

# The Gift of Righteousness

2 Peter: Faithful to the End

2 Peter 1:1-21

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Good morning First Free! My name is Dominick Wong. I'm a pastoral resident here, and I'm very excited to be joining you for this quick series on 2 Peter. Over the next three weeks, we'll be zooming through the book trying to get a bird's eye view of what Peter has to say in these three jam-packed chapters.

In his first letter, which we just finished preaching through, the apostle Peter wrote to the church to encourage them in the midst of persecution, humiliation, and alienation from the people they once called family and friends. It is in these uncertain times, that Peter points the church forward to the hope we have in Christ's return.

But while 1 Peter sought to counter threats from outside the church, 2 Peter addresses threats from within. As we'll see in the next couple weeks, false teachers had infiltrated the church and were spreading the lie that maybe Christ isn't coming back. Maybe he will not return to judge the living and the dead. And maybe, if Christ isn't returning, that means you can do whatever you want, live however you want, be whoever you want to be today.

Peter saw this threat growing and he would use his last days to fight against it. Because, as we'll see, not only is this Peter's second letter to the church, it is his final letter. See, Peter knows that he is about to die. And sure enough he will soon be martyred for the sake of Christ. So this letter, this powerful book, is Peter's last will and testament.

Like most wills, Peter is leaving something behind to the next generation. In fact, the gifts that are being passed down in this book are actually our inheritance today. But unlike other wills, what Peter leaves behind does not come from out of his estate, but from Christ's.

Today, Peter is going to show us that in Christ, we have been granted many gifts. And the question we will have to answer is: What do we do with these gifts?

## THE FIRST GIFT: JUSTIFICATION

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Let's start with the first couple verses of chapter 1. "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: May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Right off the bat Peter makes a shocking point. Even though he's an apostle, even though he was hand-picked by Christ, even though he was himself personally commissioned by the risen Lord, what does he say? That we have obtained a faith of equal standing with him and all the apostles. Think about that. This is an incredible gift. We have a faith of equal standing.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

Now, many of us have not suffered nearly as much for Christ as Peter has. I certainly have not served Christ in even a fraction of the ways he did, and yet the faith we have has equal standing with his. That word “faith,” then, can’t refer to our own personal righteousness. It can’t be a measure of how good of a Christian I am, or else there’s no possible way that my faith is equal to that of Peter’s. No, the faith we’re talking about here is saving faith in Christ.

And the reason that your faith and my faith are of equal standing with the apostles, is that it has nothing to do with how righteous we are. Rather, it has everything to do with how righteous Christ is. As Peter says, we have “obtained a faith of equal standing” with his. By what? “By the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” It is a gift. Not something you earn or deserve, but something that you’re given. It has nothing to do with how good you are, it is all about Jesus. So much so, that on the final judgment day, when you are asked to go before God and stand trial for all the ways that you’ve hurt other people and rebelled against God, if Christ lives in you, then his righteousness stands fully in your place. When the judge sees you, he will see Christ in all his goodness instead. And the punishment that you deserve? Christ has already taken that upon himself.

The first gift is this: Christ’s righteousness declares us righteous. We call this our “justification.” Christ justifies us. And if you don’t have this gift yet, send us an email, give us a call, talk to someone in your life who does know Jesus, and ask them how this free gift can be yours. Brothers and sisters, it is an incredible gift indeed. And if this was the only thing we ever received from God, it would be enough, it would be more than we could’ve ever deserved or imagined. And yet, this is not all there is. As they say on TV, “But wait, there’s more!”

## **THE SECOND GIFT: GLORIFICATION**

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Let’s look at the next couple verses. “[Christ’s] 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, 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” (vv. 3-4).

The story Peter’s telling here is simple but grand. Once we were ensnared by the corruption of the world. Once we were imprisoned in the brokenness of an age engulfed by sinful desire. Once we were no different from the evil that we see rampant in the world today.

