

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 26 July 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“Like Precious Faith”

2 Peter 1:1

Back in 1999, a British-born author named Tim Brookes hitchhiked across America; and in the January 2000 edition of *National Geographic*, he recounted his experiences during the trip. One story he told was of his experience at a church in San Francisco. As Brookes entered the packed sanctuary, an usher guided him to a window sill and told him there was room to sit there; but he cautioned him not to start jumping up and down and rocking with the music too much, because the heating register in the window sill might collapse. The church’s band—which consisted of an electric guitar, bass, synthesizer, and drums—started to tune up. Then entered the choir, dressed in gold robes, and rocking and swaying wildly. Soon, the Reverend Cecil Williams ascended to the pulpit and screamed, “Yeah! Oh yeah! You’re at the right place! You’re at the right place to be loved!” The crowd laughed and cheered with approval. After some more music, the pastor delivered his message, which was on spiritual openness. Using the metaphor of a jar, he spoke of such topics as “jarring experiences,” and “remaining ajar.” In the middle of the message, he looked down over his spectacles and asked, “How’m I doin’?” The crowd cheered with enthusiasm. The author concluded his story as follows: “This was the first church service I’d ever been to that was worth it for the beautiful women or the...dancing on stage. It was wild; it was passionate; it was full of human warmth.”¹

Did you catch that? The author said that the church service was full of “*human warmth*.” He said nothing about sensing the power of God’s Word, or conviction of sin. This “church” service, with its circus-like atmosphere, was not a place where God was being worshipped or extolled; instead, it was a place where *man*, and *human lust and sensuality*, were being worshipped.

Sadly, such is the case in countless professing “evangelical” churches today. Take, for example, Hills Christian Life Centre in Sydney, Australia. For 25 years, the “worship pastor” of this church was the world-famous Contemporary Christian Music artist, Darlene Zschech; and the pastor was Brian Houston. Since 2010, Darlene Zschech and her husband have been the “co-pastors” of Hope Unlimited Church. Both these churches are extremely successful, according to the world’s definition of success. Hillsong Music (which launched out of Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia in the 90’s), has been strongly affiliated with Zschech from its early days; and their ecumenical songs are now sung in churches of all denominations worldwide. In fact, “Hillsong” is practically a network of churches all of itself.

Why are Hillsong Music, and their affiliated churches, so successful? Because they are just like the world. Their musical performances are sleazy, just like the world’s performances. Their singers and dancers have been known to go on stage half naked. They are pro-abortion, and pro-LGBTQ. They are the very epitome of “inclusion.” They include anyone and everyone—everyone, that is, except the Lord, and those who truly love and follow Him. When Pastor Brian Houston was asked in an interview why his church was so successful, his answer was this: “We are scratching people where they are itching.”²

¹ Tim Brookes, “Rediscovering America,” *National Geographic*, January 2000.

² David Cloud, “Darlene Zschech and Contemporary Praise Music” (*Way of Life Literature*, Sept. 30, 2008)

Now, if you have ever read **2 Timothy chapter 4**, you should instantly recognise those words! This is exactly the way that the Apostle Paul described false teachers! False teachers are successful because they satisfy the *“itching ears”* of worldly people, who do not like the truth, and who turn instead to *“fables.”*

That is exactly what we will be talking about in the coming months, as we launch into a study of Peter’s second epistle. Like **1 Peter**, the book of **2 Peter** was written to Jewish believers. It was written shortly before Peter’s martyrdom for Christ, in A.D. 64; and its subject is **apostasy**. Now, in case you don’t know what “apostasy” is, it simply means “departure”—whether in the literal sense, or the spiritual sense. In the New Testament, the word *apostasia* often means “departure from the truth of the Gospel.” That is the overwhelming theme of **2 Peter**. In this letter, Peter was warning the churches that *false teachers* would soon rise up from within their own congregations, and would make merchandise of them.

The letter of **2 Peter** is vital for Christians to know, because we are living in a day of unprecedented apostasy. It is crucial that every Christian be well-grounded in the teaching of God’s Word, so that he can’t be influenced by apostates. It is my prayer that through our study of this epistle, every Christian in this room will become more solidly rooted and grounded in the truth. It is also my prayer that those who are not saved will repent and believe on Christ! The title of this message is *“Like Precious Faith.”*

Read **2 Peter 1:1**.

