

The Letters of Peter

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Chapter 1 – A Living Hope by the Resurrection

Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-5.

We have been occupied with the Lord's forming of Peter as a vessel for future usefulness, and we were seeing some of the things which constituted the difficulties in the clay which had to be broken down, adjusted, and brought into line with the Lord's mind. We saw that there was a great deal that had to be done before Peter could come to the place where it was possible for the Lord to use him as He subsequently did.

Now when we come to Peter's letters, we are looking backward rather than forward. We see that work very largely accomplished and as we take up this first letter, we are at once able to recognize what a tremendous change has taken place, what an utterly new position Peter has come to occupy, an entirely new mentality and outlook, because he has come to see everything in a new form and in a new realm. His letters, as you know, are mainly occupied with the Kingdom, but he sees the Kingdom now altogether differently from how he was seeing it in the old days when it was to him an earthly and temporal expectation. It was now a heavenly and a spiritual kingdom. Then he was looking for immediate realization of his ambitions, the gratification of his senses in the matter of a temporal kingdom, with position and so on. Now he has come to see that for this dispensation the Kingdom is a matter of sufferings. His letters have much to say about the present suffering in relation to the Kingdom, and now he sees that the glory has to come. Suffering, and glory to follow. Suffering was no thought of his in the old days. He could not tolerate the thought of suffering. When the Lord spoke about his coming sufferings, Peter began to rebuke him. He would not entertain the idea of suffering in relation to the Kingdom. Now here, in this letter, he is saying very much about the present suffering. Then it was immediate glory, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, and immediate glory. Now in this letter, it is "*the glory which is to follow*", and the glory which is a reward of suffering and of faithfulness.

He here takes up some of the great themes, the great matters, such as election, and gives an altogether new point of view to the matter of election. It is not just Israel now, it is something more than the earthly Israel. He has something to say about redemption. The house of God, the priesthood, all these things are here in his letters, but they are all seen now as belonging to another realm and of another kind. Election is something beyond the earthly Israel. Redemption is something very much different from what he had formerly thought. The house of God was no longer that earthly temple. It is a spiritual house about which he speaks. The priesthood is no longer the Jewish priesthood. It is our priesthood, it is a spiritual matter. It is all in a new form, it is all in a new realm, and if Peter had, as he had before, his own ideal of the covenant of God, now it is entirely transformed, and the one word in his letters which expresses his new conception of the covenant of God is the word 'grace'. You can write with very large letters over what Peter says here the word 'grace'. That is the present form of the covenant of God. So you see the change.

But what a change! At what cost that change was brought about! What a terrible shock the cross of Christ was to him and to his brethren. It shattered everything for them, and it was at that cost of a terrible shattering of their expectations and hopes and all their ideas that this transition was made and this new position was reached. But you do not detect anything of regret here for the change. Rather he says "*though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory*" (1:8). There is no sense of regret or of having lost something. The change has brought very great gain.

He writes to the sojourners, or those who are scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, so that he is not writing to a people in possession of their earthly inheritance when he is writing about the inheritance. It is something not centred in any place on this earth. It is a heavenly inheritance. Then he uses this tremendous phrase — *"God ... who ... begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible"* (v.4). Well, we can enter into that with Peter. Everything went for him with the death of the Lord Jesus. In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus he got everything back in a new form, on a larger scale. The whole thing was transfigured through death and resurrection. The man who was in utter despair at the death of the Lord Jesus, who would say, We had hoped that he had been he who should redeem Israel (though it was not Peter who actually said that, he would certainly agree). His hopes are shattered in the death of the Lord Jesus. But we are begotten again, not unto despair, but to *"a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (v.3).

And this, as we know, has its abiding application, that the Lord brings us by the same way through shattering experiences where things which are in a wrong realm are completely brought to an end. For us it seems that everything of our world has gone. Then the touch of His resurrection recovers, but after a different kind, a different form, a different realm, and we do not regret it. It has not been loss; it is a living hope by resurrection.

Chapter 2 – Taking the End by Faith

{taken from Austin-Sparks.Net}

Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-12.

We are here in the presence of the great transition, the great change, which had taken place in the case of Peter and the apostles and of all who had believed. Before the cross all their hopes and expectations, their entire mentality and horizon were on this earth. They were looking for the realization of a kingdom, a Messianic kingdom of a temporal kind centred in Jerusalem and bringing with it all manner of temporal benefits and advantages, with God working along that line, concentrating His power to show His favour in a temporal way, all the blessings being temporal blessings. The cross had changed that entire outlook and swept it all away as in a flood for the dispensation. With the resurrection of the Lord Jesus it was shown that God's intention was quite different from what they were expecting, for the time being, and that everything for this dispensation is of a spiritual and heavenly character, requiring a complete transformation of their conceptions and judgments and outlook.

Before the resurrection it was a devastating experience for them. Everything had gone with the death of the Lord Jesus, but Peter says, *"God... begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"*, proving that the afterward which came in with the resurrection was far beyond and transcendent over what they had lost. The terms of this Letter are very clear. *"Ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory"*, showing that they came to see that it was not loss but really gain through the cross. That, then, is the background of this Letter: the tremendous change of realm and of form of divine blessing. According to verse 5, the power of God in this dispensation is through faith.

