

Knowledge That Grows

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[0 : 00] Good morning.

My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which means that everyone needs to hear what God has to say in his word.

It's good to be back with you all. I told someone that earlier this morning, they asked me, is that actually true? Is it actually true to be back? And it is. It's good to go, and it's good to return.

And I'm excited for us. We're going to begin the book of 2 Peter today, and I invite you to turn there with me now. You can turn in your worship guide. It's printed near the end.

[1 : 10] You can turn in your Bible or your phone. And as we come to this book, there's a lot of controversy surrounding the book of 2 Peter regarding potentially who wrote it, where it was sent to.

I'm not going to drag us down into the weeds on that. I'm happy to discuss that more offline if you'd like. I'm simply going to teach it in this way. The book of 2 Peter is a letter written by a man named Peter.

He writes it in the 60s A.D. to a church somewhere in the Roman Empire. And he writes it with one desire, one purpose in mind.

Peter wants these Christians, this church, to grow. And so that question is before us as well as we come to this book.

Do we want to grow? Do you want to grow? Do you want to experience more and more of the blessings that God has for us in Jesus Christ?

[2 : 13] This growth that Peter tells us about is going to come in two ways. He wants them. He longs for them to grow in grace and knowledge.

In fact, knowledge is going to serve as one of the main themes of the book of 2 Peter. And it's to that we're going to turn this morning as we come to the introduction. If we think about knowledge, of course, we probably have a variety of different attitudes toward it.

But some of us maybe experience shame when we think about knowledge. We've been Christians for a while and we feel like we should know more. We should have learned more at this point. We're embarrassed that we don't.

Perhaps others of us, when it comes to knowledge, we're cynical. We know people who have tremendous amounts of knowledge in the faith. And yet it doesn't seem to have changed their lives at all.

They know the facts and the right answers. And they're still jerks. And so we wonder if knowledge is really worth it. We're cynical. We think about those knowledge people.

[3 : 17] Something worth, not worth touching. Maybe you're tired when it comes to knowledge. You've been coming to church for a long time. You've been hearing sermon after sermon. It sort of washes over you.

You don't feel like it really makes a difference. The pastor says lots of things, but it doesn't seem to have an impact. It doesn't seem to have a power to. It doesn't connect with us and touch us where we want to be touched.

And then finally, some of us love knowledge. It's actually a lot of us here. It's a lot of people in Reformed churches. We're thinking, why are we talking about the downsides of knowledge?

Of course, knowledge is wonderful. It's my desire to grow in knowledge as much as I can. But perhaps you're tempted to use it as a weapon rather than a tool.

It's with those questions that we turn to the book of 2 Peter. We're going to be reading verses 1 and 2. And so I invite you again to turn there with me.

[4 : 15] And remember as we come to this portion of God's word, that it is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it is sweeter than honey, even the honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read it now, starting at verse 1. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word that you've given to us. You haven't left us, but you've given us great riches, a great inheritance.

And so we ask that you'd send your Holy Spirit this morning and that you would help us. You'd help us in our cynicism. Father, you'd help us in our shame. You'd help us in our tiredness.

You'd help us in our love, that we would grow, that you'd challenge us and encourage us by your word, and that you'd do it by your spirit. We thank you that we don't have to somehow whip up enough enthusiasm for this to work, but we rely on the supernatural power of your Holy Spirit.

[5 : 48] And we ask, based not on our merit or anything we've earned, but in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. I have learned a lot about the military in my last three years in Colorado Springs.

Of course, I have a brother who's in the military, so I knew a little bit, but I didn't know how much I did not know. And there's certainly many things that you all go through and endure that I am not jealous of. And there are some things that you have that I am a little jealous of.

One of those things is access to USAA. I would love to have access to USAA, right?

Because I know of their wonderful reputation, both their financial services, their insurance products. I can't get it. As you know, it's limited. There's only two ways, primarily, to get access to it.

