

“Escaped by Grace”
2 Peter 1:1-4
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In the last lines of his well know poem “The Road Not Taken,” Robert Frost wrote:

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.”

In Matthew 7:13, Jesus said, “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

I don’t pretend that Frost and Jesus were discussing the same subject but they do both indicate that different roads make a world of difference.

As banal as it sounds, every one of us is on the road of life.
Maybe you’re young and just beginning the trip.
Maybe you’re much older and know the journey is nearly over.
Or we are or think we are somewhere in between.

But we are all on a road, a path, and it is leading somewhere.
And every day we are making scores of choices that
indicate the direction and destination of that journey.

Later this morning I will briefly tell you the stories of two men I know rather well.

The stories aren’t exciting but they are significant because while they have similarities they illustrate two very different roads.

Today we begin a short series of messages from the book of 2 Peter. (Notice I didn’t say a series of short **messages** but a short **series** of messages!)

Though some dispute it, I think there is sufficient evidence to support the idea that the Apostle Peter is the author of the letter.

He is likely writing to the same churches that received his first letter, which we studied together quite recently.

In his first letter Peter wrote to assure them of their relationship with God in spite of the difficulties, even persecution, they were experiencing because of being Christ-followers.

In this, his second letter, he writes to prepare them to withstand a pressure not from external persecution but from internal false teaching.

2 Peter 2:1-2 “There will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.”

3:17 “Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.”

I suspect you too have heard that the best way to identify counterfeit money is to really know the genuine thing.

It has also always been true that the best way to recognize error is to know the truth.

Just so, as the Apostle begins his letter, he reminds his readers of the awesome privilege that is theirs as Christians; the truth of what they already are and have.

I’m sure we’ve all heard sometime in our lives (or maybe we said it to our kids), “Don’t complain about your food; do you know how lucky you are to **have** food?”

Do you realize how lucky you are to **have** a room, a house, a car, etc?

Do you realize how fortunate you are to be an American?

Much more importantly Peter reminds his readers how favored they are as Christians.

He uses sentences loaded with meaning, describing who they are and what they have by virtue of belonging to God.

(Please stand for the reading of God's holy word.)

2 Peter 1:1-15 "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

^{2PE 1:2} Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

^{2PE 1:3} His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

^{2PE 1:5} For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

^{2PE 1:10} Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

^{2PE 1:12} So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things."

(Pray that we may be reminded of the significance of our relationship with God and treasure it, as evidenced by our lives.)

It's the first four verses we are looking at today.

And it is verse 4 that led me to say what I did at the beginning of this message and to which we will come back at the end.

2 Peter 1:4 "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

Peter describes two roads, two ways of life:

In just a few minutes, as I said, I will illustrate these two roads by describing two men I know.

To paint a word picture of the great contrast between the two ways, Peter uses superlative language.

The one he calls "participating in the divine nature."

The other he calls "the corruption in the world."

Like the frog in the ever-hotter kettle of water, sometimes we don't notice the difference between the two ways unless someone gives us perspective.

And so Peter points out two starkly different realities.

He wants his readers and us to see the real difference so that we can see the lies others may tell us for what they are – lies and not the truth.

But that is not where he begins his remarks.

He begins by describing the genuine article, the real thing.

2 Peter 1:1 "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours..."

It is easy to read right through this sentence and not realize what the Apostle is saying.

And remember if you are trusting in Jesus, what he is saying, he is saying about you!

Peter says you “have received a faith as precious as ours.”

Let’s look at this a little more carefully.

The word “faith” here is not a reference to your believing or trusting in Jesus.

Rather it is referring to the very essence of your Christianity – what you believe, who you believe – the object and outcome of your trust.

The word “faith” here is shorthand for all that you are and have in your relationship with God.

Imagine that for just a minute.

If God truly exists and he is holy and just, could anything be more important here and now and for eternity than being rightly related to him?

Could anything be worse than being God’s enemy or better than being his much loved child?

And Peter says something else that might surprise and definitely encourage us.

He says that “faith”, that relationship you have with God, is “as precious as ours.”

You new Christians, you long-time Christians, you Christians who have failed recently, you who can’t seem to get your act together, you who sometimes wonder if you even are a Christian, your relationship with God is as precious, as valuable, of equal worth as that of the Apostles themselves.

If you understand the gospel you understand that statement.

Because God’s love is not based on you but on him, your relationship with God is as significant to God and as secure with God as Billy Graham’s or the Apostle Peter.

Do you know that? Do you believe that?

You remember the story of the prodigal son.

Which son did the father love most – the prodigal son or the older brother?

The older brother thought loved was based on performance and he should win.

But the father said he loved both sons and the older son didn't have to work for it.

Peter says you have received a faith as precious as the apostles'.

Please notice that his words compound the truth of the gospel.

He says you have "received" this faith, this relationship with God; in v3 he will say you were "called."

What's so significant about that?

The word "received" is a word that means appointed by the casting of lots or by divine appointment.