We need to note the link between several fragments here: *"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls, concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you"* (verses 9-10). Which salvation? *"The end of your faith... the salvation of your souls"*. The end is the salvation of your souls. *"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently"* to discover the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

That may not be very clear as it is stated like that, but just lay hold of it for a moment. The statement is quite definite. The prophets sought diligently to know, to discover something, to discover a salvation, and Peter says that salvation is "the salvation of your souls". And he says further that that is not the beginning of your faith but the end of your faith. We place salvation right at the beginning, Peter places salvation right at the end. That does not mean that we are not saved now; it does not mean that we are not being saved now; but it does mean that full salvation, salvation in its full meaning, is future. Soul salvation is the end of our faith. That is one thing.

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you... wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (verses 10, 13). That does not mean that we have not received grace, nor that we are not receiving grace. But there is a grace intimated to the prophets by the Holy Spirit who, as it says here, "was in them", a grace that is to come at the end, at the revelation of Jesus Christ. *"Set your hope ..."*. *"Hope that is seen is not hope"* (Romans 8:24). Hope relates to something future. *"Set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* The apocalypse, the presence in manifestation of Jesus Christ, that is the grace that is to come to you.

Now the third thing which brings us right into touch with that is this: "*Searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them*" (verse 11). The Spirit of Christ in them testified to the sufferings of Christ that should follow. It is remarkable how Israel, the Jews, the Jewish interpreters and teachers, almost entirely overlooked and failed to see that the Messiah was to be a suffering Messiah. All the hopes of Israel concerning the Messiah were hopes of glory, but of temporal glory, glory on this earth. They seem to have entirely missed all that the prophets were saying about the sufferings of the Messiah.

But the prophets found two things going on in them by the Spirit of Christ. In the first instance He was making them know that the Messiah would be a suffering Messiah and He was making them know, not only by informing them, but by their own experience. You cannot read those Messianic prophecies and Psalms without knowing that the writers went through experiences which had to be interpreted, not as the common experiences of man in everyday life, but as something prophetic, something with fuller, further and future meaning. Hear David speak: "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" (Psalm 22:1). There is something more in that than just the ordinary experience of a man. The Spirit was making them know that the Messiah would be a suffering Messiah. The Jews missed that and fastened upon the other side, the glories. The Spirit was making the prophets know what the glories would be and the Jews fastened upon the glories alone. There would be the glories, but they would follow the suffering, be consequent upon the sufferings.

The glories are coming with the manifestation or revelation of the Messiah who suffered. That manifestation of the suffering glorified Christ is the grace that is to come to us. "*If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him*" (Romans 8:17). That is the consummation of grace.

This whole Letter of Peter, as you notice, focuses upon the trials and sufferings and afflictions of Christians in this dispensation. Now in this dispensation it is partnership with Christ in His sufferings and a divine government of those sufferings in the salvation of our souls. Through trial and testing and by way of faith our souls are brought to complete deliverance from the grip of Satan and self over them, bringing them into fellowship with Christ and out of fellowship with Satan, bringing deliverance from the self-principle which was brought into the soul by Adam's decision. That is the salvation of our souls.

It will be a grand thing and this is what these scattered believers to whom Peter was writing had grasped. The language may sound extravagant - "*ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory*" - but they have grasped something. What have they grasped? They have seen that the time is coming when all this wretched, horrid, beastly self-principle that is in the creation, causing all this trouble in every one of us, will have been finally rooted out and replaced by the Christ-principle of utter selflessness where we are never affected or influenced by our own feelings, our own interests and how things touch us, but where we shall be completely delivered from our own souls, these souls which are a curse to us every day, our feelings, our ideas, our wants and our wills. If only we could be completely oblivious of ourselves, be completely free from ourselves, how happy we would be! These people grasped that the time was coming when it would be like that, their faith had laid hold of it and they rejoiced with joy unspeakable. That is the grace which is coming with the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is the prospect, and the trials and sufferings of the present time are working toward that - to get us free from ourselves, to turn us out from ourselves. They had grasped that and they laid hold of the end of their faith. By faith they received the end of their faith and they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

If we are oppressed by our own souls and bothered by our own souls, let us at least turn our thoughts and praise God that the day is coming when we shall be completely

emancipated from ourselves. It might be that if only we could take that attitude of faith and lay hold of that by faith, the joy would spring up now. This is not just eschatology or optimism. The Holy Spirit did this in the prophets and in these believers of the dispersion to whom Peter is writing. He said to them. "Ye see *him not*", 'you never saw Him in the flesh, you have nothing to go upon; the Gospel has been preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; you have nothing of material evidence to prove this; we saw Him - you never had anything like that, but you received it by faith when it was preached to you and the Holy Ghost ratified it and you rejoice.' It is a wonderful picture of what taking by faith, taking the Gospel by faith, taking Christ by faith, taking the end by faith, can do. They rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

In the meantime, "*the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire*" is working the salvation of your souls, to bring in the fullness and finality of the grace of God, the glories that do follow. I do not know what sort of glories you are expecting. For me, there is very little appeal in the idea of having literal material thrones and crowns, or anything like that. But what does appeal to me is the prospect of being freed from this accursed self, then I shall be happy. That will be a kingdom that is worth everything. Well, that is the end of your faith and that is the outcome of your trial of faith. You have to read the whole Letter in the light of that, but there you have it summed up in the first chapter.

Chapter 3 – The Blessings of the Resurrection Realm

Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-5.

In chapter two we briefly took note of the great change which came about by the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as represented by the former expectations and hopes of Peter, as representing both the other apostles and all devoted Jews of their time, and what has now become the living reality of their new spiritual experience and position.

Now, having noted the inclusive statement that by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead a new form of things and a new realm of things has been opened up and entered into we might just note one or two of the things mentioned, the blessings of this new realm and in this new form.

