

**2 Peter 3:17-18(ESV)** <sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. <sup>18</sup>But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

We are all sinners in need of Christ's forgiveness. In this church we have a variety of people. We have people of differing political parties. We have people of all ages with strong opinions on almost everything . If I were to name one current topic of the day we may have more opinions expressed than there are people in the room. One thing we all have in common is this, we are all sinners in the need of Christ and the forgiveness He gives. That is something that we can all agree on. If I fail to give the good news the walls in this church speak loud and clear. Jesus loves you and proved it by giving His life on the cross, taking all of our sins upon Himself and giving to us His perfect righteousness. All of our sins are forgiven, and God will never hold our sins against for they are covered by the Blood of the Lamb. Jesus cancelled the record that contained the charges against us. The record of sins was nailed to the cross and we bare them no more. Jesus bore all the charges against us. The Bible tells us that "greater love hath no one than to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus laid down His life so we will live eternally with Him and never die.

The Old Testament reading from Genesis 50 gives us some of the best news found in the Bible. It is the end of the Joseph story. **Genesis 50:20(ESV)** <sup>20</sup>"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Joseph's brothers hated Joseph so much that they threw him into a pit and left him there to die. Talk about brotherly love. I do not have time to go through the life of Joseph but please listen. No matter what evil is done to you, God can bring good out of it. No matter how much pain you may suffer, both physical and emotional, God can bring good out of

it. There is no evil so great or pain so deep that God cannot by His grace raise something good out of it in your life. If you need to be reminded of this for your faith to be fed, please read the Joseph story. God will speak to you. In the midst of this pandemic, major unemployment, and five-year-olds staring at a computer screen instead of sitting in front of a teacher in school, God is able to bring good out of all these hardships. This is why more than ever it is time to draw near to God and God will draw near to you. God's grace opens our eyes to God's goodness in the midst of the badness of this world.

The Psalm reading and the Gospel lesson speak of God's free gift of forgiveness and God's plea for us to forgive those who have sinned against us. **Psalms 103:12(ESV)** "<sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us." In Matthew 18:35 Jesus tells us to forgive our brothers and sisters from our hearts. I received one of the most vulgar phone calls last week that I have ever experienced. The call came from another state and it began with language that I never use, the most offensive words in the English language. I recognized the voice instantly or I would have thought it a prank call. Fortunately, at the moment of the call I had a huge sense of the Presence of God. I was feeling God's Presence closely and when the call came, the sense of God's Presence grew stronger. I actually felt incredible love for the person on the phone. Now I grew up around farmers who have a different vocabulary than non-farm people. There are words that farmers use that others may be offended by like the real name for manure. The real word does not bother me in the least, I have spread a lot of it on our farm, but I know it is not right to use the word in specific circles. I say this because I know my response to being sworn at up one side and down the other came from God. Forgiveness was easy. In my heart I so strongly felt the love of God and love forgives. Friends, the grace of God that brings forgiveness our way is there to help us to forgive one another for the worst of sins. I am tired of family splits. The pressure of the virus is harming family relationships. It is only through Christ that we are able to still love each other

and forgive each other. The virus has brought out the worst in some families. The Good News is God's grace is greater than the virus. It may take some effort on our part to see it, but God will bring good out of this. God can do no other. God expects us to forgive each other even as He has forgiven us.

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We come to the last 2 verses of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter. We have been in the books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter since last March beginning with the daily devotions and then when the church reopened preaching through the remainder. I personally began studying 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter back in 1973 as a ninth grader. The study of these two books has fit perfectly during this time of the virus. I may never preach through these books again, so I want to end this series well.

Peter wrote the 2 letters so the believers in Christ would have encouragement to stay faithful to Christ no matter what. The readers had to flee from Jerusalem due to a local outbreak of persecution. God filled Peter's heart with great love for these dispersed Christians. Peter wanted God's sheep fed and these were to be Peter's last written words before he was martyred, crucified upside down.

On the night before Jesus' own death Jesus spoke these words, "You will all fall away because of me (Matthew 26:31). Peter, always quick to speak, "Though they all fall away ... I will never fall away....I will not deny you" (Matthew 26:33,35). *And what happened next? Peter fell once. He fell twice. He fell for the third time before an all-intimating presence of a young servant girl in the high priest's courtyard*" (David R Helm, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter and Jude, pg. 271).

**Luke 22:31-32(NLT)** <sup>31</sup>“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. <sup>32</sup>But 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.”

To the servant girl Peter was not ready to give a response explaining that he was a follower of Jesus and to say it with gentleness and respect. No, he lied through his teeth rather harshly. He let Jesus down to the max. I say he fell into a deep pit, a place where once you have been you never want to go there again. The Bible says that after Simon Peter denied Jesus 3 times he wept bitterly.

Friends, I have denied knowing Jesus. I have failed Jesus in many ways, behaving or speaking in such a way that betrays my belief in Jesus. I have put myself in situations where I have failed the Lord miserably. Some of you here may think the same of yourself. Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Jesus said, once you repent strengthen the brothers. Peter wrote these two letters to strengthen the brothers and sisters in Christ and Peter's faith did not fail. He proclaimed his firm belief, always ready to give an answer to the hope he had within, and it cost him his very life.

The point I wish to make is this. After Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus restored Peter to serve Jesus all the days of Peter's life. Yes, Peter had failed Jesus miserably. Have not we all. Jesus restored Peter and told him to feed the sheep, the church. There is no sin too great that Jesus will not forgive. No matter how far you may have fallen from the Lord, the Lord Jesus will restore you to great spiritual health after you repent. Those who have fallen away from the Lord and then return are often those whose ministries are all the more powerful because when you have been forgiven much you love much. Being humble before God means God is freer to use you because you are no longer so full of yourself. The Lord Jesus will always accept you back no matter how far you have fallen. Jesus restores you.

Some of Peter's last words. "take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability." The Bible predicts at the end of times there will be an apostasy of the faith. People will fall away by the droves paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines taught by demons (1 Tim 4:1). Peter knew what it was like to deny Jesus. Peter wrote everything he did to keep us from doing the same. Peter says, "take care," meaning watch your step, stay on the God's path. Don't fall into the pit of the false teachers or unbelief; it is the surest way to make your life unstable.

Friends, it is only in knowing Jesus that our lives take on a healthy stability. Jesus holds all things together by the power of His word, including our lives. When our lives are emotional wrecks God has His ways of stabilizing us and most often it begins with confessing our wayward ways to God.

. "18But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." If Peter were to appear here today and speak to us, he may say something like this. Jesus is full of grace. Jesus has more grace than we have need. It is God's grace that will sustain you always and then you will not fail. But if you do, God's grace will shower you with forgiveness and restore you to fullness of spiritual health. The more you know of Jesus, the more you want to know. Learn of Him, always and lean on Him completely. "To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."