I. The author of the letter (v. 1)

When we study any book of the Bible, it is important to understand some things about the human author. Of course, we can find plenty of information about Peter in all four of the Gospels, and in the book of **Acts**. However, we can learn some things about Peter even in the opening words of this letter. How did Peter reckon himself? How did he evaluate his life, and his purpose in life? Let’s take a look at **verse 1**, and see what we can find.

First of all, you’ll notice that Peter called himself by the name “Simon Peter.” That may not seem like an important point; but it actually *is* important. You see, Simon is the name that his *parents* gave him. It is another form of the name “Simeon”—which was the name of the second of Jacob’s twelve sons. “Simon” was a very common name for a Jewish man in Peter’s day (as it still is today); and it was the *only* name by which Simon had ever been called—until the day when he met Jesus. On that day, Simon was given a new name.

Read **John 1:35-42**.

This was an extremely important day in Peter’s life. It was the day when he met Jesus. Now, this wasn’t necessarily the day when Peter was *saved*. It’s hard to tell exactly when Simon became a member of God’s family. Most likely, Simon had heard John the Baptist’s preaching already; and he may already have repented and believed the Gospel. Only the day before, John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus and said, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (**John 1:29**). Perhaps Simon had already believed this message, and was already saved. On the other hand, perhaps Peter was saved at the moment when he first met Jesus. However, there is one thing we do know for sure: when Jesus said to Peter, *“Thou shalt be called Cephas,”* Peter was already a redeemed man. How do I know? Because receiving a new name from God is a sign of His *special favour*. It is a privilege that God gives only to His children. God gave Abram the new name “Abraham.” He gave Sarai the new name “Sarah.” He gave Jacob the new name “Israel.” Many other believers in Bible times were given a new name by God, as well. In fact, in eternity, God will give a new, unique name to *every* member of His family, as an eternal reminder

of His acceptance of them. **Revelation 2:17** says that in heaven, every believer will be given a “*new name*,” which “*no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*”

And so, on a very special day in Simon’s life, he was given a new name. Simon’s new Master, Jesus of Nazareth, called him “**Cephas.**” *Cephas* is the Aramaic word for “**stone.**” Jesus gave Simon his new name “Cephas” in order to remind him, every day, of the *spiritual character* that He wanted him to have. Jesus wanted Simon to be hard and strong in his faith in the Lord—just like a stone. Of course, Simon had a lot of learning to do before he would develop that hard, strong, unwavering, “stone-like” faith. He would have to experience the humiliation of sinking in the Sea of Galilee, after a brief moment of having enough faith to walk on the water. He would have to feel the sting of being called “Satan” when he disbelieved Jesus’ words about His coming crucifixion. He would have to weep bitter tears, and suffer much guilt and anguish of mind, after he had denied his Lord three times. Years later, he would have to be rebuked by Paul for forgetting that God had removed the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. (Peter should never have forgotten this truth, because **he** was the very one to whom God gave this new revelation!) The humbling reality is that Simon did not always live up to his new name “Stone.” However, it was the name that *Jesus* had given him; and for that reason, it was extremely special to him.

Now, maybe you’re thinking, “This is really interesting, Pastor; but Simon didn’t call himself ‘Simon Cephas’ here in **1 Peter 1:1**; he called himself ‘Simon Peter.’ When did the name ‘Peter’ come into the picture?” Well, the name “Peter” is Greek; but it means the exact same thing that “Cephas” means in Aramaic. Peter means “stone.” Jesus gave Simon this *Greek* name for “stone” on *another* very special day, a couple years later.

Read Matthew 16:13-18.

You can be sure that every time Simon called himself “Peter” (or was called Peter by someone else), he remembered what he himself had said just before Jesus gave him his new name. He had declared, “***Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.***” Every time Simon heard his new name “Peter,” it probably also reminded him that he was just a *petros*—a “little stone.” In contrast, his Master, Jesus Christ, called Himself by a different name—*Petra* (“large rock,” or “boulder”). Peter was a small stone; but Christ was the *large* Rock, or Boulder, upon which the church is built.