Election Through Grace

The first is the election. "*Elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*". The whole idea of the election has been transformed for Peter. Before it was the election of Israel as an earthly nation and people, but that has disappeared for the time being with even such as Peter. There surely was no need for the Lord Jesus to come and die and rise again to secure the election of Israel. That was something already done in Abraham. The covenant was with Abraham, and his seed was elect. Israel as an earthly people was an elect people, and they were secured by the former or the first covenant. There was no need for the cross to bring that about, it was done. The cross carries us through into an altogether different realm, and we find now, because of the cross, the elect goes beyond Israel, and it is all a matter of grace. In the old dispensation, it would have been something like treachery, if not blasphemy, to speak about a Gentile being elect, coming into the covenant. You could not have sung that hymn, in the old Israelitish dispensation, "He makes the rebel a priest and a king". They were very particular about their kings and priests, that they should be pure Israelitish seed. A rebel a priest and a king? That is grace, that is the new covenant, the new realm and the new form of things. That is what Peter is writing about now.

"*Elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*" - and here the word 'Father' carries us into another realm of a new family, a new birth. It is not the old Israelitish idea of God their Father. It is something now of grace. It is not connected with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is connected with the Lord Jesus, "*... He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*" (Eph. 1:4). It is another realm secured by grace.

Sanctification of the Spirit

"*In sanctification of the Spirit*" (v.2). Here again a change is marked. The old sanctification was ceremonial, ceremonial by reason of external rites and ceremonies. The old sanctification was entirely an external thing. Here it is a new dispensation and a new realm and a new order. It is sanctification in the Spirit, something quite different.

The Blood of Sprinkling

"*Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*" (v.2), or the blood of sprinkling. But a vast difference is marked between Sinai, the blood of sprinkling which followed the giving of the law, which was the blood of condemnation, of judgment, that any who failed would die. This again is the blood of sprinkling unto life, not unto death; unto justification, of faith, not unto condemnation; unto liberty, the law of liberty, not unto bondage. The blood here sets free; the blood in the old time led into bondage. That

is, the old covenant and the law was one of bondage, of condemnation, of judgment, something hanging over your head all the time of which you would be afraid. The blood of sprinkling of Jesus Christ is something quite other. There is no condemnation, there is no hanging over the head of threats. There is liberty through this precious blood.

And all this is carried through by the divine Trinity. You notice they are all here. God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Spirit. The foreknowledge of God the Father, sanctification of the Spirit, the blood of Jesus Christ — the whole divine Trinity and Godhead moving in grace.

A Living Hope

And then this emerges into the hope. What a different hope. At best the old hope was Canaan, the land, Jerusalem, earthly, temporal, but 'begotten to a living hope'. It is another hope; not earth, but heaven; not temporal, but eternal. It is another hope, another inheritance, incorruptible. That could never have been said of Canaan or of Jerusalem.

"... *undefiled, and that fadeth not away ...*" (v.4). That could never have been said in the old dispensation. No, those things do not belong to anything here, but they belong to the new inheritance in the new place, and this all by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

These are only observations. They are not by any means an exhausting of the content and the implications, but they help us to note what a tremendous thing has happened for Peter, for his brethren, and for us, by the death of the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 4 – The Power of God ... Through Faith

Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9.

The Manifestation of the Power of God in the Old Dispensation

The phrase that has impressed me particularly is that in the fifth verse — “*by the power of God ... through faith*”. That, in itself, marks a very big change. In the old dispensation, the Old Testament times, the power of God was manifested on temporal grounds. You had only to do certain things, and the power of God was manifested, the power of God was seen working for your temporal well-being, and everything was looked at from that standpoint. If a man prospered in business, if there was money and plenty of it, if you succeeded in any undertaking, if you were triumphant in war, it was all a mark of the power of God working on your behalf. The power of God then was almost invariably looked at through the temporal blessings and prosperities which came to people. It was a national conception and it was an individual conception. So that God’s power for them in those times was just a matter of — Well, you wanted something and you asked God for it, and if you were not breaking the law of God you got it, and so it was day by day something very tangible, something very manifest here in this life.

The Manifestation of the Power of God in the New Dispensation

Now what Peter is saying clearly in this whole letter is that it is not like that now. It may be that from time to time the Lord blesses you in temporal ways, undertakes for you in temporal difficulties, provides for you in temporal need and gets you out of troubles. But that is not the normal. More often He does not do it. If He does it once, nine times out of ten He does not do it. “*The trial or your faith*”, “*put to grief in manifold trials*”, testings. The whole letter bears down upon this, and says, No, the dispensation has changed, and you have no longer to interpret the power of God in terms of temporal deliverances, prosperings. Peter may miraculously be delivered from prison, and there were other marks, signs, even in apostolic times, but they are not the normal, they are quite exceptional. If you look, you will see that, if delivered from prison once, left in prison a good many times. If undertaken for on one occasion, an overwhelming number of similar occasions where there were no interventions of God. There may be a healing, but Trophimus will be left at Miletus sick (2 Tim. 4:20), and Paul will be left in prison, and there will not be miraculous interventions always as the normal life. The dispensation has changed.

And yet the apostle says that does not mean that the power of God is different or less. It is being manifested in another way in this dispensation, an essentially spiritual way, and it is mainly concerned with one thing. It is not concerned with the temporal blessings of the Lord’s people in this dispensation. It is not mainly concerned with such things as we are always asking for and craving and expecting, but which I think we must agree ninety-nine times out of a hundred we are not given, we are denied, they are refused us, and sometimes the question arises — What about the power of God, where is the power of God? And we feel that such situations are a contradiction to the power of God; there must be something wrong. We are left to go through instead of being delivered out. There must be something wrong, the power of God is not being manifested. We may have an Old Testament mentality. It is not pleasant teaching, it is difficult, but that is just the whole point of this letter. It is to help people in that very kind of difficulty.

