

Part 15: To the Knowers and the Feelers

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In 1924 Eric Liddell won Olympic gold in the 400 meter sprint. He was interviewed afterwards and asked how he kept such a great pace. He said in his thick Scottish accent: "The secret of my success over the 400 meters is that I run the first 200 meters as fast as I can. Then, for the second 200 meters, with God's help, I run faster."

We started a series a few months ago called Spiritual Refugees and we finished 1 Peter last week, and now, with God's help we are going to work through 2 Peter faster. It's a shorter letter than his first one, but he's working towards the same end: Christian hope and Christian conduct in a sometimes hostile world.

Peter is writing to churches who are beginning to feel out of place in the world because of their faith in Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter he encouraged the church as a whole to stand firm in their confession of faith in the face of hostility from unbelievers. This second letter was written only a few years later, since then the opposition to the church has become a bit more defined.

At this stage in church history the biggest pressure was not coming from imperial persecution, but actually the social pressure and mockery that came from those who at one point, or even presently claimed to be Christian, but who lived lives which did not accord to Christian doctrine.

In other words the opposition of the church during this time came from people who had some sort of familiarity with the Christian faith, but who found obedience to Jesus to be something totally foolish and incompatible with the joys of this world.

Here is the faithful church who despite the external pressures of society and the internal pressures of sin are trying their best to follow Jesus and realizing that the life of discipleship is sometimes really difficult. And here comes a crowd of scoffers who begin to say to them: "Don't be so uptight, live a little."

Central to this critique of Christianity are two denials. These people deny the second coming of Jesus and they deny the reality of a future judgement. If we look at our own world right now, including some who claim to have an awareness of God, it's not hard to see the continuing effects of these denials.

If we deny that our hope is in the return of Jesus where the risen savior makes all things right, then we will certainly deny ourselves the promise of future joy. And if there is no promise of a faithful, joyful eternity, then we will turn to the pleasures of this world to try and provide joy in full.

When the denial of the second coming is coupled with a denial of the final judgment, we see that the pursuit of worldly pleasures can happen without any worry or repercussion. Do whatever makes you happy at whatever the cost. The only morality you need to abide by is the morality that you yourself think is necessary. This kind of individuality ultimately cannibalizes itself in the long run.

In other words there has grown to be a divide between the knowers and the feelers. You know the types. I'm a knower, my wife is a feeler. I often am slow to act until I can rationalize myself into actions,

which often leads to me being inactive and missing out on what's important. My wife responds quickly with her emotions with great confidence, but this often gets her in situations where she realizes she hasn't thought it fully through.

For Peter this war is between the feelers who might feel confident in their actions, but have no factual reasons for which they should feel that way, and the knowers who are wrestling with what they claim to know, but don't feel confident when it comes to acting in anyway.

We are all prone to lean one way or the other and what Peter wants to do is he wants to help knowers become feelers and feelers become knowers. The knowledge which makes sense of our experience and the experience which shapes our knowledge is the gospel of Jesus Christ which demands our hearts, our heads and our hands.

When resistance or pushback weights against us, we often find our own ecosystems of intellect or emotions are insufficient on their own to guide us. But the gospel of Jesus forces its way into the heart of the convert and helps give us confidence in life and knowledge.

Today he's going to open up his letter addressing everyone, but I think there's a special message to those who are feelers. Next week he'll talk to the knowers, but the big point we are going to look at today is that for the sake of your emotions you ought to know Jesus more deeply.

While we all might lean towards being knower or a feeler, all of us have emotions. And today Peter wants to speak to our emotions in two ways. First he's going to remind believers that they are **Qualified by the righteousness of Jesus**, and secondly, that they are **Comforted by the knowledge of Jesus**.

So let me read for us our whole text today, and then we will focus on the first verse together: **2 Peter 1:1-2**.

So the first thing Peter does is introduce himself as the author of the letter and provides his credentials both as a servant, or slave, and apostle of Jesus Christ.

But immediately after he give his own credentials he reminds the church, the believers to whom he is writing, of their own credentials. This is our first point today: **Qualified by the righteousness of Jesus**.

If you're a believer, have there ever been moments in your walk with God that you have had your faith shaken by something? I was grading some papers for a theology class the other day and one of the students mentioned the pain she was experiencing as her daughter went off to college.

She was raised in a Christian home and professed faith, but at a public university she was introduced to a specific critique of Christianity which has caused her to doubt if what she believed was really true.

