Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Have you ever had it that you want to go someplace and you ask someone for directions and they say, “Ummm, I think it’s right at the lights. Oh no. Wait, it could be left… oh, hold on, it’s actually that way… I think…” Does that give you any confidence that you will arrive at your destination? It doesn’t, does it. But when someone says, “Yup. Turn right out of here, left at the petrol station, 5oom further on, and it’s right next to the McDonalds,” then you have *total* confidence that you will get to where you want to go. And what this illustration highlights is the importance of **correct knowledge** when it comes to being confident about the journey and the destination.

And this is basically what 2 Peter is all about. The most important destination that there is is heaven. It should be where we all want to arrive. But how do we get there? Are there many ways to heaven, or just one? Can we know for certain that we are headed in the right direction? Well, verse 2 talks about “***knowledge***” and knowledge is referred to throughout the letter. And if you look ahead to verse 12, Peter talks there about being “*established in the truth*.” And established means firmly planted and grounded. And we will hear about growing in knowledge, also. But we will also hear warnings about “*falling away*” or being “*carried away*” by error and losing our “stability.” So, **Peter’s chief concern in this letter is correct knowledge**. In Peter’s day, false teachers were a massive problem in the church. They taught false doctrine. And Peter wrote this letter very close to the end of his life. So, he wanted believers to have correct knowledge, written down, in black and white, that they could *rely* on; that they could *ground their faith* on; that would *guide* how they lived.

And brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, **there will always be false teachers with their incorrect knowledge**. We live, today, in times of rapid change. New ideas and philosophies and objections to biblical truth are coming thick and fast. So, we too need correct knowledge as an aid to faith and confidence and godly living. And one area of false doctrine that Peter had to address in this letter was sexual ethics. The false teachers rejected the sexual ethic of the Bible and promoted sexual immorality. And this same kind of thinking is everywhere today, including in the wider church. So, it is timely that we consider this letter.

Now, the three points of today’s sermon will be relatively brief. But because this is the first sermon of our series, before we come to them, I want to make a few more **general observations** about 2 Peter.

1. As I have already explained, the chief concern of the letter is correct knowledge. And the main parts of this correct knowledge are basically the three chapters of the letter. And the preacher and commentator, R. Kent Hughes has summarized the three chapters with three questions:
   1. Chapter 1’s question is: **Can someone come to know God without knowledge of Jesus as God’s Son?** In other words, do all religions worship the same God just with different names? Will we be in heaven with Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims? Many, today, even in the wider church, would answer, “Yes.” But the answer of 2 Peter is a resounding “No!” A true knowledge of God requires knowing Jesus as God’s Son and your Saviour.
   2. Chapter 2’s question is: **Can one know God and abandon or ignore the rigorous life that the apostles required of those who profess Christ?** For example, as I said a moment ago, must we abide by the Bible’s sexual ethic or is any sex OK sex? Is the Bible’s sexual ethic just for Bible times or does it apply also today? Well, we will see that Peter has very strong words of condemnation for those in the church who promote sexual immorality.
   3. And Chapter 3’s question is: **Can you know God and reject the notion that Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead?** For the false teachers of Peter’s day did not believe that Jesus would return as Judge. But as we shall see, Peter slams this error and explains that the return of Jesus should powerfully influence how believers live, each day.
2. So, those are the major aspects of correct knowledge that Peter’s letter addresses. But I want to make a comment here about **knowledge**. Knowledge is about facts and doctrine. We must know the facts of Scripture about the life and death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. We must know the doctrines taught in Scripture. So, knowledge is intellectual, it is content-based. But congregation, knowing facts and doctrine is not enough. It must also be a **spiritual and experiential knowledge**. And what this means is that these truthes, by the inward working power of the Holy Spirit, are true in relation to me or you, personally, and they affect how we live. As answer 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism says,

*True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in His Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation*.

So, to know Jesus is to know Him as *your* Saviour and Lord. You *live* forHim. You *trust* *and* *obey* your Father in heaven. You seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you open His Word. So, knowledge is intellectual, and spiritual and experiential. It is loving God with mind *and* heart *and* will.

