

2 Peter 1:3-15(ESV) ³His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to[£] his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue,[£] and virtue with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸For if these qualities[£] are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ¹²Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³I think it right, as long as I am in this body,[£] to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

During this time of the virus Peter's two New Testament letters have been a joy to live in. Those of you who have been watching the devotions know that we have been spending quite a bit of time in the first chapter of Peter's second letter; today will be no different.

Peter's time on this earth was coming to an end. He knew that his life could be taken at any moment. Jesus had forewarned Peter as to what type of death he would experience.

John 21:18-19(NLT) ¹⁸"I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go." ¹⁹Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me."

Jesus had also prayed for Peter that Peter's faith would not fail. **Luke 22:31-32(NLT)**

³¹"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. ³²But I have pleaded in prayer for you,

Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter’s words in this second letter were written so his readers faith would not fail. When Jesus restored Peter after the three denials, Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep.” The words of 2nd Peter are Peter’s final words to the church that are still feeding us to this day. Every word is to feed our souls, so we do not fall away from the faith but remain faithful to God until the very end. Peter does not want any of us to deny knowing Jesus like Peter did. God has given us divine power and the promises of God that will keep us faithful unto death and then we will receive the crown of life. God does not want us to Peter out, so to speak, by denying Jesus, but to stay strong in the Lord Jesus Christ and not fail. These were to be Peter’s final words. His death was imminent. A person’s final words are exceedingly important, not a word is wasted.

I put myself in Peter’s shoes and asked myself this question. If I were to preach my last sermon today what would I say? I am now preaching as if this was my last sermon to the people of St Mark even though it is not, Lord willing. I am holding back absolutely nothing. If this were my last sermon I would begin with this question, the most important question you will ever be asked. Have you been born again? Or I might put it this way, “Do you consider yourself a Christian and if so why?” In John chapter three Jesus speaks these words, “You must be born again.” To be born again is to have invited the Lord Jesus Christ into your life. To be born again means the Holy Spirit has come upon you to convince you that you are a sinner and that you need the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. It is quite possible that this work begins when you are baptized. In my lifetime I have known of people to be baptized as an infant and for the rest of their lives they ignored Jesus completely. I believe there will be baptized people in hell and unbaptized people in heaven. You must be born again. Luther Himself had a born - again experience when the Gospel penetrated his soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. He thought he had to work hard to earn God’s approval. Then the truth of the Gospel exploded

inside of him. God saves us by giving to us the righteousness that God requires as a gift, a free gift, by grace through faith. On the cross Jesus took our sins and gave to us His righteousness. We can't earn it. We can not pay for it. All we can do is receive it. John tells us that as many as receive the Lord Jesus Christ, who believe on His name, become children of God (John 1:12).

John 8:42-47(NLT) ⁴²Jesus told them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³Why can't you understand what I am saying? It's because you can't even hear me! ⁴⁴For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵So when I tell the truth, you just naturally don't believe me! ⁴⁶Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don't listen because you don't belong to God."

To put it bluntly, either you are a child of God or you are a child of the devil and there is no in between. Do you know who your father is? Have you been born again?

God's grace comes to us, comes to you to save you as you hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Some of you have believed in Jesus your entire life. Others of you have had a conversion experience of some sort. I am asking everyone in this place to at least once in your life pray the sinner's prayer and mean it. "Lord Jesus, please forgive me for my sins and come into my life." If you are ever with a person who is about to die, please ask them to pray that prayer if you do not know for sure if they are a believer in Jesus. God's desire is for all of us to be saved. I don't want any person in my listening to miss out. Have you been born again. Do you know who your father is.