Again Peter emphasizes that your relationship with God was not your own doing – it was given to you.

God loves you but you must understand his love is not a reward – he just chose to love you.

And how did we come to have this love, this relationship?

He says it is "**through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ** have received a faith as precious as ours..."

We belong to God not by our doing but by Christ's righteousness.

Even a cursory study of the NT will make it clear that these words are shorthand for Jesus' perfect life sacrificed for us thereby paying for our sins and granting us his righteousness.

Peter starts his letter with the most affirming and transforming truth any human being could ever hear - Your relationship with God is the real thing and it is all of grace, all of grace!

If you are trusting in Jesus you belong to him as certainly and as significantly as do Abraham, Moses, David, Peter or Paul.

The next thing Peter does is pronounce a blessing on his readers and us.

2 Peter 1:2 "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

“Grace” here is God’s favor.

“Peace” here is either peace with God or the peace, which God gives.

The first definition (peace with God) is objective – by God’s grace we are no longer God’s enemy but we are at peace with God.

The second definition (peace of God) is subjective.

This is the sense we have, in greater or lesser degree, that all is well between God and us.

I think the emphasis here would be on the latter because he has already declared the former in verse 1 that we belong to God.

I think Peter is saying, I bless you with God’s continuing favor and a growing confidence and joy in your relationship with him.

And how do we experience such favor and peace?

Peter says, “Through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

This knowledge is not merely the ability to recite facts about the Father and Son.

This knowledge is experiential; it is believing Jesus and it is a growing trust in Jesus as you live with him day by day.

Peter says, I want you to experience God’s favor and peace as you have greater and greater experience with Jesus and greater and greater confidence in the gospel – the good news that Jesus loves you by his grace.

Do you realize what you have?

You have been given a relationship with the eternal God through his Son Jesus.

You have access to an abundance of God’s favor and peace just through knowing Jesus.

It is yours; it is your birthright.

Now in verse 3 Peter describes “the real thing” even further:

2 Peter 1:3 “(Jesus) divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Not only do we have a right relationship with almighty God by his grace (v1); not only do we have constant access to God’s favor and peace (v2); but God has also given us everything needed for life and godliness.

“Life and godliness” is a two-word way of describing the Christian life, a godly life – living each day as Jesus wants us to live.

By his divine power Jesus has given us everything we need for this godly living.

Notice how he does this: it is “through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

This word “knowledge” is the same word he just used in verse 2.

As we noted there, this knowledge is experiential; it is believing Jesus and it is a growing trust in Jesus as you live with him day by day, believing the gospel.

Don’t miss this; the power for living the Christian life is in the Gospel.

Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in NYC has written, "The gospel is not just a way to be saved from the penalty of sin, but it is the fundamental dynamic for living the whole Christian life-- individually and corporately, privately and publicly. In other words, the gospel is not just for non-Christians, but also for Christians. This means the gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A to Z of the Christian life. It is not accurate to think 'the gospel' is what saves non-Christians, and then, what matures Christians is trying hard to live according to Biblical principles. It is more accurate to say that we are saved by believing the gospel, **and then we are transformed** in every part of our mind, heart, and life **by believing the gospel more and more deeply** as our life goes on. (article: "Preaching in a Postmodern City")

And again, what is the gospel?

It is the “knowledge of Jesus” that Peter has been talking about; it is the good news that Jesus has given us a relationship with

God solely by grace and continues to grow that relationship solely by his grace.

It doesn't remove human responsibility but it recognizes that responsibility is the ability to respond – an ability given to us by Jesus.

We are saved initially and we are being saved day by day by grace.

Again from Keller, “Unless we believe the gospel, we will be driven in all we do--whether obeying or disobeying--by pride ("self-love") or fear ("of damnation"). Mere moral effort without the gospel may restrain the heart but cannot truly change the heart. Mere moral effort merely “jury-rigs” the evil of the heart to produce moral behavior, out of self-interest. (For example) it would be possible to use fear and pride as ways to motivate a person to be honest, but since fear and pride are also the roots of lying, it is only a matter of time before such a thin tissue collapses. Luther was right. If you are obeying the law without deep joy in your acceptance in Christ, you are not loving God with all your heart. You are not obeying God for God. You are being moral so that you can put God in your debt, so he owes you a comfortable life. You are being moral so that you can feel secure in your uprightness. You are being moral in the service of self-salvation, out of the fear and pride that arise without an identity built on Christ in the gospel. (Keller)

“At the root, then, of all Christian failures to live right -- i.e. not giving money generously, not telling the truth, not caring for the poor, not handling worry and anxiety – at root is the sin under all sins, the sin of unbelief, of not rejoicing deeply in God's grace in Christ, not living out of our new identity in Christ. (Keller)

It is in the context of our relationship with Jesus, a relationship built solely on trust in his grace, that we have everything we need for godly living.

We can live each day with confidence in Jesus' love and Jesus' provision for us to follow him.

I fully realize we don't do that perfectly.