But what do verses 3-4 say? We’ve escaped. By Christ’s power we’ve made our getaway. Jesus broke us out of jail, and, folks, he didn’t stop there. There’s more. There’s something beyond imagination.

Brothers and sisters, what I’m about to say is a bold claim. And honestly, if Scripture wasn’t so clear on this second gift, I would be afraid to even suggest that it was possible. What is this gift? It’s that through saving knowledge of Christ (look what it says at the end of verse 3) we have been called “to his own glory and excellence.” And, because of that, we have been granted a gift, namely, that through his “precious and very great promises,” we will become, get this, “partakers of the divine nature.” What does this mean?

First, let me be clear on what this does not mean. It does not mean that we become part of God. It also does not mean that we will become equal to God. It does not mean we become divinity ourselves. This is a false teaching that the Mormon church spreads. No, it’s referring to the second gift: We will be made fully righteous as Christ is.

See, scripture tells us that we were originally made in God's image, reflections of his holiness on earth. But because we rejected God, even though we still bear his image, we don't reflect him fully in the way we're supposed to. But where we failed, Christ succeeded. He is the perfect man, the final Adam, the exact image of the Father. And one day, when Christ returns, he will fully unite us with himself and we will be restored to what we were meant to be.

If you're curious, the word for this is "glorification" which simply means sharing in Christ's glory. And Scripture talks over and over again about the promise of this great gift. Listen closely to these amazing passages: "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4). "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2). This is how it ends for us. This is what awaits us when Christ returns. Full righteousness and glory.

Let that sink in for a moment. When Christ comes back, your struggles, the weaknesses that pull you away from God's path, will be wiped clean forever. You will no longer be divided, you will no longer be broken. You will be whole, you will be as you were meant to be. Brothers and sisters, do you want this? I do.

Hear me, this is our great hope. Our hope is life eternal and that means a whole lot more than just life after death. Eternal life is not just an extension of our biological warranty. No, eternal life is true life; it is life to the fullest. It is a restoration of what we were made for. When there will be no sin in us. And we will be made fully righteous in thought, word, and deed. Christ's precious and very great promise is that when he returns, we will share in his own glory and excellence. This is what we long for.

So if we who believe have the great gift of being declared righteous by Christ's righteousness, and if we also have this great gift that someday we will be glorified, made fully righteous like Christ, what does that mean for us now? What do we do with these gifts?

## **THE RESPONSE: CHRISTLIKENESS**

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Let's keep reading. "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue" (v. 5a). This is the turning point in our passage. We've been talking about the gifts we have in Christ. And now Peter shows us how we ought to respond. I'll read that first part again. "For this very reason, make every effort." In just those few words, Peter is doing something very clever. With one stroke, he's addressing two types of people, two common pitfalls that many Christians make in responding to the good news.

### ***First Pitfall: Self-Righteousness***

This first type of person hears "make every effort" and says, "Yes, I'm all in." So they work hard at the Christian life, they do good works, they have regular devotions, because after all, being a Christian is all about living good, right? I get good with God by being good, right? Wrong. This is a dangerous line of thinking that confuses our work with Christ's.

But Peter leaves no room for this. He says, "For this very reason." In other words, because Christ has done the work and given you the gift, because of Christ, "make every effort." Because Christ has done this for you, now you do this. That's a very important order. It must begin with Christ.

Throughout this letter Peter is clear, it is Christ and Christ alone who justifies us. It is his righteousness alone that saves. Anyone who forgets this, forgets our gift—that we are made alive by Christ’s righteousness.

I’ll put it another way. Imagine two men. Both of them are married, and both of them work very hard at their marriage. They both buy flowers, both notice haircuts, both spend time listening to their wives. But there’s one major difference. The first man is confident that his wife loves him. There is no doubt in his mind that their marriage is strong, and so he works hard because he loves her and he desires to be worthy of her love. The second man doubts that his wife loves him. He has no confidence that the marriage will survive another crisis, so he works hard because maybe then, just maybe, his wife will love him.

