

Make your Calling and Election Sure

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 April 2018

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] Amen. The second letter to Peter, chapter 1. If you're looking up the pew Bibles, it's page 1222.

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, have received a faith as precious as ours.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Through these, he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, and to perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, mutual affection, and to mutual affection, love.

[1 : 39] For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But whoever does not have them is short-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election.

For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, for Jesus Christ.

Thanks a lot, Gordon, for reading. If you keep your Bibles open at 2 Peter 1, 1222, that would be really helpful. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have not left us in the dark about how we should live in these last days. We thank you that you have revealed your will to us as your Spirit speaks to us about who you have saved us to be and how we should live between the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and his return.

[3 : 05] And so we pray, Heavenly Father, that this evening you will give us ears to hear your Spirit's voice, minds that can understand, and hearts that are moved that we might love the things you love and live lives that glorify you.

We pray this for our good as well as for your glory. Amen. So this evening's Bible passage invites us to ask ourselves, what am I really pursuing?

What really gets me out of bed in the morning? What am I trying to achieve in life? When I think about where I'm in five years' time or ten years' time, what is it that I want to be excelling at, successful at?

There are some quite eccentric ideas out there about things that you could pursue in life. I don't know whether you saw in the news last week that there was the hot pepper eating contest in New York.

So this is people who were so well-practiced at eating hot chili peppers that they've entered competitions about who can manage to sustain themselves through the hottest chili peppers.

[4 : 12] And it was in the news because a competitor ended up in emergency medical care with severe headaches from having eaten the world's hottest chili. Apparently, on the hotness of chili scale, I've forgotten what it's called, it was 400 times stronger than a jalapeno pepper.

So I just cannot get my head around that. But evidently, it's quite damaging to eat one. So that's something you could aim for in life. Around us, there are people, of course, this kind of time of year, really giving everything to study, to succeed in exams or assignments.

And it was in the news again last week about how the newest wave of teenage vlogging stars are the study tubers on YouTube. Ruby Granger, who's 17, has had 13 million views. And her videos include sped up clips of her working at her desk for up to 15 hours at a time. So that's Ruby Granger, if you didn't get down the name, to look up later and watch those videos. And we've just had a few weeks, haven't we, of the sort of really inspiring world of sport kind of showing us, people striving for stuff. And at the Commonwealth Games, I became a massive netball fan overnight, watching England beat Australia today.

[5 : 26] Still don't know the rules, but it was epic. Even though I didn't understand what was going on, England won. But Scotland, Scotland came out with some gold medals, four in the cycling. That's pretty good, isn't it?

But of course, when you see these documentaries about the cycling, Team GB cycling or Scottish cycling, there's so much blood and sweat and tears that goes into getting a medal, just trying to be the best, trying to be all the time, 5% better, 1% better over at the Velodrome in Glasgow. So, people striving. And in 2 Peter, we get urged to show that similar kind of drive and determination. If you look at verse 5 of chapter 1, that language, make every effort. Very strong, isn't it? And then he says the same thing in verse 10. Make every effort. What about? Well, we're to show that drive and determination about growing in personal godliness, about becoming a godly man, becoming a godly woman, the godly man, a godly woman that God redeemed us to be.

That's what the big idea is this evening. So, we're in this letter to Peter, written by Peter. You can see that in verse 1. Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 43] Those two little descriptions of who he is are quite relevant, actually, to the themes of the letter we'll see in the coming weeks. That he's an apostle. That is that he has, apostle just means sent one, but he is one of the 12 apostles in that he was an eyewitness of the risen Jesus.

He saw Jesus physically alive again after he died. And so he knows, having seen Jesus alive again, he will come in glory to judge. That's significant for the letter.

And the other thing he says about himself, a slave of Jesus Christ, a servant of Jesus. That is that Jesus is Lord now. And for Peter, and the same for any of us who come to Jesus as Savior, we come under his lordship.

He's in charge and we serve him. But then there's this great tenderness in the letter because, I don't know about you, but I think it's pretty obvious to me that if I was around at that time, I would massively have pedestalized Peter.

You know, he was one of the guys who'd been there, first generation, seen Jesus, walked with Jesus. And yet, look at that great line, the next line he says in the letter. He says, to those who, through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, have received a faith as precious as ours.

[7 : 59] In other words, it doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian, if you've become a Christian today, your faith is as precious as the faith of those first eyewitnesses because it was given you by our God, Jesus, and it saves you.

There's no second-class Christian, third-class Christian. We don't know much about the audience Peter writes to. He doesn't give much away. I think it's the same audience as one Peter because if you just look at the beginning of chapter three, he says, Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you.