We sometimes fall back into our old ways of pride or fear, thinking we deserve God's favor or that we have lost it.

But the Bible says we not only become God's children by grace, we live each day by that same grace – that's the gospel, the good news.

Now finally we come to what I've been alluding to all along – the two ways.

2 Peter 1:4 "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

The "these" of verse 4 most likely refers to Jesus' "glory and goodness" of verse 3.

And the "glory and goodness" of Jesus is another way of speaking of his virtuous excellence or his excellent virtue.

It is Jesus sinless life and his sacrificial death that we might have a relationship with God and enjoy all the promises and provision of God.

It is another way of summarizing every aspect of this relationship with God that Peter has described in verses 1-3.

- V1 "Through the righteousness of Jesus you have received a faith as precious as ours."
- V2 "Grace and peace" are yours "through the knowledge of Jesus."
- V3 "He has given us everything we need for life and godliness..."

And what is the outcome of all of that?

Simply put it is that we **have** one thing and we **escape** another.

These are the two ways of life:

One is to "participate in the divine nature."

The other is to live in the "corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

Those are really the only two options open to us in life.

I think Paul describes these two in Romans 8:5-9 "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have

their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit..."

Participating in the divine nature does not mean that we become God or even that we become a god.

One commentator said it so well, "We participate in God's nature, not in God's being." (Kistemaker, 248)

To participate in God's nature is to become increasingly like him in moral character and conduct.

The alternative is that we live increasingly controlled by our own selfish interests or "evil desires."

I want you to now meet the two men to whom I've referred twice already.

Bob (not his real name) is in his 50s and has been exposed to the good news of a relationship with God by grace through faith for most of his life.

But from his youth Bob has been proud of his intellect and gift of gab.

C.S. Lewis, spoke of how at 13 he, Lewis, began to broaden his mind from the restrictions of his childhood religion. He wrote, "I was soon changing 'I believe' to 'I feel'. And oh, the relief of it... From the (tyrannical) noon (heat) of (God's) revelation I passed into the cool evening twilight of Higher Thought, where there was nothing to be obeyed, and nothing to be believed except what was either comforting or exciting." (C.S.Lewis Surprised by Joy 63)

It seems Bob has always been more interested in arguing the inconsequential aspects of any theory rather than the main idea.

His love of debate overshadows any desire to deal with the core truth of any idea.

He is more in love with being avant-garde than having any guiding principles of life.

He has always flaunted convention.

His sons were taught to refer to him and their mother by their first names.

Seemingly no limits or discipline were administered.

The boys were literally self-taught using their own computers at night and sleeping in the day; they are brilliant but godless.

Now in his 50s Bob has become increasingly cynical and aimless.

His wife once professed a Christian faith.

But Bob's thinking and arguments have led her into doubt, then cynicism and finally despair – with no sense of hope.

But don't get the wrong idea, Bob is no skid-row bum; he is bright, witty and capable.

He earns a good living and will retire in comfort **but with no purpose and no future.**

I think Bob is fairly representative of "the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

His "evil desire" is not greed of money or lust for power or sex.

His desire is pride – an unwillingness to yield to anything or anyone, least of all to Jesus.

Over the years I have watched Bob's life devolve as his pride dug him deeper and deeper into his cynical hole.

Like Frank Sinatra, he will do it his way.

But Peter says what the proverb says, Proverbs 14:12

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

That's what the corruption in the world caused by evil desires looks like.

I also want you to meet my brother Mike.

Mike too was exposed early to the good news of a relationship with God by grace through faith in Jesus.

As much as he and I fought in childhood, by the time he graduated from high school, I knew my brother had decided to trust Jesus with his life.

For the next 40 years I watched as he served the Lord by serving in profit and non-profit businesses; in major corporations, small Christian colleges and for several years with a ministry to the poorest of the poor in rural Mississippi.

Some years he earned large incomes and gave most of it away.

Some years, with a family of 8 children (five adopted), he earned less than \$10,000 and still managed to give money away.

He started businesses and literally gave them away to younger men who needed work.

I have never known a man less concerned with material things and more convinced of the trustworthiness of Jesus.

Several years ago he sold everything he had left and is giving the rest of his life to serve as a volunteer in missionary organizations.

He is a man without guile and without fear – trusting God to meet his needs even as he works tirelessly.

Over the years I have watched as my brother has increasingly reflected the nature of God.

He leaves, in his wake, children who love and serve the Lord in China, Latin America and elsewhere, and countless others who have witnessed his radical generosity out of genuine trust in Jesus.

That's what "participating in the divine nature" looks like.

It is not measured in money or the size of a house or the make of a car.

It is not measured in prestige or power.

It is measured in character and an eternal relationship with the living God and his people.

The Apostle Peter writes to a people and to us saying that is the life we have been given.

Do you realize that by grace you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires and from the righteousness of Jesus you have been granted the awesome privilege of participating in the divine nature of God.

That is who we are and that is what we have.

Out of that grace, that unmerited favor, you and I can begin to respond to Jesus with our lives.