February 3/4, 2018

Gospel Living

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

2 Peter 1:5-11

Pastor Bryan Clark

Let's imagine that your dream, your passion, is to be a farmer. Now you know I have great respect for farmers and ranchers—I think they are amazing people! And let's imagine that that is your passion. Only one problem…you have nothing you need to be a farmer. So I show up and because I so respect that calling, I'm going to be your benefactor—I'm going to make it happen. I buy you land; I build you a house; I build you barns; I buy you machinery, fertilizer, seed, irrigation—everything you need to be a farmer, I'll take care of it. There's only one thing you need to do. What is that? Farm! I'm not going to do that for you. Peter says that God has given us everything that we need to live out this life that our soul longs for in Christ. He has given you everything you need. Just one thing we need to do. What is that? To live like it! What does that mean? I'm so glad you asked because we're going to talk about that this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 1. Last week we learned the gospel truth in verses 1-4 of chapter 1 which reminded us that as a gift of His grace and mercy, He has given us everything that we need. We have become *partakers of the divine nature.* We're the recipients of *these precious and magnificent promises.* We have been set free from the bondage to sin and from the corruption and disappointments of this world. And that gives way to Verse 5:

> **Now for this very reason…** (What reason? Because the gospel truth is true) **for this very reason also, applying all diligence,** (which is a reminder this doesn't happen automatically. Just because you trust Christ as Savior doesn't mean you wake up one morning and everything is different. You have to apply all diligence. You have to work hard to do your part to bring this to pass.) **…applying all diligence in your faith supply moral excellence,**

So **faith** is what we were given, and then it goes on to list seven, what the NASB calls **qualities** or *virtues* that basically create a bit of a checklist in order to assess where I'm at in this journey. So there is a lot of debate as to whether these are seven random things in a checklist, whether they're like links in a chain, or whether they're like stairsteps. I think the most likely is that they're like stairsteps. That's the way the text is written. I think that makes the most sense. What's important to understand about that is one leads into another. So essentially we're all going to probably get stuck somewhere for some reason, and it's helpful to assess where am I stuck, why am I stuck there, and what is necessary to keep moving forward...to take the next step?

The other thing that is worth noting in Verse 5 is the word **supply**. First of all that's an imperative; it's a command. There is no question that Peter has told us God has done everything necessary, but we're commanded to take these necessary steps in order to live it out, in order to experience this life in Christ that our soul desires. So it's critical that we understand there's no magic in this. You don't just wake up one morning and all of it is true in the sense of being lived out. You have to have this partnership where He's done His part, but now it's necessary for us to do our part. The word **supply** there is also a really interesting Greek word. It's the word from which we get our word *chorus*. Basically the roots of this word were used to describe—for example—when a play would come to town in the first century Greek world, basically all they brought were the actors and the play. But in order to really bring this play to life, in order to make it special, a benefactor would have to step up, and that benefactor would provide the resources for the music, for the costumes, for the pageantry, for everything that would bring this play to life and make it special. That's this word

supply; that's the root of it. So essentially God has given us everything necessary to live this life, but now we have to diligently do our part—to bring the music and the costumes and the color and the pageantry—to bring this to life, for it's something more than merely a ticket to heaven, but actually it's that life that our soul longs for. So that's a good way to think of the list that follows.

So the first one is **moral excellence**. **Excellence** is the same word that was used to describe Jesus in Verse 3. Essentially the Greek philosophers saw this word as a word that they would translate as *virtue*, and *virtuous* meant to live in a way that was consistent with your nature. So it really applied to anything. For example, if you planted a corn seed in the ground and corn grows, they would define that as *virtuous* because the corn is consistent with the nature of that seed. You plant a flower seed. Then a flower grows, and that would be considered *virtuous* because a flower is consistent with the seed—the essence or the nature of the seed. So the idea then is Jesus is righteous and that's because of His essence—that's who He is. Out of Him flows righteousness because His very essence is righteous. So the beginning step is really an understanding of who we are as the people of God, who we are as the children of God—that we're God's own possession, we're *partakers of the divine nature*. We have been set free from the corruption of the world; we're recipients of these *precious and magnificent promises*. So all of that is at our core and there should be a longing to pursue and understand what that means and to live that way.