Peter is writing to a church who is facing a critique joy and satisfaction. These scoffers are saying, "If being a Christian is so wonderful, why does it seem so hard? If at the end of it all we all die, why not live how you want in life?"

If you've grown up in the church, you've heard storied like Daniel in the Lion's Den which is often followed up with an appeal of: dare to be a Daniel. In the face of opposition wouldn't you want to have the faith of Daniel?

Or the faith of Elijah at Mount Caramel as he's challenging the prophets of Ba'al?

Or what of the readers of Peter's letter? They know Peter well. He has written to them before. He, perhaps, even helped plant their churches. And they know what Peter, their faithful brother, has been through.

Peter by experience has shown the church the greater reality of faith. He tried three times denying Jesus in the face of open opposition, and it got him nowhere. After he repented, and Jesus graciously recommissioned him for ministry, he caved to loud legalists within the religious community and was chastised by Paul. But these moments of trial and error showed the church the enduring power of the gospel where this same Peter ended up being imprisoned and beaten for preaching the gospel. And here he sits near is death in Rome, where religious tensions are at their highest, and he is saying, "Don't be deceived, faith in Jesus is worth it no matter the cost."

You can imagine that the believers of these churches were saying to themselves, "If only I had faith like Peter." And Peter here says, "You do."

He says that your faith is of equal standing with his. More than that, he says you have obtained a faith of equal standing with "ours." Who is "ours"? I'm assuming that Peter is referring to his immediate companions and fellow Apostles.

Peter is saying that you who have never seen Jesus Christ, never heard a words spoken from his mouth, never touched his resurrected body, you have the exact same faith as the Apostles who were hand-picked by him, taught under him, and explicitly commissioned by him.

You have faith at the highest level.

Now this begs the question, what is faith? We often talk about faith whether we are religious or not. And because of that I'm afraid that a secular view of faith often permeates into a Christian understanding of it.

From a cultural perspective it seems that faith is an intentional commitment to optimism. We don't know when the coronavirus will calm down, but we see people saying they have faith that it will. Every athlete ever interviewed always has faith that his team could win the championship regardless of their skill.

But faith is not a blind commitment to optimism in the life of a Christian. Faith isn't even the belief that God will make all things right in the end. Faith is not the admission that God exists. Faith is not giving your life to God.

Faith is not the confidence that when times are tough you can make it. Faith is the wonderful reality that Jesus already has. Faith according to Peter isn't dependent upon the quality of the believer, but the quality of the one who is believed in.

That's what Peter says: **1 Peter 1:1b**.

Faith is not an extension of your spiritual stamina. Faith is the response of a broken sinner to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The value of faith, and the reward of all of her fruit, stems not from your resolve but from Jesus' righteousness.

What does this mean? Well Paul says something similar in a way which helps us understand the experience of receiving Jesus' righteousness: **Colossians 1:12-14**.

So to another anxious church, Paul says that God himself has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints of light. How has he qualified you? Through the work of redemption in the beloved Son. In him you have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

I want to say this very carefully. Because we stand in the Reformed Tradition which claims Christ alone, glory alone, scripture alone, grace alone and faith alone. Those are wonderful true realities which I will die to defend.

However I think part of our problem when it comes to our emotions is that we often add faith as a fourth member to the Trinity. For many of us we vocalize daily that we are saved by faith, and this is true. But it is only true if the object of faith is what really saves.

Faith doesn't save you. Jesus does. What makes Christian faith faith worth dying for is the object of it. Our greatest problem is a big one. We are unrighteous. We have sinned against the holy and perfect God who created this world. We have scorned him, shamed him, silenced him and scandalized him.

But Jesus never did. Jesus is righteous in full. He was righteous in heaven where he's lived for eternity. He was righteous on earth when he took on flesh. If you're a baseball fan, you know the drama that comes when a pitcher is on the verge of throwing perfect game.

The MLB has been around for 150 years, playing nearly a quarter of a million games. And of those, only 23 pitchers have thrown a perfect game. So when someone comes close, we watch.

We gather around and are holding our breath at each pitch, each pop fly, each foul ball. And if and when that final out is called, and the score card is clean, we rejoice at the purity of what we have just witnessed.

In the history of the world it is estimated that 108 billion people have lived. And there has been one man who played the game as God designed. One man who was without blemish, without sin and that man is Jesus Christ.

But the gospel is called good news because faith allows us to not only recognize that Jesus is infinitely perfect, but it counts his perfect work to us. He was punished for our sin and we share in his reward.