Either you have it through your service, right? You'd say, I have served for the military, therefore I have access. Or it's your relationship to someone who has service.

[6 : 55] Those are the ways you get entry in. Of course, I'm interested in, the only way I can get it right, would be through a relationship. So there's probably still some hope for me.

There's a chance, right, that I could marry into USAA. That, of course, if I did that, I would be receiving it, not through my service, but through someone else's.

And that's the point that Peter begins with here in his letter. He tells us about the faith that his hearers have. It's faith that they have obtained. This word, obtained, is not a word about something they've earned or grasped.

It's a word that's used about things that are received by a lot or an inheritance. This is a receiving word. They have not earned or taken hold of their faith.

Instead of saying obtained, we could say they have received it. It's something that's been given to them. And then we go on to hear this repeated. It's a faith of equal standing with ours.

[7 : 58] Now, with ours here, ours might be a reference to the fact that Peter's an apostle. He might be saying, your faith is worth the same as an apostle's faith. It might be a Jew-Gentile thing.

He might be saying, you Gentiles. Many people think this letter was written to Gentiles. You Gentiles have the same kind of faith as we Jews do. The point, regardless, is this.

There are not different levels of faith that are worth more. His faith as an apostle is worth the same as their faith. Why? Well, he hasn't earned it, right?

There aren't different levels of merit. And then finally, we find out why there are not different levels of faith. Because all of them have received it and obtained it based not on their service, but on the service of another.

They've received it by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. In other words, their faith comes through and only through Jesus Christ and what he's done on their behalf.

[8 : 57] And so there is nothing that they can do to earn it or improve upon it. If you are a member of USAA, perhaps from time to time, you have to call to have certain things dealt with, right?

And when you call, you're going to expect there's going to be certain types of security questions. One of the security questions might be this. How do you have access to this account? You might be able to say, well, I have access because of my service.

Or you might say, I have access because of my mother's service, my father's service, my husband, my wife. When Christians are asked, how do we have access to Jesus Christ and his benefits?

Why is it that we have faith? There is only one answer. It is not because of our service or anything that we have done.

It is because of and only because of the service of another. Why do we have faith? We have faith because it's been given to us by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[10 : 09] His service is the only service that matters. It's the only service that counts. We recognize this every time we pray, right? We always end by saying, in Jesus name.

Which is our way of saying, I have access to these benefits and privileges only because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And therefore, I know my faith is not worth more or less than the faith of the apostle Peter.

I have access to the same things. Of course, then, you know, USAA. It's not the whole world that has access to it. It's those with relationships and service.

The same thing with Jesus Christ. He talks to those who have obtained a faith, meaning there are some that do not. Only those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ through his righteousness are the ones that have access to faith.

And so there's a limiting factor here. When we're talking about growing, we are talking only about those who belong to Christ.

[11 : 11] Only those who have repented of their sins and taken hold of the offer of this righteousness, recognizing they have nothing to offer, putting aside any of their works. Remember, there's no other answer to the security question, right?

It is not. I have access to this faith because of what I've done. It's not because of my education, the things that I've learned, the things that I know, the people that I've built relationships with, the ministries that I participated in.

The only answer is that we are sinners without hope outside of the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior. How do you have access?

There is only one answer. Of course, you might be wondering at this point, what does knowledge have to do with any of this?

Remember, we're asking the question, what good is knowledge? What does knowledge do? Well, we find out that knowledge does not earn us anything. Many people may be impressed by your knowledge.

[12 : 15] God is not. The faith of those with mental illness is the same faith.

It's worth the same as those who have a healthy mind. My faith now is not worth more or less than my faith when I was eight years old. Books have been written, right, about the implications of this, about the implications of the fact that our faith is through Jesus Christ's righteousness, alone, so I'm going to focus just on the benefits in terms of knowledge when it comes to justification by faith alone.

