

The Level Ground of Our Faith

2 Peter 1:1-2

Series: *Growing in the Knowledge of God – 2 Peter*

Introduction: Grab your copy of the Scriptures and join me in 2 Peter, 2 Peter chapter 1.

There was once a Chinese boy who wanted to learn about jade, and so he went to study with a wise old teacher. On the first day of his instruction the wise teacher took a piece of the precious stone and placed it in the boy's hand and told him to hold onto it tight. Then the teacher began to talk about philosophy and science and math and the sun and everything under it. After an hour he took the stone back and sent the boy home. And this was the procedure of the instruction for several weeks. The boy got frustrated about this, but he respected his older and wiser teacher too much to say anything. But he did wonder, when will I learn about the jade? Well, one day when the boy came the old man put a stone into the boy's hand and instinctively the boy cried out – "that's not jade!" He had become so familiar with the genuine that he could immediately detect that which was counterfeit.¹

The apostle Peter is the wise old sage and we are the young boy as we come to the book of 2 Peter. And throughout our study of this great book, we will hold the true Gospel in the hands of our minds. But we will also hold the counterfeit too, and all of this will be for the purpose of confirming to us what is the true Gospel. Everyone has a gospel, and everyone has a god, and everyone has a hope and a plan for their own salvation, and everyone has their own version of the truth. And our culture has completely acquiesced to that reality and has made it the accepted rule of our shared worldview – that the individual gets to determine truth and reality as they please. We've even taken this so far that we now think we should let young children determine what gender they want to identify with, because we have vested sole authority in the individual.

But our culture is holding tightly to a fake piece of jade. There is only one God and only one Gospel and only one body of truth, and therefore, only one hope of salvation and one way of being made right with God. This battle between the true and the false is not unique to our day or our culture or our lives. Peter's day was full of this conflict as well. And so, he writes this final letter to address the dangers of false prophets and false teachers who claim to speak for God, but who do not. We find out in the middle of chapter 1 that Peter is about to die a martyr's death in Rome, and in 3:1 we find out that he is writing this second letter to the same churches that he wrote to in 1 Peter, the churches of northern Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. And in the first letter he warned them about the dangers of the attacks that come from the outside as Satan lurks around the Church looking for a straying sheep to devour. And now, as Peter is about to

¹ Haddon W. Robinson as quoted in Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book*, pg. 89.

depart and be with Christ he is led by the Spirit of God to address the danger of false prophets who are peddling a false gospel and are living false lives, in other words, he is warning about the attacks that come from the inside. As one commentator said, “At a time when there were calls to replace, supplement or question the apostolic gospel, he writes as a direct source of that Gospel, and he will use his letter to call the Christians back to it.”²

And this call back to the apostolic Gospel begins right away in the first verse. Let’s read 2 Peter 1 vs. 1-2.

If we were to keep reading on in Peter’s letter we would find that Peter counters the false teachers by first solidifying the foundation of our faith in chapter 1. And then in chapter 2 he counters the false teachers by exposing their character and their destruction and their motives and the vile corruption they bring into the church. He doesn’t speak much of the content of their preaching, but rather exposes the character of the teachers. He pulls back the curtain on their heart and exposes their wickedness for all to see. And then in chapter 3, Peter climaxes the argument against this counterfeit gospel by explaining why and how the Word of God will ultimately prove true.

And it all begins here in these 2 short verses. Peter first points to the authenticity of the Gospel in verse 1 and then to the advance of our faith in verse 2. And this solidifies our confidence that we have the truth.

I. The Authenticity of the Gospel – vs. 1

- a. To shore up the foundation of our faith, Peter points to the character of the three people involved in this true Gospel. He reminds them of who he is, and of who they are as the recipients of his letter, and of who Jesus is as their Lord. The truth of these three entities combines to prove the authenticity of the Gospel. In other words, he is telling them – you have the right Gospel and this is proven by the character of these three things. And though we are not the original recipients of the letter, you will see that if we have this same apostolic gospel then we have this same glorious standing with Peter under the saving work of our Lord. So, the authenticity of our faith is proven by its source, our standing, and our Savior.
- b. *Its Source*
 - i. Peter’s first words are not just simple introduction, but immediate defense of Gospel truth. He uses his Hebrew name, his given name – Simeon – instead of the Greek version of Simon. And he combines it with the Greek version of the name the Lord gave him – Peter. Without boring you with the details, this is a small touch of authenticity. This letter has been one of the most contested in the church as to whether or not it was