The Power of God and the Salvation of the Soul

Now, what is the focal point of the power of God in this dispensation? "*The power of God ... through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*". What is that? "*Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls*". Soul salvation is the point of the concentration of divine power. When we talk about the salvation of the soul, or souls, we almost entirely limit that to forgiveness and being saved from hell and judgment. But here the salvation of the soul is the ultimate, the end, the object which is in view. The power of God through faith — the end of your faith, the salvation of your soul. What, then, is the power of God occupied with? Getting our souls into another realm, another position. It was in the soul realm that sin entered and did Satan's havoc in the race. The soul desired, the soul lusted, the soul reasoned, and the soul decided, and Satan got his purchase and captured the soul, so that all the reasonings and desirings and willings of man naturally are actuated on the basis of personal interest. The salvation of the soul is the reversing of what Satan did in capturing the soul and bringing all reasonings, all desirings, and all willings into another relationship than that of self and Satan, into relationship with God and into relationship with heavenly things. It is getting our souls under the absolute government of God instead of the government of Satan. It is a soul matter, and it is a life process, and the end of our faith is the salvation of our souls, but the power all the time is centred in this one thing — the salvation of our soul through faith.

Now, it is not exaggerating to say that a thousand times a week that question arises for us. God does not do what He did in the Old Testament times when you are wanting, expecting Him to: intervene, deliver, change circumstances, give you a seal of His approval by prospering in temporal things. It must have been a terrible shock to the Jews to be told that a wealthy, religious man had no more chance of the Kingdom of God than the poor beggar sitting at the gate of Dives with a dog licking his sores; that this poor man stood as good a chance, perhaps a better, than the other one — that is all a mark of God's disapproval. This man with all his wealth — that is the mark of the blessing of God. That is how they judged. The Lord Jesus said, 'No, in this new dispensation that is not the standard at all.' It is revolutionary; it was a shock; and other things He said like that. They believed that anything in the way of temporal blessing was a mark of God's favour, and therefore of God's power on their behalf. If things went wrong, that is the sign of God's disfavour. That is the whole argument of the book of Job. God is judging from another standpoint. You may have a good deal of adversity, the Lord may seem to be leaving you, and that may be more the mark of God's presence and power to get your soul into a position, than if you had all prosperity and never went through a trial of faith like this. That can be said in other words, but it is something to be faced. The Lord does not just come in and prevent things from happening, and He does not just come in and deliver from things that have happened. Sometimes it depends very much upon whether there are spiritual principles involved, whether our soul is at stake over the matter. When He gets our souls into the right place, He can do things, but if we are going to build upon that, build our salvation upon what God does in this world for us, it is too dangerous to the Lord. His power is more concerned with getting our souls saved than with getting our temporal well-being established, and that is a wide field; it covers a lot of ground. But that is what this letter is about, as I see it.

"*The power of God ... through faith*". "*The end of your faith, the salvation of your souls*", and from the beginning to the end — trial, the trial of your faith.

Chapter 5 – Faith and the Salvation of the Soul

Reading: 1 Peter 1:10-17.

The special point in that section is the new dispensation with its new manner of life. It is rather impressive to note two things which are said as to an attitude toward this dispensation from outside. The prophets had intimation that the things that they were being caused to say did not relate to themselves, but related to a people and a time ahead of themselves. They were prophesying for a time to come and for the benefit of a people not yet present, a people of a coming dispensation; they were made aware of that. And their reaction to the intimation was that they were found in a state of earnest and eager enquiry. What does this mean? We would very much like to know what these people are going to experience, what they are going to inherit, what they are going to come into. They sought and searched diligently to know the meaning and value of the things which they were saying which belonged to the people of a coming dispensation. They were tremendously impressed with something which was beyond their own time and beyond the present and immediate application of the things which they were saying.

Then the other thing which seems even more than that is "*which things angels desire to look into*", and the force of the language actually used by the apostle is that angels bend down to scrutinize; they are in that attitude of poise and eager interest and enquiry. 'Which things angels bend down to look into', "*desire to look into*".

If both of those things are true, it surely does mean that if this is the dispensation, as Peter is saying, of those things, there is something tremendous bound up with this dispensation; that we have come into something which the prophets and angels have not entered into but eagerly and earnestly desire to know about. It is difficult, perhaps, to grasp, but here is Scripture, here is the Word of God, saying this. Well, what is it?

We look again, and we find that it has to do with the sufferings of the Christ and the glories that should follow. The prophets testified to the sufferings of the Christ and the glories that should follow but not as to Himself alone. It is 'to you', 'It is to you that they did testify these things' — "*the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow*" are concentrated upon a people in this dispensation. The meaning of His sufferings has a peculiar value for the people of this dispensation. The glories following His suffering are peculiarly bound up with the people of this dispensation.

Where do all the Old Testament saints come in? Are they excluded? No, that is not so. That is put right by the letter to the Hebrews. "*These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect*" (Hebr. 11:39-40); that is, they had to wait for us before they got their inheritance. It was all pointing onward to us. It is only a re-emphasis upon the tremendous significance of this dispensation, for all other dispensations meet in this dispensation, all other dispensations derive their value from this dispensation in which the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow are concentrated.

Then Peter says that there are two things which relate to this tremendous inheritance: two things so far as we are concerned. One is faith, and the other is the effect of that faith — the saving of our souls.