What did the name “Peter” mean to Simon Peter? It meant the world to him, because it was given to him by the King of Kings! *That* was what made it special. You know, I’ve been given new names by friends and family at different times in my life. For example, a college friend of mine called me “Huck,” because he said that I reminded him of Mark Twain’s famous literary character, “Huck Finn.” (Even though I wasn’t from the South, he thought of me as a sort of “Redneck,” because I came from a small country town, and I enjoyed chopping wood, and I played the banjo. Also, my last name begins with the syllable “Fin.” In his mind, I was like Huck Finn, floating down a raft on the Mississippi, with a straw hat on my head and a piece of straw in my mouth.) Now, I *did* answer to the name “Huck” (and to the longer version, “Huck Finn”); and I even called myself by this name when I was around my college friends. (Many of them called me Huck, as well.) However, did I *continue* to call myself by this name when I was outside my circle of friends at Pensacola Christian College? No. Other people wouldn’t have understood the reason for the name. Also, the name that my parents had given me was far more important to me. However, the new name *Peter* stuck with Simon for the rest of his life, because it was the name

that Jesus of Nazareth had given him. It reminded him of the character that Jesus desired him to have.

Now, I'd like to point out a couple other things about Peter. You'll notice that Peter called himself a "*servant*" and "*apostle*." What does this tell us about Peter?

Well, the word "apostle" means "sent one." On the day of Christ's resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples and said, "*As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*" (John 20:21). The Apostles were given a very unique job—that of laying the foundation of the churches. Altogether, there were about 20 Apostles (including the original 12 Apostles, and 8 others who were ordained as Apostles to the Gentiles). There are no other men like these men. They held a unique office.

Read Ephesians 2:19-20.

Paul says that the church has been built "*upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*." Paul isn't saying that the apostles *are* the foundation: rather, he is saying that the foundation of *Jesus Christ* was laid *by them*, through their preaching of the Gospel. Through their preaching, people believed on Christ, and churches were established, with Christ as the Foundation. Our church is here today, with Christ as *our* Foundation, because of their preaching. The Apostles were given an awesome and fearful responsibility! No one since that time has ever held the office of Apostle, because the Apostles were appointed by Christ Himself, when He was on earth!

So, this means that Peter was "way up there" in importance, and we are "way down here," right? Wrong! Let's look again at **verse 1**. (**Read verse 1.**) Did you notice that before identifying himself as an Apostle, Peter called himself by a much humbler title? He called himself "*a servant*." Not only that, but he used the Greek word *doulos*, which means "slave." The word *diakonos* can mean "servant" in the sense of a *hired* servant, or a *voluntary* servant; but the word *doulos* always means "slave." A "slave" isn't merely hired help, or voluntary help; he is *owned* by his master. He is bought and paid for; and his life is all about serving his master. *That* is what Peter considered himself to be. Christ was his Master; and he was Christ's bond-slave.

As you can see, Peter viewed himself in several aspects. On the one hand, he cherished the name "Peter" which Jesus had given him, and the favour that He had shown him. We see this by the fact that He called himself by the name "Peter," or "Simon Peter," for the rest of his life. Jesus wasn't just "a friend" to Peter; He was his *best* Friend in heaven and earth! We also see that Peter accepted his position as an Apostle, and took it very seriously. Yet, at the same time, he considered himself nothing but a slave of Jesus Christ. His life was all about serving *Jesus*.

Do *you* see yourself in this light—as a slave to the Lord? If you're not saved, you haven't even *owned* Him as your Lord. You need to repent of your sin, believe on Christ, and surrender your life to Him today! If you *are* saved, the Lordship of Jesus needs to be a daily reality to you. Do you consider Him to be not only your best Friend, but your Lord? Are you obeying Him as you should? Jesus said, "*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*" (John 15:14).

II. The recipients of the letter (v. 1)

(**Read verse 1 again.**) Who were the recipients of this letter? To whom was Peter writing? Peter says that he was writing "*to them that have obtained like precious faith with us*." In other words, Peter was writing to *saved people*. He was writing to people who shared his faith in Christ.

Now, there are several truths about salvation that we can learn from this statement. Let's look at it more closely. First of all, that word "**obtained**" is important. Another word for "**obtained**" is "received." Peter is saying that "faith" (trust in Christ) is something that people must *receive*. This means that faith is something that God *gives* to people.