1. And that brings us to this last general observation about 2 Peter. And this has to do with the **tone** of the letter. And by tone is meant the character or flavour or tenor of the letter. Today, we use emojis to let people know the tone of the words of our messages. We put a smiley face or a crying face or a skull, so that people get our tone. And when we use all capital letters in our message, then the tone is one of anger, right? Well, I am not quite sure which emoji the apostle would have used if he was texting us this letter, but the tone of his letter is what commentators call **polemical**. Polemical means arguing, defending, attacking, warning, pleading. This is not gentle Peter whispering words of encouragement to weary believers; this is soon to die Peter urgently warning believers and rebuking false teachers. There is name-calling in this letter. There is passionate pleading and powerful condemnation. And I mention this so that you know what the tone of the sermons will be. You see, sermons should reflect not only the words of the text, but also the tone of the text. For example, if it is an encouraging passage, then the overall tone of the sermon should not sound like a warning, but an encouragement. And similarly, if it is a warning passage, then you should walk out of here feeling like you have been warned. And that does not mean that there can be no encouragement in a warning sermon, but, overall, the tone of the sermon should reflect the tone of the passage. So, there will be arguing, defending, attacking, warning, and pleading in the sermons, because that is the general tone of this letter.

Well, all that being said, let’s now quickly look at the opening verses of Peter’s second letter. And we will do that as we consider the **author** of the letter, the **recipients** of the letter, and the **purpose** of the letter, from verses 1-2.

1. So, first of all, the **Author** of the Letter, from verse 1a.
   1. And the author of the letter is Simeon Peter. So, this is the disciple of Jesus, called Simon, to whom Jesus gave the extra name Peter, which means ‘rock.’ And Simeon is just the Hebrew version of Simon. He is called Simeon also in Acts 15:14. So, it is probably the case that there were a good number of Jews in the original audience that Peter wrote to, so he used the Hebrew version of his name.
      1. Now, in 1 Peter, Peter only used the name Peter. But here it is Simeon or Simon Peter. And without wanting to over analyse why this was done, let us remember that Peter was fairly sure that he would die soon. He knew that this could well be his last opportunity to speak to his beloved brothers and sisters. So, this is kind of the last Will and Testament, if you like, of the man, Simon, and the Apostle Peter. So, what does the name Simon Peter bring to mind for you? Surely it is the Apostle who suffered from foot in mouth disease? Time and again, Peter’s mouth got him into trouble. It seems like he never really took a lot of time to think through what he was about to say, he just opened his mouth and words tumbled out. Think of him rebuking Jesus for saying that He had to die. Think of him offering to build a tent for Jesus and Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. Think of him insinuating that Jesus was silly to ask who had touched Him after the sick woman touched Jesus’ garment and was healed. But have a look at **verse 10 of chapter 1**. There Peter says, “*Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall*.” Do those last words remind you of anything that Peter said? On the night of Jesus’ arrest, Jesus told his disciples that they would all fall away. But “*Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."*” And then Jesus warned Peter that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. And “*Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!"*” But we know what happened, don’t we? Peter denied Jesus, three times. So, Peter was being very honest and humble with what he said in verse 10. He was saying, This is how to avoid the error that I made. And yet, having said all this, we must not ignore what Simon said in **Matthew 16** either. For there, in response to the question of Jesus about who the disciples thought He was, Simon replied, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*.” And because of this wonderful confession of faith, Jesus said to Him, “*You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.”
      2. Now, I don’t know about you, brothers and sisters, but I really like Simon Peter! And I like him because I am so like him. I truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But I also, at times, deny Him, by what I do or say or think, or fail to do or say or think. And I expect that we are all the same in this. Yes? We are mixtures of belief and unbelief, of obedience and disobedience, of faith and failure. But Simon Peter, warts and all, was loved by Jesus and used, powerfully and wonderfully, as one of His servants, and then received into glory. And that should be, to each of us, a source of great encouragement! If Christ can love and use Simon Peter, then He can love and use me!
   2. Well, we spoke at length about the significance of Simon Peter being an **Apostle** of Jesus Christ when we looked at the greeting of 1 Peter. So, I won’t repeat that today, other than to say that it makes his words authoritative. We cannot take or leave Peter’s words; they are the words of an apostle of Christ!
2. So, let’s turn our attention in the second place to the **Recipients** of the Letter, who are described in verse 1b, where it says, “*To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ*.”
   1. Now, when the Bible talks about faith, it can mean two things. One is what we call **objective** faith, meaning the content of the gospel. So, this faith is a thing – it is *what* we believe – the truth about God and ourselves and salvation in Christ and how we are to live. But the other we call **subjective** faith, meaning the act of believing. So, this faith is a doing – it is believing in the gospel. And it is this subjective faith that is in view here in verse 1b. So, the recipients of the letter are those who have put their faith in or believed in or trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. Does this include you, dear friends? Are you one of those who know yourself to be a wretched sinner whose only hope is the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins? Are you one of those who belong to Jesus Christ, body and soul, in life and in death, who strive, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live for Him?
      1. If not, I urge you to put your faith in Jesus today. Life with Him as your Saviour and Lord is the best life. And as we are going to see, He is your only hope of heaven.
      2. But if you have put your faith in Jesus, then notice that Peter speaks of that faith as having an **equal standing with the Apostles**! Isn’t that incredible? The Apostles saw the miracles that Jesus performed. They heard His sermons. They saw Him dying on the cross and rising again. But in God’s sight, your faith is in no way lesser than theirs. You are as much an adopted child of God as they are. You are as much an heir of the promises as they are.
      3. And so, to **Galatians 3:28’s** grand statement that “*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*,” we could add, there is also neither apostle nor non-apostle!
   2. And we see **why this is the case** in the last part of verse 1: It is because faith is “*by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ*. Our faith is not because of us. We are not cleverer than anyone else or more worthy of salvation than anyone else. And we have seen this in our recent afternoon Lord’s Day sermons. “We all fall short of the glory of God.” None of us deserve heaven. But verse 10 of chapter 1 speaks of the “calling and election” of God. God is the author of our salvation. And it is the Holy Spirit who causes us to be born again to a living hope. And so, even our faith is a gift of God. As the hymn-writer puts it;