Here's the reality: If that isn't a longing or a passion, you're stuck right there. Nothing of significance is going to happen in terms of living out this Christian life if there isn't something deep within you that wants that. I can buy you the land and the tractors and the barns and everything necessary for you to be a successful farmer. But if your passion is to be a middle-school math teacher, if you don't even like to be outdoors, it's not going to work. There has to be something within you—a fire within you that says, "That is my longing; that's my passion, and I'm going to do what's necessary to make this happen." So that is like step one—a really good place to start the assessment. Is that really what's in you? Is that the fire that burns in you and is that really how you live your life? Or is this just kind of something on the side that you know? You visit God every now and then and it's really not much more to you than that. So step one has to be kind of this core virtue—this longing, this desire—because it's not an easy road. If you're going to travel this road, it has to matter to you.

…from moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge; (Vs. 5b)

I mentioned last week that **knowledge** is a critical term in 2 Peter. He uses it eleven times in three short chapters. **Knowledge** is information, but it's not merely information. It's not like you're accumulating information in order to take a quiz. It has much more to do with this information, this truth that then is assimilated into life in order to experience this life in Christ. It's the difference between being an Ag student at college and processing the information because there's a test coming and actually being a farmer and trying to farm and trying to figure this out and accumulate the knowledge to go out and apply it and make it happen—to fulfill your dream!

Most of these terms have direct relevance to the false teachers that Peter is concerned about. They come in and they proclaim lies—they deceive. There are religious lies or secular worldly lies. Every day we are bombarded by hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of lies. In order to travel this path, we must know the truth. Jesus said*, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free*." There's no way anyone in the room is ever going to be able to keep up with the lies. The only hope you have is if you clearly understand the truth. The truth exposes the lies, and you live accordingly. A lot of Christians are disappointed and stuck in their Christian life because they have believed a long list of lies—religious lies, secular lies—lies that have basically stuck their Christian life there. Until you actually know the truth of who you are in Christ—what is true of you, what

God has said—you're never really going to progress from there. So first is this desire—this longing. Second is: you have to really understand what is true.

…and in *your* knowledge, self-control (Vs. 6a)

Self-control, *discipline*. So you want to be a farmer. I give you everything you need to be a farmer. This is your passion. You learn what you need to learn, but now you have to discipline yourself to do the work. This isn't going to work if you sleep until 10:00 every morning. It isn't going to work if you spend everyday fishing. It isn't going to work if you don't apply that knowledge, and discipline yourself to operate accordingly. If we're going to live this life, there has to be self-discipline, **self-control**. As we will learn, the false teachers were encouraging people to indulge the flesh. They were making a distinction that there's a spiritual life and then there's your fleshly life and the two are irrelevant. So you can have God and still live it up. But as the people listened and indulged the flesh, they got themselves more and more in the mud...more and more in despair and discouragement and bondage...and that's where their Christian life stuck. They're going nowhere. I think we understand everything in life that is meaningful requires self-discipline. Whether it's about my marriage working, about running my business, about friendships and relationships, about physical health, about managing my money—anything of significance requires self-control or you're simply not going to be successful. If you're indulging the flesh, if there are places where you're involved in things that you know are disappointing or offensive to God, you're not going anywhere. You're stuck and you're going to be stuck unless you deal with that. You must be indulging the flesh because you believed a lie. You believed a lie because you don't really know the truth. So that's kind of how the steps continue to work to move us forward.

…and in *your* self-control, perseverance (Vs. 6b)

Perseverance just means *hard work.* Some translations have the word *patience*. Patience is way too passive. This isn't talking about patience. Patience is like sitting on a rock and waiting it out. This is more like hiking to the top of the mountain. The level of commitment and perseverance that's necessary to work hard and to fight the battles and to do what is necessary to ultimately get there. We talked about this in 1 Peter—that we don't want to be those who sit in the bleachers and watch the battle. We don't want to be those that are content to just wear the uniform but never get on the field. We want to be those that are on the field, that are in the battle, in the struggle, that are bruised and bloody, but at the end of the story we'll know that we had a significant part of that which will matter forever. That's this idea of **perseverance**—that this matters to me so I learn the truth; I discipline myself. This is going to be hard. We're going against the current. We're going against the values of the culture. There are a lot of things I have to say, "No," to in order to say, "Yes," to the best things. If I'm not willing to do that, then I'm just stuck there. There are a lot of Christians that are very dissatisfied with their Christian lives, but the truth is there is no real sense of perseverance. They just think, "I want to go to bed some night, wake up in the morning, and everything should be wonderful." That's like the farmer thinking, "I really don't want to work very hard. You know I want to sleep in until 10:00; I want to fish every day. I don't really want to worry about weeds and all that stuff but I want to get to the fall and I want to have a bumper crop. I want to go to bed one night and in the morning all of the crop is there and mission accomplished!" But the reality is, "It just doesn't work that way. It's a lot of hard work!" You have to ask yourself, "Is that true of me? Am I willing to persevere? Am I willing to fight the battle? Am I willing to get in there and challenge the culture and live this life that is contrary to the flow of the culture...but is what my soul longs for?"