The fact that our faith only comes through righteousness. How does that impact you? Tomorrow, on Monday, knowing that your knowledge does not earn you anything with God.

Well, it impacts you in this way. It's okay to say, I don't know. It's okay to say, I don't know.

It's not something we need to take security in. We don't rest on our knowledge. It's not the foundation of our faith. There are times, as a pastor, where someone will ask me a question about something in the Bible, and I don't know the answer.

[13 : 31] And I hate that. Right? I'm supposed to know the answers. I potentially feel some shame about that. And I'm also allowed to say, I don't know.

And it's a reminder to me that my righteousness is by Christ's righteousness, not by my knowledge. The same is true of all of us.

We are free. We're able to have a peace that comes from knowing we don't earn things from God and others. We're able to be okay with where we're at.

We're able to rest on God's work and his promise to us. It's possible to be too smart for our own good. It's possible to use our knowledge to hold other people at a distance.

It's possible to be taken in by Satan's lie that our knowledge somehow means that we have faith and be fooled to thinking that our faith and love is greater than it is.

[14 : 36] We can fool ourselves that we're more godly than we were last year because we know more about the Bible than we did last year. And yet that's not the way the Bible talks about knowledge.

1 Corinthians chapter 8 tells us that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. And so we know that as we grow as Christians, it doesn't earn us anything.

Our faith is not hanging in the balance. Instead, it's been given to us as a gift by Jesus Christ. We have received it. We're told in verse 1, we've obtained it.

You might be thinking at this point, aha, got the knowledge people. I now know what they need to know, which is that my knowledge doesn't matter that much.

Of course, that's not what Peter's telling us. If knowledge does not earn us our standing with Jesus Christ, what good is knowledge? What is knowledge for? What does it do?

[15 : 36] Well, we find out in verse 2 exactly what knowledge is for. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. In other words, remember I told you that Peter wants these people to grow and he wants them to grow in two ways.

He wants them to grow in grace and he wants them to grow in knowledge. That's how he ends the letter, by the way. Here he asks that it would be multiplied. The last verse of 2 Peter, he commands them to grow in grace and knowledge.

These things are not separate but connected. It's tempting for us as Western people to think about our minds and our lives as things that are not related. That's not the way the Bible thinks about knowledge, though. To know is also to do.

To know is to act. If we don't act, then we don't know. And so there's two truths here that go together. First, we cannot grow without knowledge.

Second, if we're actually gaining knowledge, we will grow. And so we'll look first at the fact that we have to have knowledge to grow. For someone who's cynical about knowledge, maybe we've been burned by knowledge in the past, it's tempting for us to think of doctrine as a four-letter word.

[16 : 48] And yet Peter is going to explain throughout this letter the ways in which doctrines actually affect our day-to-day lives. If we don't know what God has revealed to us, the truths that he's told us, we can't act on them.

Knowledge leads to growth. There are things that are true and things that are false. It is tempting for some to despise knowledge, but it is necessary. God is a person.

He's revealed himself in his word. If we want to know him and love him more, we have to learn more about what he's told us. We have to study his word and grow.

If we want more grace and peace, if we want that to be multiplied in our lives, we cannot despise knowledge. Knowledge is necessary.

If we want to experience grace and peace, we'll expect knowledge to play a role. Now, I don't want to get ahead of myself too much. Next week in verses 3 and 4, we're going to dive deeper into the kind of knowledge that creates growth.

[17 : 58] And we're going to see the way that knowledge allows us to access more grace and peace. But the opposite truth is also here as well, which has a purpose.

Knowledge must lead to growth. The purpose of knowledge is that grace and peace would be multiplied to us. Now, you might be wondering, what does that mean, grace and peace?

If justification is an act, as I mentioned during a confession of faith, if it can't be reduced or subtracted or added or subtracted, how can we grow in grace and peace? Of course, grace is talking about God's grace towards us in Jesus Christ, the peace that we experience with him.