² Dick Lucas & Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude*, pg. 33.

actually written by the apostle Peter. Some have claimed that it was written by a 2nd Century church leader claiming to be Peter. But if it was, they would have most likely said it was from Peter, or at best, from Simon Peter. They would not have been creative enough to use the Hebrew version of Peter's first name – Simeon. So, this is a small, yet important validation of the authenticity of the letter.

- ii. And then with 3 simple words in the Greek Peter declares the essential elements of his identity. He is a *doulos* and an *Apostolos* – a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ. In both of these identifiers Peter is authenticating the message of the Gospel that he writes to defend.
- iii. Peter says that he is a slave of Jesus Christ. Most English translations mis-translate this as servant or as bond-servant to avoid confusion with our nation's history with slavery. And there were certainly differences between 1st Century slavery in the Roman empire, and the slavery of the 18th-19th Centuries in Europe and North America. But there are key similarities too. So, a slave was owned by his or her master. They were considered a piece of property and they had no legal right under the law as a normal citizen. Peter's point of calling himself a *doulos* of the Lord is to say that he is owned by Jesus Christ his Lord. He has been purchased by Christ through the shedding of his precious blood upon the cross of Calvary. This purchase price paid the redemption for Peter to free him from the condemnation of sin and to make him God's child. He is now enslaved by grace to the God who loved him so. And this means that he orders his life under the command of his benevolent Lord. This is what his opponents were not doing, by the way. Look at chapter 2 and verse 1. *Read 2:1*
- iv. This is how Peter thinks about the Christian. He is one purchased by a Master, and therefore he is under the command of Jesus as Lord. And this puts Peter in a position of humility and of honor. He is writing this letter to defend Christ's Gospel. And he does this as a slave of Christ. He is following orders. This is not Peter's gospel, or Peter's church, or Peter's truth. He is a slave who is following the orders of his Lord. And this puts him in good company. The great men of the Old and the New Testament are referred to as slaves of the Lord. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and Samuel and David – all slaves of the Lord. And in the New Testament this identifier is used of Paul and James and Jude, and here of Peter. All of these men are simply enslaved to our gracious God as He used them to accomplish His work in this world.
- v. And then Peter further identifies his character as an apostle of Jesus Christ. So, he was enslaved to Jesus through grace, and now he is sent by Jesus with a message. That is what an apostle is. One sent by a ruler with

a message to be delivered. Jesus selected just 12 of these men, and he gave them a message to declare after he ascended into Heaven. Peter says here – I am one of those men, and I come with that message. My proclamation of the true gospel is the apostolic message. It is the message given to us by Christ himself, and it is the one we have proclaimed to you. Being a chosen messenger of Christ, Peter is saying that this is as close to the source of the gospel as you can get. This is Jesus' gospel, and Peter is simply the messenger of the message. Therefore, we can know it is authentic.

c. *Our Standing*

- i. This combines in verse one with our standing in this gospel. So, the source is straight from God through the apostles. And the work this Gospel does upon those who receive it is to bring us into equal standing with those apostles who delivered it.
- ii. So, after Peter gives his identity as a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ, he then goes on to identify the recipients of the letter. They are those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. The verb for “have obtained” is an interesting word. It always describes something that comes to someone apart from their own effort. And in that line it is used often to describe the casting of lots to make a decision about something. So, in John 19:24 the soldiers at the foot of Jesus' cross cast lots (same word) to see who would take his tunic. In Luke 1 the word is used to describe that Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter into the Temple. The focus of the word is on the divine control of things. The recipients of this letter are those who have obtained the kind grace of God and this has been through no doing of their own. They have responded to that Gospel message with saving faith in Jesus Christ. And this was not of their own doing. This was given to them. This faith in Christ was a faith they obtained through the divine ordaining and foreknowledge and sovereign grace of God. And this is true for everyone who has saving faith – they have received that faith by the sovereign grace of God upon them.
- iii. This faith that we have obtained is not talking about the body of truth that is believed – so the facts of the Gospel – that Jesus lived a sinless life as God in the flesh, and died a substitutionary death to appease the righteous wrath of God against our sins, and rose again on the 3rd day as one completely victorious over sin and death and hell – but it is speaking of the subjective experience of conversion from spiritual deadness to spiritual life. It is speaking of the moment when the seed of the gospel falls upon the soil of the heart and it finds good soil because the Spirit of God attends the seed and plants it into a heart which is regenerated by