Now, *there* is an important truth! We know that *salvation* is a gift from God, which He purchased for us. The Bible says that salvation is the "**gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast**" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We know that a sinner must *receive* that gift by faith. **John 1:12** says that "**As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.**" However, according to this **1 Peter 1:1**, even the *faith that is necessary to receive* the gift of salvation is, itself, a gift from God! Faith itself must be received.

Now, if you are not sure that you are saved, please listen closely! According to the Bible, there is nothing in your heart that is even *inclined* to receive God's gift of salvation. The Bible says that your eyes are blinded by your sin, and your heart is hardened. Your sinful nature has only one bent—and that is to go your own way, instead of God's way. That is why God, in His mercy, has sent His Holy Spirit to *convict* you of your sin, and to show you that you need Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the One who puts that fear of where you will go when you die, and that guilty feeling about your sin, into your heart. It is He who helps you to understand, through the words of Scripture, that you are lost, and that you need Jesus to save you. Please listen when He speaks silently to your heart! Unless *He* speaks to your heart, and unless you respond to Him while He's speaking, you will *not* accept God's gift of salvation. The Holy Spirit won't strive with you forever, either. If you resist Him, and resist Him, and resist Him, there may come a day when He will not speak to you anymore. That's why the Scripture says, "**I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation**" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Read John 6:44 and 16:7-11.

Faith is something that you *cannot have* without the Lord's gracious intervention. It is not something that you can decide to exercise when you're good and ready to do so. If you are not saved, I urge you to respond to the Spirit's voice while He is still knocking on your heart's door. Even when He does knock, it is not easy for sinners to respond to Him. Your sinful nature will resist God's call with all its power. That is why several times in Scripture, convicted sinners pleaded with Christ to give them the power to believe on Him. Let's look at a couple examples.

Read Mark 9:14-27.

It seems that this man was almost choking on his words in mid-sentence, doesn't it? He had just *said* that he believed. He *desired* to believe. Yet, he knew, deep inside, that he didn't *really* believe. That's why he cried out for *help* to believe. By the way, that is a cry that never goes unheeded. Christ answered this man's request straightaway, and then proceeded to heal the man's son. Let's look at another example.

Read John 4:46-54.

When this man came to Christ, he was concerned with one thing: his son's being healed. However, Jesus was concerned about something far more important. He was concerned that this

man needed to believe on Him and be saved from his sin. Jesus pinpointed his problem, too. He said, **“Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”** This man’s problem is that he refused to believe without seeing; and Jesus looked right into his heart, and exposed his unbelief. At this point, the man was at the end of his rope; and knew he needed *divine* help in order to believe. You can almost hear the desperation in his voice as he says, **“Sir, come down ere my child die.”** He was crying out for help to believe; and Jesus answered his prayer. Christ reached out and *gave* this man the faith that he needed to be saved, because in his heart, he had sincerely asked for it. In that moment, this man crossed over to true belief in Christ. In **verse 53**, we find that his *whole family* believed, too. In what did they believe? Did they believe merely that Jesus had healing power? No. Anyone with eyes could see that Jesus could heal. They believed that Jesus is the *Son of God*—the one who forgives sin; and they placed their personal *trust* in Him.

Now, there is another important truth about salvation in this statement. Not only does Peter say that he and his brethren had obtained **“faith”**; he says that they had obtained **“like precious faith.”** Another way it could be said is “equally precious faith,” or, “faith of equally precious value.” What does Peter mean by this? He’s saying that there is only *one* kind of faith that saves people; and that faith is rare, and precious. It is rare, because *very few people ever obtain it*.

A **false faith** (a faith in anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ, and His work on the cross) cannot save anyone. A person may be *sincere* about his trust in Buddha, or in Muhammed, or in Krishna, or in Shiva, or in Mary, or in Padre Pio, or in the Roman Catholic creed, or in a Protestant creed, or in the Mormon creed, or in a Baptist creed, or in one’s own all-around goodness and righteousness: but the Bible says that salvation is in a *Person*, and in one Person only—the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter said of Jesus, **“neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)**. You *must* place your faith in the Jesus who has revealed Himself in the Bible, and not in a Jesus of your own imagination. Only the Jesus of the Bible can save you from your sins.

