

In January of this year, it was a joy to celebrate a milestone of more than 20 years of service as pastor of this wonderful church family in Vermont. How appropriate one year on, as we embark on another season of Thanksgiving, to return to the theme of thankfulness for the church of Jesus Christ which meets not only here in Barre but throughout the world. Christ loves His church far more than any pastor ever will! So the theme of the last three weeks of 2024 will be one of God's *blessing His church* through His benedictions in Peter's letters, *giving His church to His Son as His Bride*, and *celebrating with us the marriage of His church to Jesus Christ*.

This week we breathe in these blessings of the benedictions. Take note of the Apostolic Greeting, the same that begins every worship service. It has taken on new meaning in 2024 as we intentionally focus on "Grace and Peace" as God's greeting to us every Lord's Day. Peter's greetings contain the same rich blessings as we see in Paul's benedictions (compare 1 Corinthians 1:3 and Galatians 1:3-5).

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. **And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.** To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:6-11)

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Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: **May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Peter 1:1-4)

**Mon/Tues: Read 2 Peter 1:1-2 and 1 Peter 5:10-11**

**A Package from the Father**

New Testament letters always begin with a greeting that should not be hurried through. Whereas many secular letters throughout history and today begin with glib and superficial greetings, inspired apostolic letters never open with mere social niceties.

"Grace and peace" conveys God's words of greeting to His people. In this sense, Peter opens this letter not with a mere prayer or hope that his readers would experience God's grace, but with a definitive declaration of God's purpose to place His grace and peace on His church. God's grace and peace is objectively God's to give!

In recognition of the power of such Divine greetings, listen to how our Directory of Worship defines such apostolic salutations: “A salutation is the greeting from God to his people who have gathered to worship Him.” The point is that the greeting “grace and peace” is more firm than human (or even apostolic) desires. This is also why such salutations are theologically grouped under the heading, “Elements of worship from God to His people.” God’s grace and peace are something *He packages, He delivers, and He applies* to the particular needs of every one of His people in any particular time of suffering and trial.

**Meditate and Pray:** No wonder Peter names Him “The God of All Grace.” Peter is so confident that grace and peace can be “multiplied” to meet every challenge because He grasps the extent of the reservoir of endless supply within the very character of God! Peter recognizes that all such grace and peace flows through Jesus Christ, crucified, resurrected and ascended. More on how this endless supply of grace is sourced in Christ later this week, but for now, let us rejoice that *all of God’s character* is savingly available for the embattled believer. Because He is the Lord, and our Lord, His endless supply of love and grace can be ours through faith in Jesus Christ.

### Wednesday: Read 1 Peter 5:10-11 and Exodus 20:1

### A Package of all his Glorious Excellencies

God the Father, *in His character as the God of grace and peace*, can multiply whatever we need from the deep wells of His character in context of His personal relationship with us in the Covenant of Grace. Even in the preface to the Ten Commandments, God commits Himself to being our grace and peace when He declares to His people, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

I love the way Fisher’s commentary on the Westminster Shorter Catechism describes God’s grace and peace in our lives based on who He is and His commitment to us:

(Fisher’s Commentary asks): “What does the Lord make over to us when he makes a grant of what he is essentially?”

All his glorious attributes and excellencies to be ours (Ex. 34:6); his infinity, to be the extent of our inheritance (Rev. 21:7); his eternity, to be the date of our happiness (John 14:19); his unchangeableness, to be the rock of our rest (Mal. 3:6); his wisdom, to direct us (Psalm 73:24); his power, to protect us (2 Chron. 16:9); his holiness, to sanctify us (Ezek. 16:14); his justice, to justify and preserve us (Rom. 3:26); his goodness, to reward us in the way of grace, not of debt (1 John 2:25); and his truth, to secure us in the accomplishment of all his promises (Heb. 10:23).

**Meditate and Pray:** Father, open our eyes to see the glorious resources in your character and loving disposition toward us. May we apply these to each challenge in our lives today and, through prayer, to those who we love near and far.

**Thurs/Fri/Sat: Read 2 Peter 1:1-2 and Luke 22:31-34****A Package Opened through Knowledge**

We have defined Peter's opening greeting as a salutation full of the grace and peace which *God packages, God delivers, and God applies* to the particular needs of every one of His people in whatever daunting circumstances they are facing in any particular time of suffering and trial. But let's expand further on what this grace (and peace) mean for us in our struggle against sin and Satanic opposition. Here are some lessons to keep in mind.

First, grace and peace in Scripture refer to the Christian life as lived by faith, in dependence on Christ's death, resurrection and saving work accomplished on the Cross. This is why, for example, Peter had to learn that *grace and peace* could only be his when he abandoned his own prideful insistence that *he knew* how his life (and Christ's as well) should be conducted and what goals should be primary.

Peter stubbornly insisted that the Cross should not be Christ's goal (see his rebuke of Jesus in Mark 8:32) and even vowed to defend Jesus *to the death*. But Peter learned the hard way that such carnal, *cross-less* living would not be tolerated by His Master. Peter would learn that grace and peace only came through *true knowledge* of God and His Son as that knowledge was revealed, *not in human wisdom*, but in the wisdom of the Cross. In short, the grace and peace which Peter himself so desperately needed stemmed from a rejection of his own, proud self-knowledge in favor of the saving knowledge of Christ's grace in his life.

The significance of this emphasis (on knowledge as a deepening of our relationship with God through Christ rather than an accumulation of head knowledge) – with Peter particularly in mind – should not be lost on us. Peter was the one disciple who always thought he knew the answers and who believed he could stand firm in any situation for Jesus.

Yet it was Peter who discovered, in a very painful way, how immature and weak he really was. His letter, therefore, is a plea from the heart from someone who had to learn this lesson the hard way!

Mark Johnston, Introduction to 2 Peter

**Meditate and Pray:** In His reassurance that He has prayed for Peter in Luke 22, Christ promises that, upon his restoration from sin, Peter will be able to “strengthen his brethren.” By learning *for himself* what it really means to have a Savior whose depths of grace can be *multiplied* to meet the most desperate temptation, Peter learned something about God's grace in Christ which he can pass on to other struggling believers!

This then is the purpose for which Peter writes 1 and 2 Peter: to strengthen his brethren, even as Peter's Lord promised he would do. He had learned through failure to trust in saving, humbling and true knowledge of God instead of his own wisdom.