God's gracious power. We can't save ourselves. We can't save others. We can't convince others to receive the grace of God by faith. We do not have the power to bring the spiritually dead to life in Christ. This is not man's job, but God's. And so Peter says, you have obtained this faith that we share with you – it has been an act of God's grace.

- iv. And this puts the recipients on the level ground with the author of the letter. He says they are of equal standing with them in this faith. Or as the KJV says – they have a like precious faith. This equality speaks to the privilege and the preciousness, or the value, of the faith. It's what we mean when we say that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. There are not unique races or privileged groups or superstar Christians. And that is really saying something from Peter's pen here. Just think of how different Peter is from the Christians in Asia Minor who were first receiving this letter, and then think of that as it relates to us. Peter is unique in at least 3 ways as it relates to the Gospel. First, he was a Jew. Part of the chosen people of God. They were uniquely blessed by God and the promise was upon them that through them the whole world would be blessed. Second, Peter was an apostle. A uniquely chosen and specifically sent one. He wielded the authority of Christ as he proclaimed the glorious Gospel of Christ. He was one of 12 men in all of human history called to this unique position of apostle. And third, he was a first-generation Christian. And I don't mean a first-generation in a family, some of you are that, but rather I mean, the very first generation of Christians period. Those in the churches of Asia Minor were first generation Christians too, but they were not the first of the first generation. Peter was unique from them in that way too.
- v. And yet, with all of those differences and with all of the privilege and blessing that those differences bring to Peter and to the other apostles and the other Jewish Christians and to the other 1st generation Christians – Peter still says, our faith is on level ground. We enjoy the same privilege as they do. We have access to the same spiritual blessings. We enjoy the same grace and the same peace. We know the same hope and we are blessed with the same eternal privileges. We have like precious faith with Peter.

d. Our Savior

- i. And this is true, not because of us nor because of Peter, but because of Jesus. So Peter says that we have this equal standing by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. The authenticity of the true gospel is defended by its source – the slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, and by our standing – it has accomplished the same glorious redemption in all of God's true children. And now we see this authenticity defended through the character of our Savior. This equal standing of our faith is based upon

the sure foundation of the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. This righteousness of God is earned for us by Jesus and it is displayed in how God justifies us before His bar of judgment. So, we have an equal standing before God because by grace through faith we have been declared righteous. This is not a righteousness we have earned, nor is it a righteousness we must work to keep. Rather, it is a legal declaration in which God determines to look at us through the righteousness of His Son – our Lord Jesus. So, though I am a wicked sinner who deserves God's full and eternal punishment of my sins – in Christ, my sin is paid by His death on the cross, and my unrighteousness is now fully covered by the righteousness which was earned by Christ in his life on earth. This active righteousness of Jesus is the core of our hope that we can be justified because He has earned for us what we could never earn for ourselves. And God is righteous – he is just – to look on Jesus and count the believer as right with Him through Christ.