The Dispensation of Faith

Now, this is a dispensation of faith. Paul says that to Timothy – *“a dispensation of ... faith”* (1 Tim. 1:4) There is no doubt about it, there is no getting away from it, it is as well that we face it fairly and squarely, a thing that we have not done and we find it the most difficult thing to do. It is all very well to reduce it to a matter of faith in the Lord Jesus for salvation; that is, to be saved from condemnation, to become the Lord’s, but that is a mere fragment of the whole. In this dispensation God is dealing with His people in an entirely different way from what He dealt with then in the other dispensation. Then you had only to obey the Lord’s commandments and you had temporal prosperity. All the marks of your faithfulness to God were manifest and obvious. But in this dispensation, that is not the way of the Lord’s dealing with His people. You may be utterly faithful to God without any reservations, and not get any material seal in the realm of temporal things. There are times, of course, when the Lord does work for us and make provision and deliver us, but that is not the normal state of this dispensation. The normal state of this dispensation is that it is a dispensation of faith, and that works out that, even when you are utterly abandoned to the Lord, sometimes the Lord does not get you out of your difficulties. You are in trouble, you are in distress, you are in straitened circumstances. It is so clear. Why should Paul tabulate all those adversities: hunger, thirst, nakedness, peril, shipwreck, imprisonment, treachery, robbers, enemies amongst supposed friends, sickness, infirmity, and the Lord not intervene except at certain times for special purposes giving special intervention, as in getting Peter out of prison on that occasion? But He did not eventually get him out of prison and deliver him from the executioner, nor did He with Paul. These all suffered in those ways, and it was all a matter of faith. If I am hungry, where is my heavenly Father? If I am in difficulty and adversity, and the Lord does not do anything, does it mean the Lord is not faithful, the Lord is not good, the Lord is not true? No! In thousands of ways that is the nature of this dispensation, and I say we have not faced it and we are not squarely facing it and accepting it. It is the nature of this dispensation. It is a dispensation of faith.

The Way of Soul Salvation

The apostle says that the effect of that is that your souls are being saved. It is soul salvation, and that is shown to be a much bigger thing than what we mean when we talk about the salvation of souls. We mean getting them out of sin and the grip of Satan and to the Lord. But the New Testament shows that soul salvation is a very much bigger thing than that, that salvation is infinitely bigger than conversion, and ‘the salvation of your souls’ goes right on to the end. *“... receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls”*. In what way is soul salvation going on? Is it not just bound up with this — I am in difficulty, I am in adversity, I am in trial, my whole soul craves for a change of situation. It is the soul realm. But is not the Lord rather more concerned to have me on top of the situation in spirit, where my soul is not dictating the terms and governing me and bringing me down into oppression because of its longings for different conditions? I am denying my soul and in my spirit I am walking with the Lord, and my soul is not dominant.

You see how this follows on in the matter of conduct in this dispensation, *“... not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in the time of your ignorance”*, not being governed by that soul life; now to live above the soul life and its dictates and its cravings, in strength of spirit. In the old days if your soul craved for something, you went after it to satisfy your soul, and that kept you bound in a natural realm, and it is absolutely opposed to faith. The satisfaction of the soul, the gratifying of the soul is positively opposed to faith. Here you are, like Paul or Peter, suddenly clamped in prison. This is horrible, I do not like this, please let me get out! Your whole soul begins to writhe and to demand and crave. Your souls will never be satisfied until you are out. Break out, or somehow or other bribe somebody to let you out, and what spiritual gain is there? Where have you got spiritually? But supposing like Paul, you are a prisoner on a chain,

and, while your soul would very much like to be free — for Paul said, “*I would to God, that ... all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds*” (Acts 26:29). The chain was there, he was conscious of it, his soul did not like the chain, but he is on top of his chain. When he is writing those letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, his spirit is above, he has brought his soul into the captivity of Christ, his soul is saved.

Now Peter says that faith is the way of the salvation of the soul, and as the soul is saved through the triumph of faith, something happens. The glories following the suffering come into your spirit. You rejoice “*with joy unspeakable and full of glory*”. It is very true to experience, that if in the spirit we get victory over our own souls, when we bring those soul activities and cravings into captivity to Christ and get on top of our own souls in spirit, even in a little way, a wonderful joy comes in. But the other way of gratifying the soul, giving it what it wants does not bring much joy. We say, I wish I had never done that! I simply pandered to my own lower nature! Bring that soul into captivity to Christ and in spirit gain the ascendance, and the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of glory, at once witnesses within, and you have some of the glory that follows. It is in a spiritual way now entering into the glories of the coming age. It is through severe testings of faith and the triumph of faith which is itself the salvation of the soul. The soul must see; faith, of course, is faith and does not see. The triumph of faith is the salvation of the soul, and the salvation of the soul is inheriting the glories that do follow.

We must ask the Lord to strengthen us to look square in the face this dispensation of faith. I am all the time asking the Lord for this, that and the other, but why do I want it? Is that my soul? Is it ‘I’? It may be the Lord will never be able to grant that until I have come to the place where I am prepared to go without it. That is victory of your soul. The Lord may give you the thing then, but while for yourself you want it, you are contradicting the very law of this dispensation — your faith.

Chapter 6 – A Spiritual Addition Sum

Reading: 2 Peter 1:5-11.

First to bring into view the object, the goal, the reason. Ultimately it is a rich or abundant entrance into the eternal Kingdom; that is, not a scraping in, just managing to be there, arriving anyhow, somehow; but an abundant entrance, an entrance in full and rich supply.