*‘Tis not that I did choose Thee, for Lord that could not be; this heart would still refuse Thee, hadst Thou not chosen me. Thou from the3 sin that stained me, hast cleansed and set me free; of old Thou hast ordained me, that I should live to Thee.*

And so, as one commentator puts it:

*Our ability to stand before God someday as rescued and reclaimed persons depends entirely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He alone has flown through this world without falling. He alone can and did make atonement for sin. Thus He alone can bring us home.*

And this is why the hymn, ‘In Christ alone,’ is such a favourite of believers. It is not 99.5% Jesus and 0.5% us, it is *all* Jesus and His righteousness. And I hope that you celebrate that and preach it to yourself often.

1. So, the **recipients** of the letter are those who have put their faith in Christ Alone. And that brings us, thirdly and lastly, to the **Purpose** of the Letter. And we see this in verse 2: “*May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*.”

* 1. Most of us will know what happened to **Judas Iscariot**, one of Jesus’ disciples. He ultimately rejected Jesus, even though He had lived with Him and the other disciples for three years. And in the Bible, we read about **Alexander and Demas** as two men who professed faith and served alongside the Apostles, but who later turned their backs on Christ. We have also spoken of the continual danger of **false teachers**. And there would be little point in Peter explaining to his readers how to avoid falling away if it were not possible to fall away. So, what do believers who may be facing persecution from the governing authorities, who are exposed to false teachers, and who face the daily temptations of the world, the devil, and our own sinful desires, need above all else? We need the grace and peace of God. And again, we spoke at length about this when we looked at the similar greeting in 1 Peter. So, just a couple of brief comments today.
     1. What is grace? It is undeserved favour. It is what inclines God to give gifts to undeserving by sinners. But it is also the work of the Spirit within us that changes us and enables us to live for Christ. So, it is the blessings we receive from God and the power to live for God.
     2. And peace is the absence of conflict and turmoil and doubt, on the negative side, and the presence of unity and harmony and blessing on the positive side.
     3. And Peter’s desire was that the grace and peace of God would be multiplied to believers; that their experience of His grace and peace would grow and deepen and expand. Does that sound like something that anyone here would like? I know I would!
  2. Now, when you or I write in a birthday card, “Best wishes,” or “All the best,” or “Every blessing,” it is really nothing more than a wish on our part, isn’t it. There is nothing we can do to bring that about. But these words of Peter are not like that. He was an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He wrote as an official representative of the Lord. Thus, his words contain within them the power to convey grace and peace to believers. And we see this in the rest of the verse. How are grace and peace multiplied to believers? “*In the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*.” This is why Peter and John wrote their letters. For it is from the word of God, by the Spirit of God, that our knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord deepens, from which flow His grace and peace.

And this brings us all the way back to our opening comments. Grace and peace are multiplied to the believer through **correct knowledge**. And that does not mean that the more doctrine you know, the richer and healthier you will be. It means that your capacity to cope with suffering and to thank Him for blessings and to persevere and to trust Him and to serve Him well and to know a settled and lasting joy, whatever your circumstances, will grow. And as we also said earlier, this is not just about knowing correct facts and doctrine, it is about knowing the Triune God through faith in Jesus as your Lord.

So, to those who want to persevere and to finish well, 2 Peter is a gift from the Lord. May He multiply His grace and peace to us as work our way through 2this letter Peter together. Amen.