
Day 356 – December 22

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Second Letter by Peter

Readings: 2 Peter 1:1-3:18

Reflections:

- **Second Letter by Peter:** This second letter of Peter is widely regarded as not being written by Peter. Although it doesn't follow the pattern of typical letters written in honor of a person, it does vary greatly from the first letter. This may be explained by Peter using a different secretary. It may also be that Peter is nearing his death, he has received Jude's letter and asked one of his associates to integrate some of his insights in with a further expansion on Jude's letter. If this letter was written in honor of Peter, it is safe to say that it contains content in line with apostolic teaching and was ultimately accepted as genuine by the early church leaders. The time of this writing was most likely close to 64 CE if Peter is indeed the author of this letter.
- **Salutation:** Peter here includes his first name, Simon, and calls himself a servant before he claims the title of apostle. This letter is apparently written right at the time of his death and so there is much more reflection on the past and experiences he has as Simon the disciple. At the end of our lives, our faith is much more precious to us.
- **Value of true knowledge – knowledge brings godliness:** Peter brings together two key elements to our growth towards Christ-likeness. The power of the Spirit and his promises of what he will do. This combines his inside out work through the Spirit and our growth in faith to trust what God says. In a sense this combines God's love and his truth in our lives. As we are satisfied and secure in God, then we can live counter-cultural lives. Rather than hiding from the world, we can enter into a messed up world without being corrupted.
- **Beyond knowledge into love:** Peter is providing his own summary of the building blocks of spiritual maturity: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. This list is similar to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. It is interesting Peter suggests that we must start with faith and intentionally grow into a full sense of God's love. Paul on the other hand starts with the love of the Spirit and unpacks its different qualities. In either case we get the sense of the total inside out transformation. In both cases, we are to set our sights on growing in our experience of these heart qualities.

- Need to affirm calling: Peter warns against taking God's grace and calling for granted. We need to actualize our relationship with Christ by living it out and make it real. There is no theoretical relationship with God.
- Reminder in face of death: Peter is aware of his own impending death and is doubling his final efforts to ground his community in the truth. He uses the image of tent for his body to affirm the temporal nature of our present bodies.
- Factual nature of gospel: Peter reminds them of his role as an eye witness and retells the story recorded in Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; and Luke 9:35. This affirmation of the identity of Jesus and his intimacy with the Father was announced at Jesus' baptism and after Peter's confession when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. This statement about Jesus is something that is true for all Christ-followers. God wants all of us to hear him say to us, "You are my child whom I love. With you I am well pleased." For Peter at the end of his life, the memory of the transfiguration, this glimpse into the other side becomes an increasingly important memory.
- Fulfillment of prophecy: Peter also reminds them of the prophetic words about Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures, their role in confirming the light of God in our lives, and the role of the Spirit in announcing the coming Christ.
- Danger of false teachers: This work of the Spirit in leading us into Christ-likeness is contrasted with false prophets who lead people into lies and destruction.
- God will punish wicked: Peter reminds his readers of God's righteous judgment against angels who rebelled and cultures who were fully given over to evil and yet God's consistent pattern of rescuing the righteous. We can count on both. God will judge evil. God will rescue the righteous.
- Description of false teachers: Peter's description highlights the arrogant self-centeredness of these kinds of leaders and how they are predators within community.
- Results of their false teaching: These false leaders promise freedom (to self-indulge) and yet are enslaved by and enslaving others to that same self-indulgence. Peter nails it when he says, "A person is a slave to whatever has mastered him." He also warns that knowing the truth is only helpful if you embrace it. If you know it and then reject it, you are in worse shape than before you knew the truth. Self-centeredness may look good to us but it drives the human heart back to junk that we should be getting rid of, like a pig in mud.
- Regarding the second coming – reason for letter: The reason for these letters is to help encourage us to meditate on truth and renew our minds.
- Second coming certain: Peter reminds them that the last days will be bad. Again we have discussed if there possibly was a "last days" prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE that is a foreshadowing of the final last days. Peter points out that there will be ultimately two major judgments on the planet by God. The first was by water, the flood, a cleansing judgment. The second will be one of fire and finality.

- Reason for delay: We are reminded of God's perspective with time. God transcends our concepts of time. God is wisely objective regarding the unfolding of history because he can span a thousand years like we experience a day. Yet he is intimately involved in each moment because he can experience a day like a thousand years to us. So God's sovereignty over time goes both ways. God doesn't want anyone to perish but all to turn away from their self-destructive ways, their sin and so when things take longer than we like we must remember God's heart is always to be patient with the hope of redemption. Yet at some point he will stop and say it is over and when that day happens, it is final.
- Hope should prompt godliness: The response we should have is obvious. Don't mess around but go for God full-tilt as you wait expectantly for him to set everything right. The ultimate hope? A new heaven (sky) and new earth where we live with God in intimate friendship!
- Agreement with Paul: Peter speaks in affirmation of Paul and his writings. Peter refers to them as Scripture and so we see that early in the Jesus movement the Christian writings were being recognized as inspired by God like the Hebrew Scriptures were. We should also know that Scripture is vulnerable in that the writers openly admit that at times they struggle to find the right words to express what God is revealing in and through them. We can take courage that God still chooses to partner with us even if at times we struggle to get it all right.
- Final warning: We must both guard against deception and actively focus on growing in both an experience of God's grace in our lives and relationships as well as adding to our experience of grace a deepening knowledge of the truth. Again we see that our focus should not be an obsession with the externals but rather with our own internal transformation into the likeness of Christ and intimate friendship with him.