

## “Count your blessings” (1)

We are beginning our sermon series of **2 Peter** this morning and although it's a short letter I'm sure we will soon discover that it's still a very significant part of the New Testament Scriptures. **"Mister, why doesn't this cow have any horns?" asked the young lady from a nearby city. The farmer cocked his head for a moment, then began in a patient tone, "Well, cattle can do a lot of damage with horns. Sometimes we keep them trimmed down with a hacksaw. Other times we can fix up the young ones by putting a couple of drops of acid where their horns would grow in, and that stops them cold. Still, there are some breeds of cattle that never grow horns. But the reason this cow don't have no horns, is 'cause it's a horse.'"**

Now the reason I shared that with you was help us to keep things in their context. So many times we come to a text with our prefixed ideas about what it means even before we have studied it properly. And so I'm going present **11 sermons** over the next few weeks and it's my prayer that we will all be challenged to live better Christian lives for Christ as we wait for His return. I pray that everyone will learn something new from this series or at least be reminded of some important truths from God's word.

And as we go through **Peter's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter** it's my prayer that we can understand what Peter is telling us in the context of the text itself. Because we are going to look at some tough texts which have been misused and taken out of context by many religious groups to back up their theories.

The letter itself was written by Peter who describes himself as a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, as **2 Peter 1:1** tells us **"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ."** And it was written to those who received his first letter as he tells us in **2 Peter 3:1** **"This is now, beloved, the second letter that I have written to you."** In many ways it's a very encouraging letter but it's also a very sad letter as it was written very shortly before Peter's death as **2 Peter 1:12-15** is going to tell us.

In **1 Peter** we saw time and time again that the theme was **'keep on going especially during times of suffering'**. And as we enter **2 Peter** we are going to see that the theme is very much **'watch out but keep on growing.'** We're going to look at the **first four verses** today of Peter's opening remarks and he is going to remind us of four blessings which we have from God.

**2 Peter 1:1** **"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."** Peter says the **first blessing** I want to remind you of today is your precious faith.

Now remember nobody wakes up one morning and says that's it, I'm going to start living my life as a Christian. No they first need to believe that there is a God in the first place and they then need to believe the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus and obey it. But for them to do that they first need to hear about the gospel.

That's why **Romans 10:17** tells us that **"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."** In other words if God hadn't given His Word, saving faith would not be possible. Peter already told us back in **1 Peter 1:20+21** that it is through Christ we believe in God. And if God hadn't sent Jesus Christ into the world, many of us would still be idol worshippers and in our sin.

Peter has also just told us in **2 Peter 1:1** it is **"by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ"** that we have faith. In other words it's because of Jesus' divine sacrifice, that makes saving faith possible. Loved ones you can have all the faith in the world in terms of believing that God exists but unless you're willing to accept His Word with faith, your faith is futile. **Hebrews 4:2** **"For indeed we have had good news preached to us, even as they also did, but the word they heard didn't profit them, because it wasn't mixed with faith by those who heard."**

And so what Peter is saying we need to be willing to receive the blessing of faith which God gives us through His Word. **But why is this faith so precious?** Well not only because the object of our faith is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But also because **Romans 4:3** tells us that **"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."** In other words Abraham was totally convicted that God was real and what God said was true. He understood that his faith was precious not only to him but also to God.

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see." Do you trust in the one you cannot see but you can clearly hear His voice in His Word? The real question is this loved ones; do you see your faith just as precious as Abraham saw his faith?

And so Peter says your faith is a precious blessing from God but let me remind you of another precious blessing. 2 Peter 1:2 "Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Now the words "grace" and "peace" were common forms of greetings in Biblical times. If you were to speak to someone and say 'grace be upon you', this would mean you would want God's unmerited favour to rest upon that person. You would want nothing but the best for them. And if you were to speak to someone and say 'peace be with you' this means that you would want the natural result of having God's grace upon them which is peace.

But notice what Peter does here, he says, 'grace to you and peace be multiplied' where? "Multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ". Now you may not be aware of this but every single person on this planet experiences God's grace to some degree. Whether people choose to believe that God exists or not, He is blessing everyone.