…and in *your* perseverance, godliness; (Vs. 6c)

Godliness is one of those terms that often sounds really abstract like, "I don't even know what that means. Is it like a look on my face or what is it?" The best way to understand **godliness** is simply experiencing Jesus as a way of life—in every area of my life. There is no secular/sacred division. The Christian life is not that I visit God on Sunday and then do my own thing six days a week. It's not that I have a public life and a secret, private life. It's not that there is a secular part of me and a sacred part of me. It is a way of life! Jesus penetrates every area of my life. One of the unique things about being a farmer is it's not really a job. It's not a 9:00 to 5:00; you don't punch in and punch out. It is a way of life. If you don't want that, if you can't settle into that, you're never going to make it as a farmer. It's even unique in the sense that the farmhouse sits on the farm. Most of us, when we're done with work, we go home. Think how different that is for a farmer. It's right there; home is right in the middle of the farm because it's a way of life. That's **godliness**. It's something that's a part of every area of my life. If you have parts of your life that are disconnected from your Christian faith—little private secrets and things—and you kind of have your business way and you have your Jesus way, this is never going to work for you. You have to think about working your way backwards. Why isn't this making sense? Do I lack the **perseverance**? Do I lack the **self-control**? Do I lack an **understanding** of what's true? Do I just not even want this? So you kind of process through the steps and figure out why that is.

> **...and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.** (Vs. 7)

There is the Greek word *phileo*. It's where we get our word *Philadelphia*. It's a very high form of love; it's kind of a brotherly love, about compassion and kindness to others. The last one is *agape* love, which is the highest, self-sacrificing form of love. I think sometimes we make too much of a distinction between these, but basically the last two represent the harvest. It's kind of the top of the journey—this sacrificial, self-giving love that Jesus said should define His Christ followers. *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you agape one another."* Over the last decade or so it has been very interesting how a lot of people, including a lot of Christians, have bought into this idea that you know truth is overrated and we've gotten kind of carried away, unbalanced, with learning truth and, "That's not all that important; we just need to love one another." So it's really helpful to see what Peter just said. You virtually cannot love with the love of Christ unless you're consistent in the previous steps. In other words, **love** is the final step in the journey. It's the outflow of this life. If you skip the previous steps, you simply have no capacity to love as Christ loved. So it's necessary. That's like the harvest; that's the evidence of the life of Christ in you. You work your way backwards and try to figure out if that isn't there, where the breakdown is.

> **For if these *qualities* are yours and increasing,** (Vs. 8a)

That language is really important. **Yours and increasing**, meaning this is something that takes time. This is something you learn. This is something you grow in. Nobody goes to bed one night and this is all true of them the next day. The language implies it's a process, a growth process; we are moving forward and growing in this.

> **…yours and increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Vs 8b)

Useless...idle...worthless...**unfruitful**—this is where I'm getting the farm imagery. Peter is using basically farm imagery to say, "If there is a harvest," which is the idea of being fruitful, "it's because of this process that has been true of you in your Christian life which brings forth a harvest." If these qualities are there, you won't be *useless/idle/lazy* and you won't be *unfruitful*, but there will actually be a harvest which has been the goal all along. What is the harvest? "The harvest," he says, "is this **knowledge**, *this experience of this life in Christ."* Every one of us has this longing

deep in our souls for this relationship with Jesus. There's something within us that wants that and longs for it. The harvest is this relationship with Jesus that is built on truth and these steps that Peter has defined. Verse 9:

> **For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins.**

Literally *self-blinded*—that somewhere along the way you lost sight of who you are in Christ, of what it means to be a *partaker of the divine nature*, of these *precious and magnificent promises.* Somewhere you got confused; somewhere you lost your vision, and the result of that is that you have lost your way. You haven't really experienced this life that your soul longs for. Verse 10:

> **Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;**

One of the effects of the false teacher is people get so confused. They believe the lies; then their Christian life is ineffective. They start to get discouraged; there is despair. They start to think of themselves as, "I'm kind of a loser-Christian; this isn't going to work," and they ultimately conclude, "I'm not even sure I'm saved!" There are people every year that walk away because they have become so confused, so hurt, so wounded, so convinced this is never going to work for me, and it never dawns on them that what's happened is they are victims of the false teacher. They heard some religious teaching—maybe it's something from the secular world—but somewhere they've gotten confused and they've lost their way. So what Peter is saying is the best way to combat that is you come back and you reorient your sense of **calling**—who you are as a child of God, and you begin to walk back through these steps. You have a renew—a sense of calling and sense of who I am as a Christian, which is then going to require this passion to pursue this, which then moves to the step of **knowledge**. "I've got to figure out where I got off, where I went wrong, what got me so confused," and begin to sort this out and begin to move through these steps in order to experience the life that I long for.

He says at the end of verse 10, "If you do this, **you will never stumble."** Now some commentators have what I would consider a bad habit of going to different places in the New Testament, and wherever a word is used, it has to be used that way everywhere in the New Testament. That's really a very ineffective way to do Bible study. There are Greek words in the New Testament that are used lots of different ways in lots of different contexts. That's exactly the way we use our English words. This word basically means to simply stumble or to trip or to fall—to not really continue down the path of our Christian lives. Some would say it's a reference to losing our salvation, but that would be the opposite of everything that Peter has taught us. Peter has taught us that this is a gift received by faith. He told us in 1 Peter chapter 1 that by the mercy of God you *have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection, in order to obtain an inheritance that's already reserved in heaven for you.* It is so sure it's already reserved in heaven because it's not based on your works or performance; it's based on the *righteousness of Christ*. He talks about going through difficult trials and tribulations that will basically purify us and make us ready for the return of Christ when we will experience the fullness of our salvation, the fullness of these *precious and magnificent promises*. So to say all that and then come along and say, "By the way, if you don't perform up to par, you're out," would be as contradictory as it can be. He is simply saying there are a lot of Christians who are dissatisfied with their Christian lives. They feel like they're stuck; they're not moving; they're not going anywhere. "This isn't what I thought it was going to be." We can easily be disappointed in our Christian life. "I thought it was going to be different than this." But if we were to be honest with ourselves, what we wanted was just to go to bed one night and for everything to happen in the morning, which is like the farmer going to bed one night and expecting

to wake up and there's a crop in the field. It's unrealistic. It's not going to happen that way. You have been given everything that you need, but you have to do your part, and you have to assess, "Where's the breakdown for me? Where is it in this series of steps where it has probably fallen apart for me, and I need to back up and figure that out in order to move forward?"

> **for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.** (Vs. 11)

Now again, those who think that **stumble** means you lose your salvation interpret this that if you don't stumble, then when you die and get to the other side, you're welcomed into the kingdom and you have eternal life. Now one of the huge problems with that interpretation is: that's implying that eternal life and salvation don't really begin until after you die, and then there's this mystery, "Am I in or am I out?" That's clearly not biblical teaching. It starts the moment you trust Christ as Savior. At that moment you become a *partaker of the divine nature*. I think what this verse is talking about is in that moment, if you have lived consistently with your Christian life on earth, then when Jesus returns you enter into the fullness of that; it's just in alignment with what you've been living for in this earth.

The idea of **the entrance** is an interesting word that made reference to an Olympic champion. When that Olympic champion would come back home to his or her hometown, there was a celebration; there was a party, and there was this *special entrance.* It was not unusual that they would actually create a new entrance into the city for that person, and that champion would come in and out of the city through that entrance as part of the celebration of their champion. That's the term that Peter is using and carries the idea that when we live out our Christian life in alignment with who we are in Christ—it's what we talked about in 1 Peter—"I'm on the field; I'm bloodied and I'm bruised, and I'm doing my part to be part of the ultimate victory when Jesus comes back." It's the fulfillment of what I was living for. There's this alignment with the ultimate celebration that sets in, and in 1 Peter he said, "That's ultimately what we want."