Those are very different pictures. One is sweet, the other is tragic. And it’s the same with us and Christ. Listen to me, if today you are trying to earn Christ’s love. That is tragic. Because with Christ, you don’t have to wonder whether he loves you. He loves you so much that he died for you. This is your unfailing gift. So that is the first pitfall.

### ***Second Pitfall: Unrighteousness***

The second type of person is the one who hears that Jesus has paid it all, and says, “Great! I prayed the sinner’s prayer when I was 5. I was baptized when I was 7. So I’m all set. I’ll see you in heaven.”

Except, in their life they have lived only for themselves. They’ve gone against God in every way. They don’t flee from sin, they embrace it. But that’s okay, right? Cause it’s Christ’s work, not mine. I can do what I want, live how I please, because I have a heavenly get-out-of-jail-free card. Nothing can come between me and eternal life. I’m set, right? Wrong. The false thought here is that because we are justified by Christ’s righteousness, we need not ourselves be righteous.

It is primarily this pitfall that Peter is writing against in the rest of this chapter and in the letter as a whole. To this person Peter says, don’t think Christ’s effort means that there’s nothing for you to do. Far from it. Instead, make every effort.

Look back with me at verse 5: “For this very reason (*precisely because of Christ’s work*), make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” Here we see the correct response to the incredible gift we have in Christ.

### ***The Response: Pursue Christlike Righteousness***

If you’re curious, the word for this response is “sanctification” which is simply the call to all Christians to grow in holiness and righteousness. Faith in Christ does not just sit still. Faith by nature produces virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and its end goal is love. We are called to be righteous, to be sanctified, to be like Christ. We can all agree that these are good things. Righteousness and Christlikeness are good things. But what does the pursuit of Christlike righteousness have to do with the gifts that we have in Christ? Why is this the correct response?

Peter tells us in verse 8: “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” What is Peter saying here? That

it's just common-sense. In other words, if you have saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, you should be producing fruit, you should be effective.

In the same vein, look at verse 9: "For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins." If you've been cleansed of sin, don't sin. If you've been freed from prison, you should probably leave the prison. If you don't, if you slide back into what you've been freed from, then you're so nearsighted that you're blind. Take it from someone who is actually so nearsighted that he's blind. How foolish would it be if I had my glasses and I chose not to use them? If I got in a car and tried to drive without them? Friends, I'd be writing my own death sentence. Because, after all, what do you do with a gift? You use it.

My friends all know that I love cooking. And so as a parting gift, a very close college friend went out and bought me a very nice knife. Razor sharp, perfectly weighted, Damascus steel that keeps a fine edge. I was floored when I opened that package. It was easily the nicest thing I owned. And do you know what? I was terrified to use it. I didn't want to break it with my lack of skill, to dull its edge through wear, or chip it on a bone. And so, for the first couple years that I owned that knife, I didn't touch it. It sat in my pantry and every now and then I'd remember that I had it and I'd take it out to admire it. But it wasn't doing what it was meant to do.

After a while I realized my foolishness and began to use the blade. And I've probably misused it, and done damage to it, but folks, this knife is a joy to use. It slices straight through veggies without any give. It fits my hand so well that I'm not tired from hours of use. As I learn to use the blade, it has improved the way I cook. But I wouldn't have experienced any of that had it continued to remain on my shelf. The gift was meant to be used.

This is what Peter is getting at in verses 10-11: "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall." What does it mean to confirm your calling and election? What is it saying? That if we practice these qualities we will never fall? It almost seems to be suggesting that the ball is in our court now. That now that Christ has saved us, it is up to us to stay saved.