I've written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. So his first letter was written to Christians scattered around what's now modern-day Western Turkey, Asia Minor, as it was, and it seems he's writing to that same group again, a letter of a general circulation that kind of is passed on to us and we read and God speaks to us in it today, and the aim can be the same for us, that it's a reminder to us and it stimulates you to wholesome thinking about what it looks like to live today for Christ and maybe you could use it as a spiritual MOT, this book, to be assessing, well, how am I getting on as a Christian?

And he begins with this wonderful section about God's power and God's promises. So my first point this evening, an inspiring assurance of God's gifting. It's on the sheet. An inspiring assurance of God's gifting.

If you have a look with me at verses three and four, he's probably speaking still about Jesus here. He called Jesus God in verse two, and then he says, his divine power has given us, sorry, it's in verse one that he calls Jesus God, and then in verse three, he says, his divine power has given us

everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

[9 : 51] So that's the power that he's given us, and next we get the promises. Through these, that is, he's still talking about his glory and goodness, through his glory and goodness, he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

The word he had forgiven, which comes in verse three and verse four, it's kind of like the word bestowed, it's a strong word of generosity, like if you had a king who gave a massive estate and castle and loads of land to somebody, he bestows it in his generosity.

That's the picture of God giving us promises and power. It's not just promises, is it? He says, very great promises because God's promises have changed the whole of human history.

Human history is about God keeping his promises, they are very great promises and they're not just very great promises, they are precious promises because for anyone who trusts them, they transform your eternal destiny.

So we've called, and they transform you into this glorious future, so that's why I've called the series in 2 Peter Facing Up to the Future because that's a key theme in the letter is that we look ahead to what God has promised us in the future.

[11 : 22] It's a future that gets described next by Peter with this quite striking phrase. He says, through the promises you may participate in the divine nature. You think, has Peter gone quite new agey here?

What's this participate, you know, are we becoming God? Clearly Peter doesn't mean that we become God. It might just mean, he might be talking simply about how through God's promises we enjoy fellowship with the divine nature, fellowship with God.

I think it's probably also though to do with becoming godly. We use the phrase godliness, don't we? Becoming godly is becoming like him ethically in our behavior and our character.

And as we do that, it's as though we're participating in the divine nature and ultimately when God gives us immortality and we have eternal lives in the new creation, we will be sinless and that kind of idea of we haven't become God but we share characteristics of God.

So that's what's coming. Now Peter's about to challenge us to be ambitious about our godliness but first in verses 3 and 4 he wants to assure us that God never asks us to do something without fully equipping us to do it through his power and his promises.

[12 : 40] I'm reading, rereading at the moment Captain Corelli's Mandolin, the book, and set in the Second World War and there's this point quite early on in the book where these Italian soldiers are sent on a mission one night and they set off these two men and the mission's quite confusing.

They have to go to this outpost and they have to kill the people there but they're told there won't be many people there, don't worry. And on the way they realize the equipment they've been given is totally inadequate and they get there and there's loads of people there and they realize that actually it's deliberate that the Italian commanders have sent them on a mission that they want them to die in so that Mussolini can use it for propaganda.

And amazingly they manage to sort of survive this mission but when they get back from then on they don't trust the commanders anymore because they realize that they've been sent on a mission that they weren't equipped for, that the guys didn't want them to succeed.

And I just wonder if sometimes the danger is we start to get a view of God that's almost like that.

That we think God keeps demanding things of us. He's checking up on us but he hasn't helped us.

And that's not the view of the true God that Peter has at all. He assures us the living God is nothing like that. He's like this hugely generous king who's like a father to us and he gives us everything we need all out of his grace and kindness.

[14 : 07] And when he asks us to change it's for our good and he thoroughly equips us to do it. He empowers us. He's not out to trip us up.

I don't know if you've had that with driving tests. I know I won't pick on them but several people here have had a bit of a saga with driving tests. But you know I remember on the morning of my driving test my driving instructor in my last minute lesson saying you'll be alright Matt you'll be alright.

You just have to remember the examiner is looking to fail you. He wants to fail you. Okay? Which didn't make me feel very good actually. But you see the point that sometimes the examiners you feel like they've got their stats they can't pass everyone so they're looking for the little things they

can use to give you a major fault.

And God is nothing like that. He's not looking to fail us. He is kind. He's delighted to give us all things. He's a very kind God. That's our first point.

And we need that start about God's power and promises because of what comes next. Our second point a challenging command for our character. If you have a look with me at verse 5 for this very reason make every effort to add to your faith and then he lists these seven virtues.

[15 : 26] Add to your faith goodness. The good behavior that's the fruit of trusting God just trying to do things in a good way in God's eyes. Then we add to goodness knowledge.

We already have knowledge of God. In fact it's our knowledge of God that saves us in verse 2.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God. But then we grow in that knowledge as we continue to walk in life with God immersing ourselves in his word but also as we as we step out in faith and live for him we get closer to him.