Look at how the author of Hebrews connects faith, righteousness and endurance: **Hebrews 10:36-39**.

So when your emotions tell your tired faith that it cannot endure, you look to this Jesus and his righteous work and you know that it is his completed work on the cross which qualifies you to stand when it feels that you cannot.

To be covered by Jesus' righteousness accessed by faith is to realize that you are converted. To stand in Christ is not to stand in who you once were. It is to stand in who Jesus was, is, and will forever be.

To those feelers who feel like everything is great and that God is pleased, Peter wants you to know why God is pleased with you. He wants you to know that you can have faith even when things seem hard because God's wrath has been turned and his love poured out because of Jesus Christ and your faith in his work on the cross.

Does this bring you rest? Rest from your work? Does it bring you peace? Peace when your heart is confused and condemnation seeks to cast doubt on your ability to endure? Do you see that Jesus hasn't changed even when your circumstances have? Peter's point is that your continued obedience to Jesus even when things are hard is proof that your faith is rooted not in blind optimism but gospel conversion.

Now I want to have a quick aside here before we move on.

I learned something this week in preparing for this text. I found an author who was comparing the general letters common during this time and the New Testament letters written during this time.

The scholar noted that the greetings of New Testament letters were far more involved and personal than other letters during this period. When I'm helping guys who are learning to preach I often tell them that the most important thing you can do I identify what an author is trying to do with his words.

What is Peter trying to do in verses one and two? Say hello. How does he do it, but proclaiming the wonderful unifying, converting and enduring gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we reflect on our conversations and community as a church, do our "hellos" communicate this same weight? Are our "hellos" different than the worlds?

A great point of application of this righteousness applied is to reflect on the nature of our conversations and hospitality at church and in community group. The nature of our relationships, and the comfort with which we welcome each other should be contagiously rooted in the warmth of the gospel.

If faith is an experience with Jesus instead of mere mental assent. Then we are fundamentally different because of it. What does this look like? In Acts four, this Peter proclaims the gospel after he healed a crippled man. And look at the response of the crowd: **Acts 4:13**.

You see what was so obviously clear to the crowds was that the only way they could reconcile the lives and the messages of these ordinary men was to say, "They've been with Jesus."

That's what Peter is after in verse 1. But that's not where it ends. Being with Jesus leads to a life of knowing Jesus. And this is where Peter goes next: 2 **Peter 1:2**.

Here is our second point: **Comforted by the knowledge of Jesus**.

To be saved by Jesus is to receive by faith the righteousness of Jesus, but to experience the comfort of grace and peace being multiplied to you is to continue to know God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see Peter and John were noticeably different not just because they had been with Jesus, but what is implied is that their proximity to Jesus allowed them to know Jesus and be changed by him in a unique way.

Next week Peter is going to say something which offends the knowers, and this week he says something which might offend the feelers. He says this: you cannot expect to feel the grace and peace of Jesus if you do not seek to know Jesus.

Peter is calling, for the sake of you emotions, believers to dig their hands deep into a clear understanding of God and of Jesus Christ. He wants us to understand in greater clarity the way in which our sin has separated us and how God has set forth a plan to redeem us through the work of Jesus Christ.

Why? Because the more we know about the person and work of the one who saved us, the greater confidence we have that he is indeed sufficient when life is hard.

Now for some of us we find gaining knowledge about Jesus to actually be a stumbling block to loving Jesus. But Peter says that's a false contradiction. It's actually in seeking to know God and Jesus Christ that we come to better experience emotionally the grace and peace we need to endure in a hostile world.

Meaning this, to put faith once in Jesus Christ and then to have no desire to better understand him or his gospel is to be like a married couple who once married stops dating each other all together.

But if faith is a response to the realization that Jesus' perfect righteousness is what we need in life, then wouldn't we like a smitten spouse seek to draw all the more knowledge even inside of marriage? Wouldn't we want to see how our spouse loves us this side of the altar? How they responds to trials?

Theology is simply the study of God and here Peter is calling us to be theologians: to know God. We often think that a call to theology is a call to boring and abstract data. But Peter is saying to us that conversion allows us to know Jesus as a spouse not as a biographer.

A biographer might be able to present to you a better factual account of who Sarah is. Here is what I do not now about my wife that a biographer would: I don't know who her second grade teacher was. I don't know if she has had her tonsils removed or not. I don't know the address of her first house in Montana. I don't know the history of her family past her grandparents. Those are all facts that a biographer can give you from the outside.