A **dead faith** can’t save anyone, either. What is a dead faith? It is the “faith” of someone who *mentally agrees* with the truths of the Bible and of salvation, but who has never truly repented of his sin, and committed his life and soul to God. A dead faith is no faith at all, because it has no repentance in it. To “repent” means that you agree with God about your sin. It means that you agree with God that you deserve death and hell. It means that you *turn* to Him, and ask Him to *deliver* you from the bondage of sin, so that you may now have the power to live your life for *Him*. If you have truly placed your trust in Christ alone to save you, then you have also truly repented of your sin. On the other hand, if you have never repented in your heart—if you have never turned your life over to Him, with the intent of letting Him be the *Ruler* of your life—then you have not truly trusted Him. You may claim to believe in Jesus; but your faith is a dead faith.

My friends, no one is saved by trying to do good works. The Bible makes this very clear. However, there *will be a change* in a person’s outlook, behaviour, and direction in life, if he have truly trusted in Christ. Why? Because that person has now *invited* Christ to come into his life, and to control his life. **Second Corinthians 5:17** says, **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”** John the Baptist said, **“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every**

tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:7-11). No matter how righteous others may *think* you are, God sees into your heart; and He sees every rotten sin that is hidden there. If you have never repented of your sin and asked Christ to come into your life and be your new Master, then you have not truly believed. You have a dead faith. It is not precious. It is not worth anything to God.

True faith, on the other hand, is exceedingly precious. Why is it so precious? Because true faith has for its Object Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and He is *infinitely* precious. God will show mercy and pardon to those who repent of their sin and self-righteousness, and turn to the Son. He paid the price for your sins, which you were *not* able to pay. He did it all for you. Is He precious to you? Do you know Him as Saviour? If not, I urge you to trust Him today!

Read 1 Peter 2:6-7.

III. The Author of our faith (v. 1)

(Read verse 1 again.) The last part of this verse is extremely important, because it reminds us of *how* it was possible for us to obtain our faith in Christ in the first place. It was made possible ***“through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”***

Now, before I talk about Christ’s ***“righteousness,”*** I’d like to point out what this statement says about Christ’s very Person. The most direct, literal reading of the Greek is this: ***“the God and Saviour of us, Jesus Christ.”*** This statement clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is not only our Saviour, but our *God*. In fact, He wouldn’t be able to be our Saviour if He *weren’t* God!

You see, this is where the word ***“righteousness”*** comes in. Only the righteousness of *God Himself* can cover your sin. Only God, the Lawgiver and Judge, has the prerogative to take His own perfect righteousness, and to stamp it on your moral account book, as though it were yours, and thereby declare you to be “not guilty.” Your *own* righteousness can’t save you. Your own righteousness is worthless! No angel of heaven (holy though God’s angels are) can substitute his righteousness for yours. They don’t have that prerogative, because none of them is our Creator, or Judge, or Lawgiver. Only the righteousness of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, who paid your sin-penalty on the cross, can stand in your place. That is why Jesus is called “the righteousness of God.”

Read Romans 3:19-23.

If you have never received Christ as your personal Saviour, and had His righteousness placed on your account, I urge you to ask Jesus to save you today! God cannot accept your righteousness; but He *can* accept His Son’s righteousness. When you repent of your sin and trust in Christ, His perfect righteousness is placed on you, like a spotless garment; and God looks at you and says, “My Son has paid your sin debt; and by faith, you have received His gift. I see you as having my Son’s righteousness. I see no sin. I accept you as my child. Case dismissed!”

Conclusion: In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul wrote to the Christians of the church of Corinth, ***“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”*** Jesus *is* Righteousness to every sinner who repents and believes on Him. If you have placed your faith in Him, His righteousness is standing in your stead, thus enabling God to accept you. If

you are saved, then rejoice in your salvation! Rejoice in your precious Saviour! Take time to thank Him for saving you. On the other hand, if you are not saved, I urge you to repent and cast yourself upon Christ for salvation. He has never yet cast anyone out, when that soul comes to Him in true contrition and faith! While His Spirit is speaking to your heart today, won't you heed Him? ***“Now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation.”***