Matthew 5:45 tells us that "God makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust". So whether or not you're a Christian this morning, it makes no difference to God, He is still blessing you to a degree. The difference between a Christian and non-Christian is that the Christian recognises where those blessings come from and say 'thank you Father'. But the biggest difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is in the amount of blessing the Christian receives.

Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Paul says it's only those who are in Christ who can experience every spiritual blessing which includes His grace. Philippians 4:6+7 "In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus". Paul says it's only those who are in Christ who can experience the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

And loved ones it's only a Christian who can truly sing 'count your blessings, name them one by one'. And so Peter says that all those blessings come in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. Now the word knowledge is a word which Peter is going to use all through his letter. He's just told us in 2 Peter 1:3 "Seeing that his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue."

He is going to remind us what growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ involves in 2 Peter 1:5+6 "Yes, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence; and in moral excellence, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control patience; and in patience godliness."

He is going to remind us that our knowledge of Jesus Christ is far more than just intellectual knowledge over in 2 Peter 1:8 "For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Later he is going to warn us what will happen to Christians who fall away after receiving knowledge of Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 2:20 "For if, after they have escaped the defilement of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in it and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first."

And finally to end his letter in 2 Peter 3:18 he is going to encourage us to "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." And so Peter says your faith is a precious blessing from God, grace and peace are a precious blessing from God but Peter goes on to say, let me remind you of another precious blessing.

2 Peter 1:3 “Seeing that his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue.” Peter says that all things that pertain to life and godliness are a precious blessing from God. Now when he talks about life he is referring to our spiritual life and our spiritual well being. And when he talks about godliness he is referring to the conduct of our behaviour which comes from our devotion to God. In other words Peter says we have everything we need for our spiritual lives in order to help us serve our God in a way which pleases Him.

And he says we have everything we need because God has given to us by divine power. We have everything we need through the knowledge of Him as Peter just told us in the verse before. And make no mistake about it loved ones; people can only experience true life and true godliness through the knowledge of the One who has called us by glory and virtue.

So let me ask you, if He is given us everything we need to live the kind of lives which pleases Him, **do we need anything else?** You know Josh likes coming to art class with me but I remember the very first time he came but before we went he asked me what he needed to take with him. So I got him some paper, some colouring pencils and a rubber just in case he made a mistake. He was now was equipped to be an artist. He had everything he needed to do the job which was required of him. He didn't need anything else because what he had was sufficient.

Now why is it, when it comes to spiritual living, some people are not happy with what God has already given us? Why is it that Peter says that God has given us **everything** we need to know concerning how He wants us to live and serve Him in His Word, and yet people still want more?

Why is the Bible alone not enough for some people who want to know what God thinks and wants of us? Doesn't the Bible already tell us what God is like? Doesn't the Bible already tell us how God feels about sin? Doesn't the Bible already tell us about how God loves us? Doesn't the Bible already tell us what we need to do to be saved? Doesn't the Bible already tell us how the world is going to end?

Its simple loved ones either Peter is telling the truth in that God has given everything we need to live a life which pleases Him or Peter is lying to us. I mean what more do people need to know, **do you want to know about heaven?** Read the Bible. **Do you want to know about hell?** Read the Bible. **Do you want to know how to have a great relationship with your husband or wife?** Read the Bible. **Do you want to know what God's will is for you?** Read the Bible.

If God through His word has given us everything we need for our spiritual lives then we don't need prophesying today for God to reveal something to us which He has already revealed to us in His word. If God through His word has given us everything we need for our spiritual lives then we don't need tongue speaking today for God to reveal something to us which He has already revealed to us in His word. If God through His word has given us everything we need for our spiritual lives then we don't need supernatural knowledge today for God to reveal something to us which He has already revealed to us in His word.

Hebrews 1:1+2 “God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son.” Listen loved ones, God used to speak to mankind using a whole host of methods from dreams, visions and miraculous signs and wonders but now, today, He speaks to us through His Son. **And how do we know what the Son has to say to us today?** We read it in the Bible.