We don't change in our standing with God. If we're forgiven of our sins, we're forgiven. There aren't degrees of forgiveness. We can grow in our experience of the benefits of those things.

We can grow in our experience of sin having less and less of a hold in our life. We can grow in our experience of knowing God's care for us as our heavenly father and struggling less and less with our fears and anxieties about the future.

[19 : 10] We can know more and more that we're at peace with God, experiencing the benefits of a clean and clear conscience. It is possible for us not to improve upon our forgiveness, but to improve on our experience of the benefits and the privileges that God offers to us.

That's what Peter is talking about here, that grace and peace would be multiplied to them. They would know and take hold of these things more and more. If you think about USAA, you might be a member, right?

And there may be services and things that you have not taken advantage of. Maybe you've taken hold of their insurance products, but you don't understand the benefits that are there for you in their banking services.

Maybe vice versa. It doesn't change your standing with them. It changes your experience of the benefits that you receive. And so if our knowledge is not leading to our growth in grace and peace, we are growing superficially in knowledge.

We are not growing truly in knowledge. It is possible to know lots of facts about God and not to have grown in grace and peace in any way.

[20 : 26] A couple years ago, I was a guest at the House of a Woman in another part of the United States. And this woman works for a missions organization.

And as I got to know her, she told me about her life story. She had a lot of difficult things happen to her in her life. She had gone through a very difficult divorce. And then her ex-husband had met a tragic end, and she had challenges with her children.

But she also recounted to me all the ways that God had been faithful to her in the midst of that. And it was clear to me that this woman had a deep experience of God's grace and peace.

She had a presence about her that was peaceful. She had confidence in the Lord that came across in her attitude and also in her words. She had seen God's faithfulness to her over and over in very challenging circumstances.

And I don't know this for sure because I did not challenge her. But if she and I were to go head to head on Bible trivia, I am pretty confident that I could clean her clock on the differences between Sheshbazar and Zerubbabel when it comes to the period of the restoration in Israel's history.

[21 : 44] I probably have greater factual knowledge than she did just as a function of my job.

This woman had greater knowledge of God than I did. Because she had a greater experience of God's grace and his peace, and that was clear to me.

And so she knew God more than I did. Knowledge is meant to lead to grace and peace.

It is meant to be something that grows us in our relationship with God. In other words, theology is not an intellectual hobby. We're told, remember, the book of Proverbs, we started out in the summer.

Proverbs chapter 1, verse 7, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of what? Knowledge. It's the beginning of wisdom in chapter 9. Chapter 1 is the beginning of knowledge. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

[22 : 55] In other words, if we don't have fear of the Lord, we're not growing in knowledge. If we have knowledge, then we should be growing in the fear of the Lord. It is possible to know all sorts of things about the Bible and know less about God than a four-year-old who can say with sincerity, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

It is possible to understand and learn all the different views about the end times in the Bible.

And if you're still just as much of a jerk to your spouse as you were before you learned those things, you have not grown in true knowledge of God. It is possible to study the four Gospels in the Bible and be able to outline the similarities and the differences between the four accounts.

And if we have not grown in any way in following the example Jesus gives in the Gospels of loving our neighbor, we have grown in knowledge in a superficial way.

We have not grown in true knowledge of God. If we memorize Psalm 29 and we know that God gives his people strength and peace, but we're still just as anxious as we were before, we have not grown in true knowledge of God.

[24 : 19] If theology is an intellectual exercise, then we are like a professional sports team that is always practicing, but never plays a game.

Our knowledge of God is meant to drive us out into the world in action. That is what Peter wants for these people.

He wants them to have knowledge. And we're going to dig into some doctrine in 2 Peter. Peter is going to go head to head with false teachers.

These false teachers are teaching things that are incorrect about the Bible, and so Peter is going to throw some punches about the doctrine of Scripture.

