

Sunday Morning Message

March 7, 2021

2 Peter 3:1 - 18 – *Keep Going and Keep Growing by the Grace of God*

[Note – this message and text have been preached many times in the past, but we will go thorough it again as the concluding message of this series]

Series - *Experiencing God's Grace in the Midst of Suffering*

Text – 2 Peter 3:1 - 18

Congregational Reading – 2 Peter 3:17 - 18

Introduction to the Series

The writer of this letter is identified as Peter. Peter was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was not only one of the twelve, but also a member of the inner circle of the Lord, which also include James and John. Peter knew a little something about growing in the Lord. Early on in his apostleship, Peter would often try to do things His way. He was a bit impulsive, and somewhat outspoken. Peter's famous failure in the flesh came when he denied knowing the Lord, and this immediately following his self-confident boasting that he would never do it.

Peter, however, didn't stay defeated. He got back up, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, was greatly used of the Lord. His message at Pentecost yielded the fruit of 3000 souls trusting the Lord Jesus. Peter was also used of the Lord to lead Cornelius, a Gentile man, to faith in Christ.

Here in this second general epistle or letter from Peter, he is writing near the end of his life. We estimate that the date of this writing was around 66 AD. He will be martyred at the hands of Nero shortly after this epistle was written, probably around 67 AD. It was most likely written from Rome. Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside-down, having requested this form of crucifixion because he felt unworthy to be put to death in the same manner as the Lord.

The theme of this letter is much the same as Peter's first epistle. He is encouraging believers to remain faithful to the Lord even under incredibly difficult circumstances. Additional emphasis in 2 Peter is given to the exposure of false teachers as well as to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Another significant difference that should be pointed out is that the scope of this letter seems to have been intended for a much broader audience than 1 Peter. That first epistle was written to a specific region in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) and is referred to in this letter as being previously written to these same recipients, but this letter is addressed to all believers, presumably beyond the geographical boundaries of the first letter. Of course, the Holy Spirit intended that

both letters be included within the Canon of Scripture and would thus be written for the benefit of all believers.

Introduction

In the first part of chapter one, we learned that there are seven things that God states that we should diligently add to our faith: these things are virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. The passage promises us that if we add these things, we will be fruitful, secure, and rewarded.

In the remainder of chapter one, Peter gives them some reminders:

1. He reminds them of these seven truths from the beginning of the chapter, and tells them that he will keep reminding them about them.
2. He reminds them that he was an eyewitness to the glory of the Lord.
3. He reminds them that they have a more sure word of prophecy – the Word of God.

In chapter two, the tone of the letter changes and Peter uses some very strong language to warn these struggling, first-century believers about the many false prophets and teachers that existed in their world.

Transition

Now in this final chapter, Peter discusses the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and encourages them to keep growing while they wait for the Lord and while they continue to serve him at a very difficult period of Church history.

Introduction

One of the most discouraging things for a pastor is to see the people of his church fall away from the Lord. Many who were once very zealous for the Lord, and very faithful to God's House, and very committed to fulfilling the Great Commission, and very separate from this world have turned back and have forsaken the Lord. Some are gradually slipping away from Him, and others are just not growing in the Lord as they once did. Sometimes, it is a radical departure from the faith.

Illustrate - This COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll spiritually as well as physically. There have been many spiritual casualties.

God reminds us here in 2 Peter 3 that we are supposed to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ even though the world is rejecting the Word of the God. We are to remain steadfast in our faith in spite of the fact that many Christians in our world today, and even some in our church, are giving up and quitting.

Parallel Verses:

Turn to Matthew 13:1 – 9; 18 – 23

In the Parable of the Sower, there of four groups of people discussed. The Lord Jesus teaches us here that some never receive the seed of the Word of God because Satan steals it away. These people have been blinded by the god of this world. But, there are others that do receive the seed of the Word of God, but they never seem to grow in the Lord. Then there is a third group that do grow for a time, and even produce fruit for a while, but eventually they too fizzle out and lose interest, and become unfruitful. Only one group out of the four groups mentioned in this parable continue to grow in grace, and continue to produce fruit in their lives.

God wants us to continue going and continue growing:

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: (1 Timothy 4:16a)

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: (1 Timothy 6:20)

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." - (2 Timothy 1:13-15)

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." - (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; (2 Timothy 3:14)

(Jesus said, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed [John 8:31];)

Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. (Proverbs 4:13)

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. (Hebrews 2:1)

Jesus told both the church at Sardis and the church at Philadelphia to "hold fast" to the things that they had.

To Sardis, specifically

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God." (Revelation 3:2)

Paul rebuked the church at Corinth because they were not growing in the Lord as they should have been:

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

Also in his Letter to the Hebrews, Paul admonishes them about their growth:

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:12-14)

In our passage today, the Lord is encouraging us in these last days: these days of apathy, apostasy, and unrestrained immorality, these days when it seems that everything from our past is being rejected and thrown away, to keep going and keep growing.

I A Reminder of the Lord's Imminent Return (vs. 1 – 10)

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:51-58)

Turn to 1Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11

The Lord explains to us very plainly that the only reason that he has not already returned is that there are some people out there in the world who need salvation.

II An Encouragement to Stay Focused (vs. 11 – 16)

Jesus said, *"occupy till I come"* (Luke 19:13), which means we are to stay busy serving Him until the time that He calls us home to Heaven. Don't quit now, we are almost home. Don't even slow down. If anything, things should pick up as the day of His return approaches.

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25)

Stay focused in your faithfulness to attending church; to supporting this ministry with your tithes and offerings; to your service for the Lord; to your soul-winning efforts; to your loving support of the pastor and his family.

III A Warning To Not Quit (vs. 17 – 18)

In the Book of Revelation Jesus reminds the churches of Asia Minor, and all of us, that He is coming back quickly. He told some of those churches that they needed to repent, He told one that they needed to hold fast to that which they already had. I would say to the members of this church that some of us need to repent about some things, and others need to just hold on to some things and not let them slip away. Why, because the Lord will soon return.

The Lord is coming soon. We need to stay focused on the task of sowing the seeds of the gospel to this lost world. Don't allow the distractions of this world to veer you off of the path. Don't allow the devil to pull you out of God's will. Stay in the game until you hear the sound of the trumpet.

Conclusion

There are countless illustrations that I could use to drive home the point that many Christians are quitting today. (Bill S from The Christian Bible Church) But I don't need to do that, because you all know a lot of examples of what I'm talking about yourself. Most of you know people who have fallen away, and you probably also know what the devil did to lure those folks out of God's will. The question is will that happen to you?

Where will you be 5 years from now if the Lord tarries? Will you still be in church and serving the Lord? Will you be further down the Christian road than you are now, or will you have turned back? I'm scared for all of us because better people than me have already fallen. I'm worried about some of you because you just don't seem to be as excited as you once were. You're missing church a lot more than you used to. You are probably not in the Word privately as much as you once were either. When was the last time you shared your faith with somebody? How about your love for the things of this world? These are all some sobering things to consider. Are you growing in grace or are you slipping away from the Lord?

Many of you have been at this thing for a long time – don't quit – this will all be over soon. Jesus is coming back.

*"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." -
(Revelation 3:11)*

"Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." - (2 John 1:8)