Immediately unto that end a state is necessary, and that state is said to be fruitful *"unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* by means of clear far-sightedness of vision. Now unto this fruitful knowledge, a spiritual far-sightedness, the apostle gives us this sum of things which are to be added.

Things which are to be Added to Faith

Virtue

"To faith ... virtue". It is a word which just means the quality of excellence, the thing which is of pre-eminent estimation. Here, of course, it is moral excellence. He has used the word about God just a few sentences before (verse 3): *"Him that called us by His own glory and virtue"* or excellence. Now, says the apostle, to your faith add this quality of excellence. It is all an appeal to refuse anything that is second or third rate, anything that is make-do, discontentedness with anything short of the highest standard, just the highest standard of spiritual and moral excellence. That is virtue.

Knowledge

"To virtue knowledge", to be knowledgeable Christians, not Christians who are ignorant, without understanding, but are all the time seeking to be people who know in a right sense; really bent upon knowing the Lord; getting along, wandering through life, taking it as it comes, but really bent upon knowing the Lord; adding knowledge.

Self-Control

"To your knowledge temperance". The word here unfortunately translated 'temperance' in the Authorized, is better translated 'self-control'; the will is called into operation and that is self-control. In our whole being there are powers which are for good, but which can run away with us and become our master. In the realm of our bodies, there are appetites and so on. Our souls with their cravings can take possession of us and we may become their slaves. The word is now, by the Holy Spirit within, we are to take hold of ourselves, we are to bring our wills into play and to say, No, definitely and positively, to anything lawless in our tendencies, in our passions, desires and appetites, and bring them within control. *"I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage"* (1 Cor. 9:27); and, speaking of the competitors in the Olympic games with which so many of his converts were familiar, he repeatedly pointed out the necessity for self-discipline in training. Now Peter uses the word which means just that. It means bringing yourself under control, having the mastery of the forces of your being which would run away with you, whether they be physical or mental or soulical.

Patience

"And to self-control, patience" (A.V.) and to Peter the word for patience is 'endurance' (R.V.). Add endurance. Do not let it be spasmodic, up one day and down the next, variable, but this feature and virtue of endurance, persistence, keeping on.

Godliness

"To patience or endurance, godliness". Peter uses this word quite a few times in this second letter. It simply means what is consistent with God. Old translators used to translate it as piety. It is a Puritan word which came into disrepute and was used rather to imply weakness. People were called pious. But the word 'godliness' is just that; what is consistent with God, God-likeness.

Love

"And to godliness love", love of the brethren; and to love of the brethren, love — a double emphasis upon this matter of love.

The Outcome of the Addition

Now summing up those seven things, the apostle brings them all to bear upon one word, which again, unfortunately, is not properly translated. *"If these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. He does not use the same word as he has used before when he said, Add knowledge. He uses now the larger word, *epignosis*, which is full knowledge. *"Unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. That is the object, that is the thing which governs. The full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ demands diligence, virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, Godlikeness, love, and if these things are in you, you will come to the full knowledge of the Lord Jesus and will not be unfruitful.

Then he says, *"He that lacks these things is blind, seeing only what is near"*. That is a very terse phrase, 'seeing only what is near', near-sighted, a very little world. Look at each of these things and take them out and see what a little world you have without them, but what a big world these things introduce. Adding knowledge is enlarging our world; and you do not lose by seeking excellence. You certainly do not lose by self-control. Sooner or later, the person who does not exercise self-control over appetites and so on will become a very selfish person and a selfish person is always a person of a little world. The person with self-control says, I see there are greater values in saying No to that; there is something to be gained by just putting it back. The person without self-control takes the thing without a second thought as to what lies beyond. It is a little world you have if you only see what is near. With "these things", you have far-sightedness, and your world is a much bigger one, and the world in which you move is the world of the full knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the end is an abundant entrance to the everlasting kingdom.

Bunyan's picture in his second 'Pilgrim's Progress' with Patience and Passion is one of the best illustrations of this thing. Patience is quite prepared to go without, to say No and to wait. Passion grabs at everything, wanting it now, not content to wait. That is what Peter was saying, and it is of course of very apt application to those Christians in the conditions in which they were when Peter wrote to them this letter. He comes to us and says, is it a full knowledge of the Lord Jesus that you are after, a large world of spiritual fulness, an abundant entrance into the Kingdom, not just scraping in? Well, that is the way. Add knowledge, be out to know the Lord; and to your knowledge virtue on the way for the highest excellence of life and character; self-control — by the aid of the Holy Spirit bring the will into operation to say, No and Yes at the right time. So your world is enlarging, your range extending and you are getting away from the mere, near-at-hand things.

Chapter 7 – God’s Responsibility and Ours

Reading: 2 Peter 1:1-11.

That portion is very full, and provides a ground for much, consideration. I just point out one or two things, without touching details.

God’s Faithfulness in Calling

There are three aspects of the section. The first is the aspect of God — *“... have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ”*. That word ‘righteousness’ as used there would be better translated faithfulness, for that is the sense in which, the word is used here. Peter, as you know, is writing to Jewish believers of the dispersion, and in so doing he is saying in effect, The Jews as such rejected God in Christ and in so doing rejected their own interests and cut themselves off from all prospect in the divine purpose in this dispensation, but God is faithful, and if the nation has done that, wherever He finds in the nation those who repudiate the nation’s attitude and turn in faith to His Son the Lord Jesus, He is faithful to them to bring them into the good of the specific purposes bound up with, this dispensation. So Peter says, those amongst Jews, the rejecting nation, who have found like precious faith with us because of the faithfulness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the basis of everything: like precious faith. On the basis of His faithfulness we come into the sphere of all these divine blessings which are mentioned after this. *“... has granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness”, “precious and exceeding great promises”*. All that inheritance is because of God’s faithfulness to those who put faith in Him.