But Christians are not called to study God from the outside. We have the privilege by faith and righteousness applied to know him from the inside. How? Through Jesus' righteousness. I might not know Sarah's fastest time running track, but I know what it feels like to be her husband. I know how she cares for me. I know what I can do to make her feel loved. But despite all that I do know, I desperately, intimately, longingly want to know her more.

You see some of us read our Bibles until we are saved, and then we assume that we have what we need. But when we are saved is exactly when we need the Bible. It's when we lay down the pen of a scholar and pick up the ring of a spouse.

We know God is pleased with us because Jesus the righteous one died for us, and look at how the Holy Spirit now drives us more and more into this reality: **John 16:13-14**.

The whole work of the Trinity is at play to draw you deeper and deeper into a knowledge of Jesus.

Do you want to know Jesus more? Knowing Jesus doesn't inflate the head it enflames the heart.

How might you take some steps to do this? Let me give you three quick ones.

First: Be saved by Jesus.

There is no one in this world like Jesus. Whether you are aware of it or not, you are more broken than you can ever imagine and God is more wonderful than you can ever fathom. But Jesus takes our brokenness and brings us into the wonder of God by relationally uniting himself to us in faith.

If you want to know Jesus, you must be saved by Jesus. Repent and believe. Here is rest from work in the righteousness of Jesus. Here is love in a loveless world. Here is peace amidst the storm and a savior for all of life.

I can't help but think of the old hymn: "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus just to take him at his word, just to rest upon his promise; just to know, 'thus saith the Lord,' I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee, precious Jesus, Savior, Friend; And I know that thou are with me, wilt be with me to the end."

If you've never realized the wonderful joy of Jesus' righteousness for you, don't leave here today without it.

Second: Seek to know him in his word.

Peter will circle back to this but look at **John 5:39-40**.

All of the Bible when rightly studied leads us to Jesus. Just as faith is nothing without Christ, so the Bible is nothing if we miss Jesus. This is his love letter to us. In it we see our woeful situation and God's immense love to bring his people all the way back from damnation through the work of Jesus.

If Bible reading is difficult for you, and it can be, don't leave here today without asking someone to read the Bible with you. Join us on Wednesday for the Bible reading group. Listen to the Monday morning devotionals. Don't neglect the joy of knowing Jesus in his word.

Lastly, pray. Pray that God would open your eyes to know him more and more. We can know God sufficiently in Jesus Christ, but we will never know him exhaustively. There's always more to learn so pray that God gives you eyes to see the never ending joy of examining Jesus.

Now I want to close by asking the question: Why should we seek to know Jesus and trust Jesus in seemingly difficult times? What is the practical hope that comes from knowing the quality of our savior?

In 2009, a US Airway flight had to make an emergency landing on the Hudson River in New York. Captain Chesley Sullenberger skillfully, and miraculously landed the plane resulting in the safety and survival of the 155 on board.

For those on the plane, Sullenberger was a hero. But Sullenberger was tried by the FAA. Why? Because even though he safely landed the plane the government wanted to know if he was to blame for crash even though he made safe landing.

In other words what was on trial was the quality of Sullenberger as a pilot and based off the verdict of that trial he would either be praised for his heroism or blamed for his faults.

The world does the same things for Christians when it comes to Jesus. We might rejoice now that he has saved us, but the world might at times say, "But it looks like you still crashed? You might have landed safely, but at what cost? Don't you think he might have been the reason why your flight was so difficult?" The world will call the quality of the Christian life to trial by putting the quality of Christ on trial.

But for those who have seen his love for us, we know the quality of the God who saved us. We know his love for we have seen his cross. We have seen our own sin, and watched it be washed away by his blood. We know that the quality of our savior allows us to trust him even when our emotions might be conflicted. The empty tomb today reminds us of full promises tomorrow.

If you don't know the quality of this Jesus, you might find yourself at risk of caving to the world's challenge.

But we can know Jesus, for Jesus has come to know us on the cross. He has entered into our mess so that we might trust him in the full of it.

John Owen was a 17th century pastor who wrote to a woman in his church who had lost a child. I want to leave us with this quote today so that we might seek to know this Jesus with this clarity and as a result have this grace and peace multiplied to us: "Christ is your pilot; and however the vessel is tossed whilst he seems to sleep, he will arise and rebuke these winds and waves in his own time."

Let us learn to know this Jesus and his righteousness for the sake of our joy.