- ii. That is the righteousness by which we have an equal standing with Peter and with the 1st Century Christians of Asia Minor, and with one another. If we are in Christ by grace through faith, then we are right with God. No one person can be more right or more pleasing or more precious to God in Christ. We are all loved and welcomed and equal before God in Christ.
- iii. And this can only be true because of who Jesus is. So, notice how Peter describes Jesus' character here. The last phrase of verse 1 is one of the most clear and airtight statements about the deity of Jesus. He is our God and Savior Jesus Christ. There is no way in the Greek to separate those terms. The construction in the original language is clear – Jesus Christ is both God and Savior.
- iv. Then combine that with the description of Jesus at the end of verse 2 – that he is also Lord. So, Jesus is God and Savior and Lord. And it has to be this way. If Jesus is God then he must be Lord. If he is Savior then he must be God. If he is Savior then He must be Lord. All three go together to make known to us with clarity that this Gospel of Christ is the authentic Gospel because it is based upon the righteousness of Jesus, who is God and Savior and Lord.
- v. And this is a big point in Peter's letter. His favorite description of Jesus is that he is our Lord and Savior. So, he will use that again in 1:11; 2:20; 3:2; and 3:18. He uses the name of Jesus 3 other times in the book besides the ones I just mentioned, and each time he uses the title "the Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, every time he is speaking about Jesus he is using this official title which makes so clear the authoritative nature of Jesus' Deity. He is God and He is our Savior through the shedding of his own blood, and he is therefore, our Lord.

- vi. This becomes significant in proving that the gospel Peter preached and these Christians hold to is the true and authentic gospel. As he describes the false teachers and prophets in chapter 2 it becomes very clear that they are not all that interested in Jesus' authoritative word nor in his authoritative control over their lives. They are happy to claim him as their Savior and walk in a man-made religion which identifies with Jesus, but they have denied him as their Lord. They want his saving grace, but they have rejected his sovereign position over their lives. And this is a sure sign of a false gospel. When those who proclaim it are those who deny the truths of the gospel with their very lives – then they are proclaiming a false gospel.
- e. But Peter's gospel is authentic. We know that because the source of this gospel is God himself through the slave and apostle of Christ, Peter himself. And we know that because this gospel has won for us an equal standing with God through the righteousness of Christ. And we know that because of the nature of our Savior. He is Lord and He is God and this guarantees that He is able to save us. And this authentic gospel gives rise to the advance of our faith. That is what Peter prays for in verse 2.

II. The Advance of Our Faith – vs. 2

- a. So he prays – may grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. This is almost verbatim with how Peter had begun his first letter to them. The only addition is the sphere or the location of the multiplication of grace and peace. So, he prays for them to grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. This prayer matches the admonition that Peter ends his letter with in 3:18. He says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”
- b. This is what Peter did in his first letter too. He put a parenthesis around the whole letter with bookend phrases that mirror one another. This is why he is writing to them. This informs everything he will say between 1:3 and 3:17. He prays that through this letter God will multiply grace and peace to them as they grow in their knowledge of God. In other words, Peter is praying that their faith would advance. The faith they have obtained by the sheer mercy of God is a faith that will now produce growth in them.
- c. *Grace & Peace Multiplied*
 - i. He speaks of this growth in terms of multiplication. In terms of math, and I am no math buff so you can correct me later here, but in terms of math, if you are seeking to increase numbers to get to the highest possible number, then addition is the slow way to go. You will get there, it will just take a lot longer with a lot more work. But with multiplication it only takes a few steps and you are dealing with massive numbers pretty quickly and

there is infinite possibility – the numbers just keep piling up. That is the thought here. Peter longs for them to be overwhelmed with grace and peace in the knowledge of God with infinite possibility – there is always more grace and peace to be multiplied to them in the knowledge of God. The grace he speaks of is the grace they already know in how they obtained their faith.

- ii. And this grace we are shown in and through Christ is a grace that gives us peace with God. That is exactly what Peter said in his first letter in 3:18 – For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous (that’s saving grace), that he might bring us to God . . . and that is peace. Peace with God that not only makes things right with God and keeps us out of Hell, but peace with God that allows us to be co-heirs with Christ and considered sons of God for all of eternity.
- iii. The order of Peter’s prayer is important. Grace always precedes true peace. We must be made right with God through the work of His saving grace. He must convince us of our own sinfulness. He must show us the penalty of our sinfulness. He must draw us to repent of our sin. He must lead us to trust in Christ and His finished work for us. He must give us saving faith. He must cause us to be born again to a living hope in and through Christ Jesus our Lord. And this gives us peace with God. We cannot have peace without God if we do not know the grace of God.
- iv. And so Peter prays that this grace and peace that we know would be multiplied. And this is the greatest defense against false teaching and false teachers – an ever increasing grace and peace in the life of the believer. The advance of grace and peace which grows us more and more in Christ is the surest defense to the counterfeit gospels and the counterfeit truths and the counterfeit gods which pervade so much of modern-day Christianity.