And please don't misunderstand what Peter means here when he uses the word knowledge, he is talking about a lot more than intellectual knowledge. He is talking about a knowledge which comes not only from knowing Jesus Christ but also from developing and experiencing Jesus Christ in our lives. In other words there is no point in having a load of knowledge about the Bible if your life isn't reflecting what you know.

And the final precious blessing which Peter reminds us about is found throughout the pages of the entire Bible. 2 Peter 1:4 “By which he has granted to us his precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.” Peter says we have the precious blessing of God's promises.

You know as a father I have failed our kids in so many areas. I promise to take them out for the day only to find that I can't do it due to someone needing help.

I promise to take them to the cinema only to find I'm too tired but will take them the following week. Some people promise their husband or wife until death us do part and then go on to break that promise and leave because they want a change. You take your car to the garage and they promised you it wouldn't cost any more than £200 to get it through its MOT and then you get a phone call to tell you it's now going to cost you £350 to get it through.

You see sometimes we make promises we just can't keep, but loved ones, a promise from God is a statement we can depend on with absolute confidence. No wonder Peter describes those promises as exceedingly great and precious promises. You see Peter understood why they are so precious and that's why he reminds his readers and us that through those promises of God we may be partakers of the divine nature. In other words as Christians we may share in the things which are related to the nature of God.

Let me explain, you would still be in your sins today and helpless to do anything about it, if it wasn't for the promise of God to send The Redeemer to save us. We would have no hope of heaven or anything beyond this life if Jesus didn't die on the cross like God promised He would. We would be just as corrupt as most of the world still is today.

But because God promised His Son would die for you and for me, we have now escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Because make no mistake about Christian we cannot escape from corruption on our own. But Peter says through these great and precious promises from God, we have escaped.

Now let me share with you a few of these precious promises which Peter has in mind. If you're a Christian this morning then you need to know that God has promised that your sins have been forgiven. **Acts 10:43** "All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive remission of sins."

If you're a Christian this morning then you need to know that God has promised that you would be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. **John 7:37-39** "Now on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water." But he said this about the Spirit, which those believing in him were to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus wasn't yet glorified." And so we are promised by God the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**And when did God fulfil these promises to Christians?** At their baptism. **Acts 2:38** "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". God has also promised Christians to care for them and strengthen them. **Isaiah 41:10** "Don't you be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness".

In **Hebrews 13:5+6** God promises that "He will never leave you and He will never abandon you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" So as Christians loved ones God already has and will continue to fulfil His precious promises to us. And for Christians there are more precious promises to receive in the future.

Paul says in **Romans 8:23** that we are awaiting the promise of the redemption of our bodies. He also tells us that in **1 Corinthians 15:50-53** that we've been promised brand new bodies which are created to live forever. Peter himself told us a few months ago in **1 Peter 1:3+4** that we're going to receive an inheritance which God has promised and reserved for us in heaven. And in a few weeks time Peter again in **2 Peter 3:13** is going to remind us that were going to see the promise fulfilled of the new heavens and new earth.

Have you ever heard of a man named **Russell Kelso Carter**? He was devout Christian man most of his life, and when life was good and his health was good he went through the motions of being a Christian and reading the Bible but not fully appreciating God's promises within the Bible. But one day when his health was causing him a great deal of stress and concern, he started reading His Bible again but this time he began to finally understand the reality and power of Bible promises.

Now you may not have heard of him before but you should be familiar with his name. You see **Russell Kelso Carter** was the writer of the famous hymn that we often sing, a hymn that says, "Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living Word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God".

And so after much prayer, and reading of the Bible, Russell prolonged his life by another 49 years, hence the reason for the words within the hymn. Loved ones, God's promises are trustworthy because He is trustworthy, as the Hebrew writer tells us in Hebrews 10:23 "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess, for the one who made the promise is trustworthy."

Let me encourage you this morning to never forget the precious blessings which Peter has reminded us of this morning. Your faith is precious, the grace and peace we receive from God are precious. Knowing that God has given us everything we need for our spiritual lives and godliness is precious.

All the promises that God has ever promised to us are precious. Because it's only when we remember these things daily can we remain faithful to our promise to live faithfully for Him today.