These teachers are teaching things about the end times that are incorrect, so Peter is going to throw some doctrinal punches about Jesus' return. All of that is so that these people would grow in grace and peace.

[25 : 25] Their knowledge is meant to serve a purpose. Now you might be asking at this point, okay, I want the kind of study that leads to true knowledge. How can I study the Bible in such a way that it increases my experience of grace and peace?

Glad you asked. We'll talk about it next week in verses 3 and 4. But I'll end with this as we're getting ahead of ourselves. About a year ago, I was driving north on I-25, and I was getting off on Uinta, and I was doing a ride on red, so my car was stopped.

And while I was waiting for traffic to go, the car behind me decided it was time for them to go ride on red, and they rear-ended me. They drove right into the car with their large pickup truck. And I'm a man, you'll understand this.

I'm a checker when I leave the house. So it's always keys, wallet, phone. Now women, I know you may not understand this. You just got the purse, right? It's a lot easier for you, but we're always checking. So I'm always checking.

Even if I'm out, I'm leaving the car. Phone, wallet, keys. Phone, wallet, keys. I get rear-ended. I pull off to the side of the road. I look into my passenger seat.

[26 : 40] There is no phone. So I can't take any pictures of the accident. Can't call anyone. In a very vulnerable position, right?

The woman who runs me allows me to borrow her phone, which is extremely helpful. Except how many phone numbers do you think I've memorized?

I know you all love to hate millennials. I have, at that time, had only memorized one phone number cold, and that was my parents' home phone in Maryland.

And I'm on the side of the road, Uinta, in Colorado Springs. What good is that to me? Now we ended up getting it resolved. They took responsibility. Thankfully, I didn't need the pictures.

I learned a very important lesson. And I also realized that I did not have the knowledge necessary to get a hold of anyone except my parents.

[27 : 43] So what did I do? This is a quirk of my personality, but I made some flashcards of phone numbers. And I started memorizing people's phone numbers, knowing that I want to be in a position, no matter where I am, I want to be able to access those relationships.

I don't want to rely on my phone, my contacts. They're stored up in the cloud somewhere. I want to be able to call people in Colorado Springs.

I want to be able to get a hold of my family members. I want that knowledge. And that knowledge did not earn me anything with those people.

If I came up to you and I said, guess what, I memorized your phone number. You might think it was a little creepy. You definitely wouldn't say, that has been what I've been waiting for.

We can finally be friends. You have earned your place. You have earned favor with me. I now know that you care enough. You're serious about this relationship.

[28 : 55] No, I don't have time to memorize a lot of phone numbers. I memorize the ones for people I already have deep and meaningful relationships with. It's the relationship that comes first and then the knowledge.

And I did not memorize those numbers so that I could win debates or show off. I memorized them so that no matter where I am and no matter what situation I find myself in, I know I can access the benefits and the privileges of the relationships I already have with those people.

That knowledge is not an academic exercise. It is a relational exercise. It is critical to have the knowledge because I value the relationship so much.

Brothers and sisters, the same thing is true with our heavenly father. He is not impressed with our knowledge. We do not pursue knowledge about God to prove anything to him.

Our faith comes by the righteousness of Jesus Christ and only by his righteousness. But because we have that relationship and it means so much to us, it's because of that that we grow in knowledge.

[30 : 09] We grow because we want to be able to access and enjoy and understand everything that God has given to us in Jesus Christ. And so why, what is knowledge for?

What can it do? We grow in knowledge so that no matter where we are and no matter what situation we are in, we can know and experience the benefits and the privileges, the grace and the peace of our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me. Our father in heaven, we thank you that we can come before you with confidence because our righteousness comes from Jesus and not from anything that we do.

And so we ask that you would stir up that love in us that as we know your care for us, it would propel us to want to know you more, to pursue true and right knowledge of you.

We ask that you do that now by your spirit. You do it for us as we celebrate together the meal that your son gave to us. And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus.

[31 : 24] Amen.