d. *In the Knowledge of God*

- i. And notice that this multiplication of this grace and peace happens in the sphere of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. This is where this kind of advancement of true grace and peace happen – they happen in the knowledge of God. The heart and the head are always connected in Scripture. It is not enough to tell someone to love God more without pointing them down the path which will help them to know God better. It is not enough to call a believer to grow in righteous living if you don’t point them down the path of knowing more of their Righteous Savior.
- ii. This idea of knowing God and his truth is going to come up again and again in this short letter. The protection for their faith in the authentic Gospel is a true knowledge of the one true God. They must be multiplied

in the grace and peace that comes as they know more and more of God and of the Lord Jesus.

- iii. We are awash in a world that doesn't know what true knowledge is, doesn't know how to teach true knowledge, and doesn't know where to look for the knowledge we need to have. We don't know what we are supposed to know. It is the information age, but we aren't sure what information is right and what is wrong. And we don't know where to get information from. And I don't just mean that we are inundated with fake news that comes at us from every angle. What I mean is that we, as a culture, don't value true knowledge anymore. We have bought into the evolutionary and mystical lie that we can create our own truth by visualizing and verbalizing that truth. That is what evolution has at its core you know – the ability for a species to think its way and will its way to some other existence that is better. And when you combine that naturalistic explanation of progress with the New Age Mysticism that is rampant in our cultural psyche – you have the dumpster that is on fire in our culture wars over what is true and what is not. New Age Mysticism has taught us that experience and feelings trump any external standard of knowledge. You can only know by feeling and thinking for yourself and experiencing things. So, you can only know if you are boy or if you are girl by listening to your feelings and following your experiences. That is an extreme example, but it is that kind of thinking about knowledge that is thriving in our culture today. And the church is not immune to this. This New Age mysticism has crept in through false teachers like John Wimber who, in his book called Power Evangelism, printed in 1985, taught that people won't believe the Gospel by us just preaching it to them. Rather we need the power displays of miracles and supernatural works for them to believe. Those powerful displays of the supernatural will convince them and then they will believe.
- iv. Well, that didn't work so well for Jesus now did it? His life of miracles led him to the executioner's stake. And this doesn't jive with Romans 10:17 does it – faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. The church has always needed to know God and our Lord Jesus more. The church has always needed to multiply in grace and peace by growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We don't need mystical movements of experience – we need the true knowledge of God.
- v. I am risking going long here, but just a few points of application and then we are done. Beloved, if you have known the authentic Gospel of Jesus that has come to us from the apostles and has put us on the level ground of like precious faith with them through Jesus our Lord – then your faith should be and will be and must be advancing in grace and peace. And this

advance always comes in the knowledge of our God and of Jesus Christ our Lord. Listen – this is one of the main reasons we meet together as often as we do. This is not Christian busy work. We do not call you as a church to gather on Sunday morning and Sunday night and in some form during the week simply because we think you need more to do. No, you don't need more to do, but you need more of God. I have not yet met a thriving Christian who is growing and abounding in grace and peace who only went to a Sunday morning service of a church and did nothing else to grow in Christ. You need more than that. You need to be in the Word personally. You need to be studying the Word of God so that you might know God. You need to be meeting with other Christians who are also a part of your church so that you can grow together and encourage one another to increase in grace and peace. You need to come when the church gathers, unless you are providentially hindered. This is the great opportunity of our Sunday School ministry and of our Sunday night service and of our mid-week Small Groups. There are lots of opportunities wrapped up into each of those, but they are primarily opportunities for us as a church to be multiplied in grace and peace as we grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. You need more of the teaching and preaching of the Word of God – not less. You need less of the Chiefs and more of God. You need less of your Smartphone and more of God. You need less of protected family time and more of God. You need less of your favorite news network and more of the deep and true doctrines of God. When you neglect the gathering of the body of Christ, when you fail to dig into the Word, when you falter in your pursuit of simply reading the Bible – you are walking away from increased knowledge of God and therefore the multiplication of grace and peace. And we all need more grace and peace! Let's pray!