that Adam and Eve fell when they did not stick closely to what God had said to them. The devil has been very successful over the ages bringing the Scriptures under suspicion, and he continues with the same strategy. Paul uses very strong language when he addresses these issues in Galatians, read them and be amazed!

You are probably aware that since the advent of Higher Criticism, the Scriptures are under attack by people who desire that the intellect of man be the determining means by which truth is evaluated. This is contrary to the way it must be. We need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit to understand the Bible correctly. The shorthand way of describing the different views is this, are we to sit in judgment over the Scriptures, or are we to sit under the instruction of the Scriptures? We must sit under the instruction of Scripture, or we will be doing the very thing Peter is warning us about!

In Chapter 2 of 2 Peter, the Apostle warns that false prophets will arise who by their flattering words will draw away many from the truth. This happens in every generation when a teaching arises which is either attractive, exciting, or is pushed beyond legitimacy by neglecting the balance of the whole council of the Bible. There are too many examples to go into. However we need to be cautious of being so caught up in any one aspect of the Christian life that it becomes unbalanced. Acts 2.42 is but one bench mark to hold to, the other is the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. If we keep these in sight, we are on a good path.

False teaching was the means the devil used to snare Adam and Eve. It worked with them and it continues to work. New teaching usually turns out to be old ideas reheated, and presented as the solution to all our problems. The sorts of things floating about today are often more focused on how we can live a happy life in this world, with scant attention paid to the future. Eternal life, which unlike this mortal life is everlasting. Eternal life or the three score and ten years of mortal life, which do you think is the greater?

I was told of a USA TV preacher who was asked in an interview how it was that if we were meant to be healthy, wealthy and successful, as he preached, how did he account for Paul's thorn in the flesh and sufferings. The preacher's reply was that if Paul had understood salvation as he did, he would not have had the thorn! This is not only wrong, but very proud! We need to be aware of these issues. Our kids will come across it all on the web, and so will we. That is why I still like books, you get the publisher and names and contacts if the authors are alive. This is why many of the older authors are good, their work has been tested by time, and the good and the indifferent are known. Take heed what we see and hear.

**3.** In chapter 3, Peter tells us the last reason why he is committing this exhortation to writing. It is because the Day of The Lord is near. This refers to the return of Christ, not as a child, but as the glorious king and with His mighty angels. The world as we know it will come to an end and a new heaven and earth will be formed. This time the new world will be without sin. This Day will bring to an end the time when people can repent and turn to the Lord and be saved. The Day of The Lord is the Day of Judgment, the separation of the sheep and goats, believers and unbelievers. The believers will be with the Lord, and the unbelievers will end their journey to eternal destruction.

This Day is the defining moment, so it is important for people to hear about Jesus and respond before this Day, because it will be too late when it comes. We tend to be complacent about this because it has been 2000 years and no Day has come. Paul would see it differently. He would warn us that the coming of the Day is now closer than it was, so be ready! We need to keep Peter's words before us, or else we will sink into idleness and apathy. Peter closes chapter 3 with a serious warning v17, 'be on your guard.' This is so like the warning Jesus gave the disciples, 'watch and pray.'

Peter's concern in this second half of Chapter 1 is the place of Scripture in our estimation. Do we have a low view of it, or a high view? A low view would go along with claims that the Bible is full of contradictions, that it is an old book of relevance to a past age. It would say that the Bible is only one of many holy books, and that we should take the best parts of all the holy books, and so on.

The Bible itself does not give us such options, it makes strong claims for itself. The Bible demands that we take a high view of it.

There are two arguments that Peter offers us to persuade us to take a high view of the Bible.

The first appears in v16. He confronts the issue head on by telling us that the Bible is not the work of crafty or imaginative men. He tells us that what he has written is not hear say, folk stories or a romantic rendition of a story. He tells us that this is an eye witness account, and we know from the rest of the Bible that it is not the eyewitness account of one or two people, but a multitude of people. Peter is presenting absolute truth. The only truth that God has is absolute truth. There is no one else who is infinite, eternal and boundless who knows all truth. Therefore what God says is absolutely true, so true that we can stake our life on it, because that is what we must do. We are to stake our lives on the solid rock, not the feeble sinking sands of the opinions of even the cleverest of men! We are faced with the crucial question, how do we get to heaven, how do we avoid hell, how do we live to please God? Do we look to the Bible for the way, or listen to some bloke on a late night talk show, a comedian who makes fun of religion, or some character from a TV program! That is the first point Peter makes.

The second argument Peter presents so that we adopt a high view of the Bible is the fact of fulfilled prophecy.

Peter alludes to the promise of the coming Messiah given to different prophets over many years. We are being asked to think about Jesus, the place of His birth foretold, the circumstances of His Birth foretold, His sufferings, ministry and death all foretold. Then as if to put a double knot in it, Peter refers to the Transfiguration where the voice from heaven testifies to the Son. Peter is saying that if all these prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ, then we can be sure that all the other Scripture is accurate and will also be fulfilled.

Here is a silly illustration. Imagine that you need an operation. You meet two doctors, some new whizz kid who says that he has worked out a theory which will make surgery unnecessary. We will be the first patient, but he is sure his plan is the new future! I know someone who was asked to undergo capillary surgery as one of the first trial patients. They declined, and I don't blame them! You then see an older doctor who says that he has done this operation 10,000 times with a 99.9% success rate and recovery to full function. Which would you go with? The proven path, even if old, or a new untried method? I would choose the well-tried method!

Peter is telling us that the Scriptures are the good path, the reliable path, and in fact, the only path. The reading in Jeremiah is telling of a sad situation that arose in the history of Israel. The people opted for their own way, a new way, a false teaching. They wanted to do things their way, and as we know from history, it did not work.

#### Application

If you read the histories of revivals and visitations, it is always found that there is a return to the Bible, to its truths and values. It has been this way since Biblical times – the time of Josiah for example, and later, the time of Luther and the Reformers. The same was seen in the subsequent revivals in the 1700's, 1800's, and 1900's, not only in Europe but all across the world. Did you know that some of the Churches in Korea set their members homework on the sermon or the teaching in their house-groups! What would you think of that? We could have a book service for children and adults! The Korean Church is serious about the Bible. Many of the Presbyterian Churches there, have services like ours, only in Korean. They need to have multiple services because of the thousands of people who come. They are in the midst of an on-going revival, but the proclamation of the Scriptures is central.

I think the main application is obvious from what I have written. We need to primarily be a people of the Word and the Spirit. When the Spirit illuminates the Word, we have living truth, which is more than intellectual comprehension. This will require a change for many of us. We need to read the Bible in a way we have not done before, to give it a place in our lives we have never given it before.

We will need to permit the Word to challenge things and ways of living we accept. Many people think of Christianity as being about living as a nice person. We need to drop this and see that it is about how, with God's help, we can live a holy life, and the pattern of holiness we are to follow is Christ Himself. If we are holy, we will also be nice, but the

niceness will be true niceness, not just a desire to be liked or to live without confrontation.

This in turn brings us back to the first 11 verses of 2 Peter. In this short passage we are being taught and reminded how to live a holy life in ever increasing degree.