Then we add to our knowledge self-control. Self-control in our speech. Maybe when we're tempted to criticize somebody else to slag them off behind their back especially if we're with other people who are doing that.

Self-control. Self-control in our thinking in our thought life not thinking selfishly about other people objectifying people.

self-control about how much we drink on a night out if we're with friends who are drinking and getting drunk. Self-control about our anger perhaps when we're running late and we're frustrated or when we're driving and someone cuts us up on the road.

[16 : 46] Then we add to self-control perseverance in verse 6 that we are willing to endure hard times in the Christian life because we know that it's only by persevering that we make it to glory.

We have to keep going as a Christian. We add to perseverance godliness becoming more like Christ and to godliness mutual affection or brotherly kindness as it's sometimes translated so that being godly isn't just about what we don't do the things we say no to the temptations we resist it's also about what we do that we're looking for ways to help people when we see people who need help we give them time we're there for people and certainly for my money when I first became a Christian that was the thing that most pulled me over was seeing the way that Christians cared for each other they showed brotherly kindness they showed mutual affection I remember being in this church that I joined to become a Christian and chatting to this guy and he was quite an unusual guy and he couldn't really see properly and we were talking and I felt like I'd kind of got stuck with him in my selfishness and then he said to me that I've got this problem with my eyes but one of the guys in the church just told me last week he's going to pay for me to have eye surgery to put my eyes right and it just completely stunned me that level of that's the sort of thing that your brother would do for you that a family would do so of course it was going on in the church because church is family it's just so moving to see people care for each other like that and then we add to mutual affection love which fits there with godliness and fits there with affection because it's love for God and love for his people and love for one another that fulfills his law that's what his commandments are all about so it's this virtuous cycle of as we more and more seek to live for God and grow in knowledge of God we grow and grow to maturity and it's a list here that Peter gives us because he's determined to banish complacency in the Christian life that if you think you've got it sorted as a Christian then you should be concerned because we shouldn't really feel like that we should be pursuing these things pressing into them more and more and we'll never stop until Jesus comes in glory we'll never stop pursuing these things of course it's not that these things save us it's not that if we're failing at these things and we're all failing at them it's not that that means we're not right with God Peter's made very clear in that first sentence it's our faith that saves us when you have that kind of faith though it changes you it changes your desires we're saved by faith alone but not by faith that remains alone we grow in our faith and we strive to live godly lives we live lives now that reflect the future that we're being promised and that big idea kind of sets a tone for the rest of the letter that we'll see in the coming weeks

Peter's first audience these churches they were in the minority in that part of the world and the Christians were sort of scattered around in little house churches just as in Glasgow today Christians are in the minority we're in the minority we're marginalized and Peter in his two letters I think he seems to hit the two biggest threats to Christians in that kind of environment in one Peter he deals with the threat of persecution persecution from without and how that can cause Christians to either assimilate and just blend in or just give up altogether and in two Peter the big threat isn't opposition

out with the church it's false teaching within the church that's the problem if you just glance down at chapter 2 verse 1 it's the big theme of chapter 2 but chapter 2 verse 1 but there were also false prophets among the people just as there will be false teachers among you they will secretly introduce destructive heresies so we'll get a feel for that as the weeks go on but for now it's worth just thinking about a couple of the themes of the false teaching that Peter's trying to address as the letter goes on one is that the false teachers seem to have been denying that Jesus would come in glory to judge so chapter 3 is devoted to assuring us the day of the Lord will come Jesus is alive he will come and judge he's profoundly interested in how we live today and that's why we get phrases like this in chapter 3 verse 10 he says the day of the Lord will come like a thief the heavens will disappear with a roar the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare then verse 13 he says but in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells in keeping with his promise that's the promise that he's already referred to in chapter 1 is great and precious promises that there's this new heaven and a new earth coming and that future that we trust in breaks into the present and inspires us to live differently now but these false teachers they were focused on the present and not the future they were saying don't worry Jesus isn't going to come and judge and also saying it therefore doesn't really matter how you live and we see that danger in church life today where we're tempted to forget about the future and just focus on kingdom life now and the impact we can have now and the experiences we can have now so I think it's striking how few contemporary worship songs are actually about the future when we have sermons where the bible passage about the future it's quite hard for our musicians to choose songs because there are so few of them about the new heaven and the new earth and about glory and about judgment day and there are so many about life as a