God’s Provision to Make Good the Calling

The second aspect in general is according to two things: the knowledge of God and the power of God. *“Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”; “all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us”*. That is one aspect.

And then the power — *“seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things”*; knowledge and power divine for making good all the inheritance, all the heritage in Christ. He has given us the knowledge and He gives us the power.

Our Response

Firstly His faithfulness in calling, in letting in, then being within the knowledge and the power available for all that is there, the divine provision for making good. This follows the whole matter of making good which is summed up in that phrase in verse 10: *“give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure”*. God’s faithfulness in calling; God’s provision to make good the calling; our response — *“give the more diligence”*. Peter used that word twice, for it is also in verse 5: *“adding on your part all diligence”*. This should be our response because of God’s faithfulness and God’s provision. There is laid upon us a responsibility because the Lord has made every provision, has done everything from His side. We are not put under responsibility to find our way in or to find the resources for making good. God has taken full responsibility for that. Our responsibility is to give diligence, more diligence, and to make our calling and election sure.

That is the broad outline of that section. The details we leave for the time, and those details are in diligent application — adding, adding, adding, this and that and that. We hold that over for the moment. We are brought in by the faithfulness of God; we are

provided with all that is needed by the faithfulness of God; now what are you going to do about it? The call is, Give diligence, give the more diligence, make sure! It will not just happen, after all that God has done. There is to be a strong response on our side to the call, to all that the Lord has gathered around us.

Chapter 8 – Establishment in the Present Truth

Reading: 2 Peter 1:12-21.

So Peter goes on with his commission. His commission was, when he had turned again after his fall in the denial of the Lord, that he should strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32), and these two letters are in the way of fulfilling that commission. This paragraph which we have just read hears that mark very clearly. Peter here breathes the spirit of earnest solicitude that those to whom he writes may be established, confirmed, and he says that he is taking every measure to provide for that, and every precaution against their being left unprovided for in the spiritual life. His first letter very largely circled round Matthew 16, the Rock and the Church built thereon. The second letter seems to circle around Matthew 17, the transfiguration comes right into view here.

These two things, with quite a large number of others, indicate that many things said or experiences gone through, many things seen at one time, may not at that time be understood or be of real spiritual meaning, but they sink down into the sub-consciousness, more or less remembered, unto a time when the Holy Spirit begins to make the person or the persons concerned live in a new way. Then all those things begin to come back with a life and meaning which they did not possess for such people at the beginning.

So here we see Peter living in the good of things which at one time did not make any difference to him, although they were the greatest things that could happen to a man. He had that flash of revelation – *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matt. 16:16), the revelation which the Lord said was from the Father, but even such a thing did not save him from the terrible denial of that same Lord. He was in the mount of Transfiguration, and nothing could have been a greater experience than that to any man, and yet even having seen Christ in His glory did not save him. It is almost unimaginable. Those two things, and the many others, and yet the crash came until the man passed into a position where he himself was all alive to the things of the Spirit, and then those things began to come up from beneath and became the very things which constituted his ministry, which was a very great ministry.

This is a point which may bear repetition in line with what Peter says here, *“I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them”*. In line with that, a repetition is not, perhaps, out of place. You know these things. We have heard that! That is not new! There was a point at which some might have said to Peter, Well, you know the Lord Jesus said so-and-so. He would have said, Yes, I know. The Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mount. Oh yes, I know that — I was there! Yet it could be objective and of little or no spiritual power in the life. But Peter has passed through to the real spiritual power and value of things which were once known in that way, and he is saying now, You know them and you are established in the existing truth, the truth which has come in, which now is. The Authorized Version calls it ‘the present truth’, the truth of this dispensation. And yet knowing them and being established in them as the system of truth for this dispensation, you are open even to do what I did in possession of these things. You may fall away, be carried off, get into scenes and conditions where there is nothing to feed spiritual life. All this may be, after all, of little saving power in the presence of certain conditions and situations. Peter says, I am not taking risks, I am going to repeat. I want you to understand that what we are talking about and standing in is not cunningly devised fables, whatever that may refer to. It is not all something fictitious, made up, pretty stories. This is something very real, and has become very real in our experience. We have been eyewitnesses of this, we know, and the thing has become tremendously real.

Peter finds the reality, or the need for reality, emphasized by the realization of the Lord's word about his death, his passing being not far ahead. The Lord said to him, "*When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.*" And the writer adds the note "*Now this he spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God*" (John 21:18-19). And Peter says, Well, I am old now so it cannot be long, although that is not exactly what he meant when he said "*comes swiftly*". He knew that, so far as time was concerned, it could not be long before he went, and that the form of death would be a swift one. It would be no lingering death in which he could exhort the saints. He is anticipating the coming departure. And that is making him take this very serious course to see to it that even though people knew things in a way, that they really were established in the present truth.

The Lord inspired Peter in this way, there is no doubt about it, and the message to us is, Do not let us ever settle down and think we know; we have heard it, we have the terms, we have the language, we have the truths, we have got it, and we know. We always need to know the same things in new ways, in new depths, with new meaning, and the true course of a spiritual life is that the things most well-known in a way are the things which are always coming to reveal new fulnesses. We are going back to beginning things, as we could call them so often, and find much more there than ever we knew. We never exhaust the content of anything that is of God. We must never take the mental attitude — I have heard that so often, I know all about it, I am almost wearied with that truth. No; whatever may be wearisome in the way in which it is presented, the thing itself has much more to divulge than ever we imagined.

