A Blueprint for Growth, Part I

2 Peter 1:1-4 — Understanding I and II Peter Series, Part 7

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

With this message we turn to Peter's second letter. It goes to the same people as the first: "Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder)" (2 Pet. 3:1). And Peter writes it knowing his time is short: "shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me" (2 Pet. 1:14).

The two letters fit together. The first is about faith on its way to its goal, "the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9), and the suffering that proves it along the way. The second is about what threatens that faith from inside. Peter warns that "there will be false teachers among you" (2 Pet. 2:1), and he closes by telling them to "beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked" (2 Pet. 3:17). Jude's short letter covers the same ground (Jude 3-4), and we'll read the two side by side when we reach Peter's second chapter.

Before Peter names the danger, though, he lays a foundation, and everything in chapters two and three rests on it. That foundation is chapter one, and it starts with faith.

I. A Faith Shared, an Outcome Not

> "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." (2 Pet. 1:1-2)

"Like precious faith with us." Peter's readers have the same faith the apostles have, and they have it "by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." In that sense every Christian holds a common faith. Nobody has a better kind than anyone else.

But Peter's first letter already showed that what people do with that common faith is anything but common. It's a faith "kept by the power of God... for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," and it's tested by fire on the way (1 Pet. 1:5-7). Some let their faith be brought all the way to its goal. Some don't. The faith is shared; the outcome isn't.

II. The Just Shall Live by Faith

There's an Old Testament verse that speaks to exactly this, and the New Testament quotes it three times. It's in Habakkuk:

> "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for

> it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:2-4)

Notice what God sets in front of the reader: a vision with "an appointed time," something to wait for and run toward, and two men. One is proud, and "his soul is not upright in him." The other is "just," and he lives by faith. Faith isn't only how a man begins. It's how the just man *lives*, all the way to the appointed end.

Hebrews quotes it and tells us what the vision is waiting for:

> "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." (Heb. 10:35-39)

The appointed end is a Person: "He who is coming." And the two men of Habakkuk are now two outcomes for people who began with the same faith. One "draws back," and God has no pleasure in him. The other believes "to the saving of the soul," the same salvation Peter named as "the end of your faith" (1 Pet. 1:9). The perdition of the one who draws back is the loss of that salvation of the soul, set in the age to come. Nothing in the passage touches the standing that was settled when he first believed.

Paul quotes Habakkuk twice. Writing to Christians in Rome, people he calls "beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7), he says he's "ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also" (Rom. 1:15). Why preach the gospel to people who are already saints? Because there's more good news than how a man first comes to God. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Rom. 1:17). From faith to faith. It begins in faith, and it keeps going in faith.

And writing to Galatia, one of the very regions Peter addressed, Paul uses the same line and then ties it to inheritance a few verses later: "the just shall live by faith... For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3:11, 18). He'd already asked them, "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). They'd begun well. The question was how they'd go on.

That's where Peter's second letter starts. They all share the same faith. Now he's going to show them how that faith grows.

III. Grace and Peace Multiplied in the Knowledge

> "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." (2 Pet. 1:2-3)

Peter uses a particular word for "knowledge" here, *epignosis*. It's the ordinary word for knowledge with a prefix that intensifies it: a full, accurate, thorough knowing, the kind you grow into. And it's a knowledge only the spiritually alive can have, since "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Peter's readers should have had that kind of knowledge. Many of them had spent years under Paul's teaching about the coming kingdom (Acts 19:8-10; 20:27). And Peter prays that grace and peace will be *multiplied* to them in it. He knew what was coming. False teachers were going to rise up from among them, and they'd need every bit of grace and peace God could give.

Look at what that knowledge brings with it. Grace and peace are multiplied in it, and God's divine power "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" through it. Nothing they need is missing. It all comes "through the knowledge of Him who called us."

And He "called us by glory and virtue." Peter's first letter told them what they were called to: to suffer as Christ did (1 Pet. 2:21), so that they "may inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:9), and to share His sufferings so they'd rejoice "when His glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:13). They were called to share His glory. But Jesus Himself put a warning on that: "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14).

IV. The Power of His Resurrection

Paul describes that divine power and what it does, and the order he puts it in matters:

> "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." (Phil. 3:8-11)

Look at the sequence. First "the power of His resurrection," then "the fellowship of His sufferings," then "being conformed to His death," and only after all that, "the resurrection from the dead." Why would resurrection power come *before* suffering and death? Because in that first phrase Paul isn't talking about his own body rising. He's talking about the power God used to raise Jesus, and about knowing that power now, in this life.

That's the baptism picture again. "We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). A Christian walks in resurrection power, and that's what lets him share Christ's sufferings and die daily to the old nature. Jesus put it in one line: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). A cross is for dying. Only resurrection power can carry a man there day after day.

And at the end of that road is what Paul was pressing toward: "if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Notice the two words for resurrection in these two verses. In verse 10, "the power of His resurrection," Paul uses the ordinary word, *anastasis*. In verse 11 he puts a prefix on it: *exanastasis*, an out-resurrection, a rising out from among the dead. It's the only place the word appears in the New Testament. And Paul doesn't speak of it as something already in hand. It's what he hopes to "attain," "if, by any means," and in the next breath he says, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on" (Phil. 3:12).

V. Exceedingly Great and Precious Promises

> "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:4)

"Exceedingly great." Peter's word is a superlative, the greatest promises there are. And they're "precious," valuable and dear. These are the promises bound up with Christ's coming, His kingdom, and His people's share in it. The more a Christian grows in the knowledge of Him, the more of those promises he understands. That's the growth Peter called for in his first letter: "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). Milk is where a Christian starts, and these promises are the solid food, the same teaching Hebrews wanted to give about Christ as King-Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:10-14).

Through them, Peter says, "you may be partakers of the divine nature." And he names what has to be left behind: "the corruption that is in the world through lust." Lust is a God-given desire gone wrong. God made us with real needs and desires, meant to be met in His ways and to honor Him. When the flesh gets hold of them and bends them, they become lust, and lust corrupts.

Peter's readers had escaped that corruption. But he'll come back to the same idea in his next chapter, talking about the false teachers and those who follow them, and he puts it as a warning: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning" (2 Pet. 2:20). Notice the word *knowledge* there. It's the same full knowledge Peter is praying will multiply in them now. These are people who had it, escaped through it, and then were entangled again.

Applying "A Blueprint for Growth, Part I"

Every Christian shares the same precious faith, but the outcome isn't shared automatically. The just live by faith toward an appointed end, and some draw back. The difference doesn't come from willpower. God's divine power has already given us everything that pertains to life and godliness, and it comes through the full knowledge of Him, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

So grow in that knowledge. Walk in that resurrection power. Take up the cross daily. And keep your eyes on those exceedingly great and precious promises, because the corruption you escaped is still in the world, and Peter knew there'd be teachers ready to lead you back into it.

Looking Ahead

Next, Peter lays out the blueprint itself: "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge" (2 Pet. 1:5), and on up the ladder.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.