[23 : 13] Christian now we're too focused on the present the second aspect of the false teaching that Peter's correcting is something like this reading between the lines the false teachers would be saying something like this how you feel on the inside matters much more than what's going on on the outside and that's why the list of virtues here from Peter is so practical and physical the Lord Jesus wants us to demonstrate our faith in him by living lives of practical godliness so that what we do with our bodies how we treat each other it really matters to God because he's made us physical and the new heaven and the new earth are going to be physical but today just as in Peter's time we're in danger of that kind of thinking my feelings on the inside matter more than what I do on the outside because we long it's attractive isn't it we want a spiritual life that gives us warm feelings and good feelings on the inside but still allows us to pursue sensual pleasure ourselves it's what we're attracted to but to Peter says that real spirituality is displayed in kindness self-control faithfulness brotherly affection practical love and he wants us to press into them that phrase again in verse 5 make every effort and it's a phrase a bit like furnishing furnish your faith with these things a bit like if you imagine because we're thinking about how generous God is if you imagine that somebody gave you an amazing fabulous new flat they just gave it to you it was the it was the perfect flat for you in

Glasgow and they just give it to you and you can have it you don't have to earn it but it's empty of course you're not going to leave it empty now that you've got it you'll furnish it with the things that will make it into a home for you and Peter's calling on us to do that with our faith that we furnish our faith with the qualities that God longs for from us and as we do that we keep our eyes fixed on what God has in store for us in the future that's our final point so we've had an inspiring assurance of God's gifting a challenging command for our character and then thirdly we get a persuasive description of our future if you look with me at verse eight he says for if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and he contrasts that with the the complacent Christian who isn't pressing on verse nine but whoever does not have them is short-sighted and blind forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins it's so easy to drift into that trajectory it's not so much that you've stopped believing in Jesus or stopped saying you're a

Christian but life just gets crowded out by other demands other stresses in life other opportunities in life so that what you're really pursuing day by day what you're really aiming at is something different to a godliness that pleases God and as the years go by like that you don't grow as a Christian you stay as a baby and what Peter says about that way of life is it's forgetful you notice that of course if you ask somebody like that whether they've forgotten that Jesus died for them of course they haven't actually forgotten but it's that it doesn't mean as much to them anymore it's further away

from them we get to the point where we're not we're not as convicted as we used to be by our own sin so that we're not we're not as kind of bowled over anymore by God's grace because we just don't think that we we need grace that much we don't think of ourselves as particularly sinful and so the cross gets smaller and that's why Peter says again and again in his letter that he wants to remind us so he says in verse 12 so I will always remind you of these things even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have and in verse 15 he says and I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things chapter three verse one I've written both of them as reminders great great little verses there about what ministry is all about ministry to one another it's okay to tell each other things we already know we remind each other of the main things and perhaps it's a good time to ask ourselves are we in danger of moving on from the foundation of the gospel in search of something new in search of a mystical experience in search of the novel I used to have this mate I played rugby with and we train you get together for warm-up before a match and then you'd see the opposition which is never good and then you go in the changing rooms and you have this thing where the captain would say some stuff and then other people in the team who knew what they were talking about would start saying stuff before the rugby match to try and you know motivate us and keep us going and my mate Ed used to always say exactly the same things okay he used to say come on boys come on boys it's easy rugby it's easy rugby win the ball well keep the ball keep it simple easy rugby okay and in one sense because of course it wasn't easy rugby is not easy that's the whole problem right but you see his point it's not that it was easy to do it's just guys this isn't rocket science okay and Peter's like that as well to Peter is easy Christianity not that it's not challenging it couldn't be more challenging but it's not rocket science God has given you everything you have a glorious everything you need a glorious future power in the present get the basics right live for him now and doing that will cost you everything make every effort and if you don't do it you fall back it's the old bicycle principle in the Christian life you know that when you're riding a bike as soon as you slow down you get wobbly if you stop you fall over you have to keep going forwards to keep going and the result of growing in our practical godliness is that we have peace because we're assured we have confidence that we are saved verse 10 he says therefore my brothers and sisters make every effort to confirm your calling and election for if you do these things you will never stumble and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we don't have to confirm our calling and election to God he knows who are his but we can confirm it to ourselves when we see change in our own lives if we can say look I know I'm not the person that I should be and I know I'm not the person that I will be but I'm not the person I was when you see change like that it reassures you I do have faith I can fix my eyes on a certain future and what a future a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ as he looks at our life and sees moments of self control of perseverance of godliness and he says well done well done good and faithful servant in the end that's what will count God's promises will get us there his power enables us to please him so let's let that future break into the present as we rely on his power to live his ways in lives of practical godliness let's pray together father God we praise you and thank you for your generosity we thank you that you raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead that Peter and others saw him alive again that they spread that news that we might put our trust in Jesus as Savior and recognize him as Lord thank you for the power you've given us everything we need for a godly life and so we pray that you'd enable us to make every effort to furnish our faith with these great qualities of practical godliness that you would work in us what's pleasing to you and we would have our eyes fixed on a great future with you that rich welcome into your kingdom amen