But can that be right? Do you feel the tension here? Is it Christ's work now or our work? I believe the answer lies in a third gift. One that we've actually already read about. We glossed over it at first glance, but look with me at verse 3: "[Christ's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." It's right there. The ability to do good works, to even be righteous in the first place, also comes from Christ. Because the third gift is this: Christ gives us all we need to pursue righteousness.

Christ alone saves us, Christ alone glorifies us, and Christ alone sanctifies us by giving us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Not just what we need to get started. Not just a little bit here and there. But every virtue in you, every fruit that is growing, every second of our lives, is ours by the divine power of Christ alone. Even your good works are the work of Christ. And that is the great mystery, that our pursuit of holiness is both Christ's work and our work. That at the same time that Christ calls us to be holy, he is the one who every moment enables that same holiness. And this should come as no surprise, because over and over again, God chooses to use broken human vessels to accomplish his miraculous deeds. And what greater miracle than that Christ would make us, broken sinners, more and more like him in all his holiness?

So, then, what does it mean to confirm our calling and election? Simply this: Works confirm our calling, because our works are the confirmation, the evidence, the receipt of the work of Christ in us. If Christ lives in us, then how could we not be producing the fruit of righteousness? If you have been truly called, your life will be changed in light of that calling. If we have a gift, how could we not use it?

Because what is our final gift? The end of Christ's work, the goal of our perseverance is this, "For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v. 11).

We who believe in Christ have this incredible gift. The promise of a glorious future, of an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior when he returns once and for all to set all things right. And like all promises, this promise is meant to be eagerly anticipated. Like a child excitedly waiting for their father to come home from a business trip. If they're genuinely, eagerly anticipating dad's return, they're gonna be looking out the window. They're asking mom over and over again, "When's dad coming back?" They're planning all the things they're gonna do together when he's home. They're living into the promise long before it's fulfilled. And that is why we are called to pursue righteousness in this life. Because if you believe in this promise of full righteousness and glory, why would you possibly do anything other than run towards it now and wholeheartedly pursue righteousness?

## THE AUTHOR'S INTENT

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Hopefully now you can see why this letter is so important to Peter, why he's spending his last days writing it. He says in verses 12-15, "Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things." Peter's dying wish is to remind us, to stir us up by way of reminder so that after he leaves we can remember these things. And the apostle is so passionate in his appeal because he's certain that it is true, that our hope is real, that Christ will truly return and that we will share in his glory.

He knows this because, as he says in verse 16: "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." Peter could have brought up any other event. He witnessed Christ heal the sick and cast out demons. He saw the risen Christ himself. Things that none of us can claim. But instead of any of these things, Peter chooses to describe what he and a few other disciples saw that day on the Mount of Transfiguration. Because this was not just another miracle, this was a vision of Christ in all the majesty and glory he will manifest at his second coming. The same glory that we will share in when Christ returns.

And if that's not enough, if you need more assurance that Christ will return gloriously, Peter goes on to say in verse 19: "And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Peter reminds us that the Old Testament prophets likewise speak of the coming day, the day of the Lord, which has yet to dawn, but will be as bright as the morning star rising in our hearts.

As we'll see with Pastor Mike next week, false prophets were denying that the day of the Lord was coming. But this is true prophecy, coming not from men, but from the Holy Spirit carrying men along to write down these sure words.

### *Conclusion*

So today we live between two world-changing events. Christ's first coming and his second coming. At Christ's first coming, our verdict before the judge was wiped clean, and we were declared righteous—our gift of justification. At Christ's second coming, more than just the verdict, but the actual brokenness and sin that still lingers on in us today will itself be wiped clean; we will be made righteous—our gift of glorification

And so here we are today. Between these two events. At the same time both sinners and saints. Already in Christ, but yet not fully. Right now, who we are does not match who we will be. But we have the amazing promise of full righteousness and glory.

And so in light of this glorious future, we are called to be holy, to be sanctified, to pursue Christlikeness, to run towards righteousness, and in so doing confirm our election as we march towards the goal, faithful to the end.