And Peter carries this on and says, Not only is my departure coming soon, but remember, for you there is a crisis — the Lord is coming. It is a marvellous thing. We hardly notice the transition from the mount of Transfiguration to the Lord's coming. Peter says in effect, The nature of those two is the same: His power and His coming, or His presence. You know exactly how you will see Him when He comes again and you will know exactly what the meaning of His coming will be.

Our word for the moment is the need to be established in what we know, or what we think we know, that it must be something in which our feet stand, and not a lot that we hold for then we can just be swept away when other conditions are around us.

Chapter 9 – “Give the More Diligence”

Reading: 2 Peter 1:1-11.

Although I may not see a particular call for this word here, it has so impressed itself upon me that I feel it is a word that the Lord wants underlined - this word 'diligence' twice used by Peter. "... *adding on your part all diligence*" (verse 5), "... *give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure*" (verse 10). Diligence does not need very much defining as a word. It simply means earnest application, the applying of ourselves earnestly to the matter on hand. It is a word used quite a lot in the New Testament, and, apart from the word, the atmosphere represented and created by the word is found everywhere in the New Testament, especially from the Acts onwards. The spirit of the Christians and the Lord's servants is one of diligence, earnest application, to this great matter of the knowledge of the Lord and of what is associated therewith.

Diligence Over Against Passivity

Very simply, then, diligence first of all stands over against passivity. Passivity can be one of the great enemies of spiritual progress, spiritual strength and spiritual effectiveness. Spiritual passivity is a very dangerous thing. It is dangerous very largely in the direction of a failure to discriminate between passivity and restful trust. We need not point out the difference between those, but there it is. It is one of the things where we have to be instructed and on which we have to be very much alive. The difference between passivity, inertia, spiritual carelessness, indifference or even laziness, and that restful trust which is always powerful and which is always energetic. There seems to be a strange contradiction in ideas, if not in terms in the suggestion of the apostle that we should labour to enter into rest. That sounds strange. "*Let us therefore labour to enter into that rest*" (Heb. 4:11). But true rest is something that you have to be very definite about, very strong about; you have to take yourself in hand, definitely roll your anxiety on the Lord. Faith, rest, trust, is energetic. Passivity has none of those elements. It is just supineness. Well, diligence stands positively over against passivity.

Diligence Over Against False Contentment

It also stands over against a false contentedness. There is a true contentment of which the apostle speaks when he says, "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content*" (Phil. 4:11). That is true contentment, a fruit of the Spirit, the outcome of definite self-discipline. But there is a false contentedness, a settling down too soon, accepting our present position as sufficient, and there are many today who are losing a great deal because they have no outreach, no sense of great need. That may not be true of us, at any rate the majority of us here, but it is something to note that there is a contentedness which is very wrong and which will deprive us of all that the apostle is presenting as that to which we are called and chosen in Christ. Beware of a false contentedness. Remember that there is a standpoint from which all God's movements and activities with us come out of His own discontent: His movements with His servants of old, as with Abraham: "Get thee up, get thee out, get thee into", were the expression of God's discontent with things as they were, and He had to bring Abraham into fellowship with His own discontent. While, on the one hand, there should be a true contentment, on the other hand, no child or servant of God should ever be characterised by contentedness which means there is no real pressing on, reach out, and consciousness of much more yet that has never been imagined as to the Lord's purpose.

Diligence Over Against Distraction

Again, diligence will stand over against distraction, dividedness or detraction. Here is a something which the apostle says is a matter for us, and what it amounts to is resolutely resisting the distracting things, the things which would divide mind, attention and heart, and that will detract from the one business on hand. It is a case of undividedly and unreservedly applying the heart and mind to God's calling, and diligence will therefore require just the brushing aside of things that would come in to take from the completeness of application. It is the refusal to be divided over a number of things, to have one object and to make everything come into line with that, and what cannot must stand back, we are on this business. That is diligence over against distraction and dividedness.

Diligence Over Against Superficiality

Once more, it will certainly stand over against all superficiality, just glibly skimming the surface, just passing lightly on our way. Diligence will mean a getting down to the heart of things and seeking to grasp the inner depths of God's meanings, not just taking things at their surface value, but seeking to know all that God means by something: diligence working against superficiality.

Diligence Over Against Procrastination

And then, finally, diligence will certainly be opposed to procrastination, to delay. This is one of our great enemies, the great peril of thinking that sometime we will get down to it, things will help us when we get here or there, when this happens or that. Sometimes it is without any kind of defined situation in which it will be done, but it is not now; it will be. We may not have thought when or how, but it will be, that is ahead, that is our object. Or it may be when we know this or that, when we are sure on some point we will be able to concentrate and get down to it, but that goes on for ever. You never will, however old you get; you will never be free of that peril of thinking, yes, this is going to be, but it is not now. Diligence says, We are not delaying this; as far as in us lies, now is the time, and it may never be unless it is now. Diligence says, Now is the time to get down to it as far as possible. Probably we shall discover, as we take that attitude, that we are making possible a good deal more and ruling out a great deal of the weakness and the loss which is continually sustained by this tomorrow that never comes, this going to do it which never arrives. Diligence says, No, today!

We have not said anything about the things that come into Peter's great addition sum, but we approach it by this word 'diligence'. Give the more diligence, add in your diligence. The Lord make us diligent servants.