It's interesting, right at the end of verse 11 is the word **supplied** again. That's our word *chorus* that we talked about. That's the music and the pageantry and the costumes—everything that brings the drama to life. Only this time, instead of it being a command, it's passive, which means this is something that God does. So basically the bookends of this discussion are: God has given you everything you need to live out this Christian faith. Now you're commanded to do your part. And you do your part because ultimately, when you enter into the kingdom, the ultimate part is God's and he will supply the ultimate music, the ultimate costumes, and the ultimate pageantry to bring this pageant to life forever! We have the opportunity to begin that drama *now*, that will be ultimately fulfilled *then*! I think that's in essence what Peter is saying—and it's a very common theme throughout the New Testament.

I find this to be a very practical text to try to sort out: "What does it mean *to live out this gospel truth?*" Sometimes that can seem so vague. So it's kind of like: Okay, step by step: Is it something you generally want? Is there a passion in your soul; is there a fire in your soul that says, "I really do want this?" Is it possible technically to be a farmer, but just be a lousy farmer that never gets a crop? I guess so; I guess it's possible. But why would you do that? If you have a passion to be a farmer, that should be pretty obvious. In the same way, is it possible to just have a ticket to heaven and that's all there is to it for you? I suppose, but why would you want that? Why would you want that when your soul is longing for something that is possible in Christ? So it starts with that *longing*, that *passion* that moves then to a sense of *knowledge*. You have to understand what's true in order to sort out the lies. There's no way to skip this step and make it to the next step, so there has to be a commitment to knowing and understanding the truth in order to expose the lies, which

then moves me to *self-control*; a sense of discipline. If I now know what's true, then I want to live that way. I need to know what to say, "No," to; I need to know what to say, "Yes," to, and I need to have a sense of self-control to live out this truth. Is that going to be easy? No, it's actually going to be really hard. That's why I need *perseverance*. I need courage. This is going to be a fight. I'm going to live contrary to the values and lies of the culture. This produces a *godliness*. Jesus penetrates every area of my life. No secrets...no pockets...no shadows...no public life and private life. This has to penetrate every area of my life, and that begins to manifest itself in a *phileo* and *agape form of love,* which is ultimately what people see...which is ultimately the harvest...which is how people would identify me as a follower of Jesus—a very helpful list to think about where I'm at in my Christian life. God has done His part, but I have to be willing to do my part. That's what it means *to live out this magnificent gospel truth.*

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that You have done everything that's necessary for us to live out this new life we have in Christ. God, just remind us anew and afresh that this is a partnership and we have our part to do. God, give us the discernment and the wisdom to get a sense of where it is that we're stuck, where it is that we've kind of stopped our growth. Lord, my guess would be almost everyone here this morning genuinely wants to grow as a Christian. Lord, that's why we're here, so give us the discernment to figure out where we're stuck and what it will take to move forward to experience the fullness of the life we have in Christ. In whose name we pray, Amen.

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Gospel Living

Hope-filled Living in a Culture of Despair

2 Peter 1:5-11

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Who are the false teachers most likely to lead Christians astray today? Why?

2. What do false teachers offer that makes them appealing?

3. Do you think some people live inconsistent with their core beliefs or does everyone ultimately live according to what they really believe? Why?

Bible Study

1. Review quickly the great truths Peter presented in II Peter 1:1-4. Now read II Peter 1:5-7. When Peter states, "for this very reason" in verse 5 what is he referring to?

2. What is implied by his phrase, "applying all diligence?" Since that is a command, what can we conclude about what is necessary to experience these qualities? Are they automatic simply because we're a Christian?

3. Faith is what we received from God (1:1). The following 7 qualities or virtues then flow out of our faith like steps moving toward a fruitful Christian life. Identify each of the 7 qualities listed. Define it and discuss what it means in practical terms.

4. Read II Peter 1:8-11. What is implied in the language "yours and increasing?"

5. These qualities cause us to be fruitful (that's the harvest) in our Christian lives. What does Peter say is true of us if these qualities are lacking? What does he mean?

6. One result of false teachers is they get Christians confused as to what is true which usually leads to a big mess. In the mess, people begin to question if they are even a

Christian or not. What advice does Peter offer to help us get back on the right path again?

7. What is the best way to prepare for the return of Christ according to Peter? Compare I Peter 1:6-9.

8. Sometimes it helps to take a list of qualities like this and apply them to something more concrete than our "spiritual" lives. Bryan used the illustration of farming to do this. What would each of these qualities look like for someone learning to farm?

Application

1. Are these qualities yours and growing or lacking? If lacking, work your way backwards and identify where you think it's breaking down for you? What "step" did you get stuck on and why?

2. What are some things you can do to either keep increasing in these qualities or get back on the path if you've drifted away?

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