If this were my last sermon, and it is not, but if it were, I would ask you to pray every day to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. In order for this church to grow spiritually and numerically we are trying to change the culture of this church. It is a very slow process. It is a process that only the Holy Spirit can accomplish. I cannot change the culture of this church nor can anyone else. It is only a work that can be done by the Holy Spirit in and through us. Please pray every day to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let me put it this way. As born-again Spirit-filled people, we desire what God desires. God desires all people to be saved. When we resist the Holy Spirit we remain quiet, silent, and mute about our Christian faith. The Holy Spirit is here to reveal Jesus to everyone. Paul writes, "I believe therefore I speak." We want every person here to be an outspoken Christian. We want every person here to be used by the Holy Spirit to bring people into relationship with Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit's work in us that causes us to speak up and to never be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we keep the faith to ourselves we are resisting the Holy Spirit which is a terrible sin. We want our church to be evangelistic to the core. People's eternal life is at stake. It is called loving Jesus enough and it is called loving the lost. It is called loving God and loving your neighbor who does not know Jesus. The Holy Spirit floods us with the love of God and that is why we speak God's truth in love.

When I was in high school I had what I call an ecstatic experience with the Holy Spirit that lasted 2 days. I also called it my treading on air experience. The Holy Spirit gave me the deepest sense of God's Presence that I have ever felt. For 2 days at school I felt totally immersed in God's love. Not only did I feel saturated with the love of God, I felt God's love for the people around me. There were students in our high school who were dealing with depression and more. I felt intense love for these people and moved by God to speak to them. I would walk up to the person and say something like this. "I know God loves you more than you think God does and this is what God is trying to say to you right now" and I would speak

words that came from God. The intense sense of God's loving Presence was ecstatic. I don't remember what I said to about a dozen people but each one could not get over how I knew what they needed to hear. Some of these people I barely knew but God knew them, and God knew what they needed.

Friends, to resist the Holy Spirit by being quiet is resisting the depths of God's love that motivates you to care enough about people's souls that you want to see them saved for eternity. This cultural shift is completely a work of the Holy Spirit and as long as we are resisting the Holy Spirit it will not happen and the church across America will continue to decline rapidly.

The Holy Spirit inside of us is God's divine power that keeps us growing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that nudges us, prompts us, and stirs us up on the inside to keep growing in one's personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit's power is so great. The Bible warns us not to grieve the Holy Spirit or quench the Holy Spirit. Please ask the Holy Spirit this week to tell you where you are resisting His work.

When God's Holy Spirit is actively working in your life you will find yourself talking about Jesus and your Christian faith frequently. Let me ask you this question that you probably have never been asked. "How many people have you led to Jesus Christ? How many times have you prayed with others to receive the Lord Jesus Christ and be born again for all eternity. What in the world are you waiting for? It is called being a Christian. Keeping your faith to yourself is no longer an option. People will not come to Christ unless you speak. We wonder why churches are declining nationwide. Here is one reason. We are silent about the Christian faith. They cannot come to Christ if we do not speak. How many people have you prayed with to receive the Lord Jesus Christ?

Romans 10:13-17(NLT) ¹³For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."¹⁴But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him

unless someone tells them? ¹⁵And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”¹⁶ But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, “LORD, who has believed our message?”¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

God has placed inside of us His divine power so we will know what to say, when to say it, and no longer remain quiet about Jesus. The Holy Spirit loves to speak through you. You are an instrument of God, filled with the Holy Spirit of God in order to be used of God to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. Planting seeds of the Gospel through conversation with your God-given gifts is one of the main reasons you were put here on this earth.

Pastor, I don't know what to say. Then come to our organic outreach class when SS starts ups again.

I know the stories of our prison ministry people, how thrilled they are when they see inmates commit their lives to Christ. Some of you have told me stories of the time or times you prayed the sinner's prayer with another person. We have Bible studies in this church so we can all learn what the Christian faith is all about so we can give it away freely by the power of God. If you are a Christian you are capable of saying something about Jesus, planting a seed of faith, that God might use to birth faith in the person you are speaking to.

I once wrote a note in a person's high school yearbook and it was really mean. “Roy, please stay the same way you are so I won't have to worry about seeing you in heaven.” I am not proud of writing that. He wrote in my senior yearbook. “I look forward to seeing you in heaven.” I wrote the wrong thing at the wrong time in order to be mean. That one statement jolted him, and God used my error, my meanness to wake him up to spiritual realities.

What will it take for you to open your mouth and speak of the love of God that saves us for eternity. Paul writes, “I believe therefore I speak.” Please spend time in this second letter of

Peter. God will feed you so you can feed others the Word of Truth and so your faith will not fail.

Amen and Amen.