

After a rocky start, Paul came to value me highly. He said as much in three of his letters.<sup>1</sup> Paul and I became close friends. But...not nearly as close as Peter and I. In one of his letters, Peter called me his son.<sup>2</sup> And I considered Peter to be my mentor, confidant and father.

Peter has been in my life almost as long as I have been an adult. We started out an unlikely pair. He a rough fisherman, thick Galilean accent, little formal education, friends in low places. Me a rich kid, upper class Jerusalem accent, highly educated, friends in high places. Those all became petty differences on the day of Pentecost when Holy Spirit came. From then on, Peter and I were on level ground...brothers in Christ, serving God.

I understand that some modern people call us Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and Saint Mark. Makes us sound so...so perfect. That's not how we thought of ourselves. We were servants, voluntary slaves of Jesus who had imperfect backgrounds. He denied Jesus, refused to associate with non-Jewish Christians. I...abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the First Missionary Journey. That eventually resulted in a split in their relationship. No, we were far from perfect.

However, when you read *Second Peter*, you can see how much progress Peter made. And, you can infer that I made a lot of progress, too. When you read this letter, you can't find a trace of a rough, uneducated fisherman...or a spoiled rich kid. In fact, if you read this letter closely, you will find some startling information.

Peter addressed his letter to a general audience. If you have a precious faith in Jesus, this letter is written to you.

In one of his most powerful statements, Peter opens with this knock-out punch: The divine power of Jesus has given us everything we need for a godly life, every thing we need to participate in his divine nature, everything we need to escape the corruption of this world. *Everything we need.*

As a response to these amazing privileges, we should make every effort to add these weapons to our spiritual arsenal: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, godliness and love. If we do, we will be effective and productive for Jesus. We will not stumble and fall. We will receive a rich welcome into the kingdom of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Col. 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:10, Philemon 1:24

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 5:13

I thought Peter could have stopped writing after his welcome. Few of his hearers could even begin to understand what it meant to participate in the divine nature of Jesus. It boggles *my* mind, and I was with Peter and Paul for decades.

Rather than stopping, Peter shifts gears to talk about the prophecies of Scripture. Now, prophecies don't always mean foretelling the future, sometimes they speak truth into a situation.

He reminds his hearers that the testimonies of the apostles are true, they are not cleverly devised stories. The apostles were eyewitnesses to the things they testified about. And, they intend to make every effort to see that after they die, people will remember what the apostles testified about.

Following this line of thinking, Peter says that prophecy doesn't have its origin in human will, but prophets speak from God as led by the Holy Spirit. However, there are false prophets and teachers who introduce destructive heresies. These greedy people will exploit people with fabricated stories.

Now, I do have to admit that you get to see a flash of the old Peter when you see his anger against false teachers and the destruction they cause. He writes they bring destruction on themselves. He likens them to being in the situation of the sinning angels who God put in chains in darkness. In your terminology, he is saying false teachers are going to hell. Literally. God did not spare the sinning angels, or Sodom and Gomorrah. He condemns the wicked and saves the righteous.

Peter says these false teachers blaspheme in matters they don't understand. They are unreasoning animals born to be destroyed. They are blots and blemishes, experts in greed, enticing people to sin. When you read this passage, you get a taste of Peter's righteous anger.

I'm going to stop for a minute and talk about two nuggets of wisdom that Peter gives. The first – he says that people are slaves to whatever masters them. This is a theme that Peter and Paul often talked about. Many people of your time are probably offended by their conclusions.

Peter and Paul believed everyone was a slave, because everyone was mastered by something. Paul wrote that people are slave to righteousness or sin.<sup>3</sup> Other things that master people are pride and greed. Others seem more benign... love or recognition, love of self. Comfort, luxury. The list goes on and on. Their solution was this: choose to become a slave to righteousness, to the Lord Jesus. He is a master who gives life, not death.

A second nugget of wisdom is this: for people who escape the corruption of the world by knowing Jesus, it would be better for them to have never known Jesus than to turn their backs

<sup>3</sup> Romans 6:16-18

on him and go back to their old ways. This is a sobering warning to those who lightly choose to follow Jesus.

Perhaps those two warnings make me sound like a real downer. Maybe you are thinking, "I would be better off just ignoring all this Christian stuff. I don't want to think about being a slave to Jesus or being fully committed to him." I suspect Peter may have been thinking of people like that when he decided what to write in the last part of his letter.

Rather than backing up, slacking off, and sugar-coating his message, Peter raises the stakes. He says he wants to remind them that he wants to stimulate them to think wholesomely. He is going to do this by telling them about the coming Day of the Lord. These are serious matters. Matters of eternal consequence.

Peter says that in the last days, skeptics will come. They will follow their own evil desires and laugh at Christians who are waiting for the coming of Jesus. They will point out that things never change, they are just the same as they always have been. Jesus hasn't come back, and he is not going to come back. They deliberately forget, or ignore, the facts.

God does make huge changes when he chooses to do so. At his command, he formed the heavens and earth. At his command, he caused the flood that deluged the world.

What these sceptics ignore is that time is of no consequence to God. To him, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day. He isn't being slow in keeping his promise of Jesus returning, he is being patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. God knows when the day will come, the day he gives the command, the day it all comes to an immediate end.

The heavens and earth are reserved for that day. That day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. The heavens will disappear with a deafening noise, the elements...the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything on it will be destroyed.

[long pause] Look around you...everything will be destroyed. Nothing...nothing left. [long pause]

With that in mind, what kind of people should you be? Peter recommends that you live holy and godly lives. Because those who do, get to look forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness rules. Make every effort to be blameless and at peace with Jesus, because his patience means salvation.

Peter and Paul have always had a little friendly rivalry going. They love each other, but the blunt, intellectual Paul and the rough working class, Peter, see the world a little differently. In this letter, Peter takes the opportunity to give Paul a little dig. Peter writes that Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort. Now that is an understatement. Paul's letters contain lots of things that are hard to understand.

Because they are hard to understand, plenty of ignorant and unstable people find them easy to distort.

As he ends this letter, Peter warns his listeners not to be carried away by these false teachers. He wants his readers to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, and not fall from their secure position.

As Peter finished dictating his letter, I was taken back a few decades to an afternoon when Peter told me about one of his last encounters with the resurrected Jesus.

They were on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus asked Peter if he loved him more than other things. Peter told him that he did love him. Over the next few minutes, Jesus instructed Peter to feed the lambs of Jesus, to take care of his sheep.

I had to pull away and leave the others to be alone for a minute. I cried. Jesus had to be so pleased with his close friend, Peter. What better way to feed the lambs of Jesus, to take care of his sheep than to leave behind this letter. The letter you know as *Second Peter*.